

The Report on Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada, 1932:  
Charlotte Whitton, R.B. Bennett and the Federal Response to Relief

by

Catherine Mary Ulmer  
BA, University of Saskatchewan, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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This thesis is about Charlotte Whitton's advisory role to Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett during the summer and fall of 1932 researching and producing the only official report on unemployment and relief ever commissioned by the Bennett administration during the Great Depression. By 1932, the collapse of Bennett's previous relief policies convinced him to reconsider his approach to relief. At Bennett's behest, Charlotte Whitton, one of Canada's most prominent social workers, undertook a June to August tour of Western Canada, observing how each province experienced and dealt with unemployment and relief. Whitton then prepared a report for Bennett which informed him of her observations and made specific recommendations for how Canada's relief system could be reformed. Her final product, however, was far from an impartial policy document. As this thesis argues, Whitton's report was a biased document which reveals as much about Whitton's personal ideology and professional ambitions as it does the conditions facing the Western provinces; the observations and suggestions contained within it were heavily conditioned by Whitton's pre-existing belief in social and fiscal conservatism. Although Whitton's tour allowed her a first-hand view of the amount of poverty and despair faced by Canada's unemployed, as this thesis argues, her beliefs conditioned her response and nothing she encountered changed her hard-line, traditionalist approach to relief. Yet, while Whitton's report reveals much about its author, as this thesis contends, an analysis of Bennett's reaction to it also sheds light on Bennett's approach to unemployment and relief during this time. His commissioning of the report marks a moment three years before his New Deal legislation when Bennett pondered reforming the relief system. Yet, instead of taking action, Bennett did nothing to change the status quo. While Whitton's conservative report certainly agreed with his personal assessment of relief and unemployment in Canada, her central suggestion, that professional social workers be placed in charge of Canada's relief system at all levels to increase efficiency and curtail abuse, was still too costly for Bennett to implement. His failure to seize on this earlier opportunity to introduce a solution to Canada's unemployment issues challenges the sincerity of his New Deal legislation, and his claims to support reform.

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## Acknowledgments

This thesis was conceived of during a conversation with my undergraduate honours advisor, Dr. Bill Waiser, in early 2006. I said, “I’m not sure what I should write my thesis on,” and he replied, “have you heard of Charlotte Whitton?” I cannot quite believe there was a time when I did not know who she was.

In the process of researching and writing this work, I have enjoyed the advice and support of many people, but none more so than my supervisor, Dr. Penny Bryden. I cannot thank her enough for guiding me throughout this process and tirelessly reading through my many drafts. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Lynne Marks and Dr. Eric Sager, and my external examiner, Dr. Robert Wardhaugh, for their comments and advice on my final paper. Several other professors have both guided this work and offered encouragement along the way. Thank you to Dr. Gregory Blue, Dr. John Lutz, Dr. Elizabeth Vibert, and Dr. Bill Waiser, I so appreciated your input and kind words. I must also thank the staff at the University of Victoria, particularly our graduate secretary Heather Waterlander, but also Karen Hickton and Eileen Zapshala, for both their aid and friendship.

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandfather, Roger Colenso Carter, my greatest friend. If I could tell him that I had finished this thesis, he would have said: “Congratulations my dear, but, of course, this comes as no surprise.”

## Introduction

“I have pondered the wisdom of some short statement from you to the effect that in view of the shift of emphasis to direct relief, the federal power is at present giving attention to the facts of the situation,” wrote Charlotte Whitton to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett from her hotel on 3 July 1932.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Whitton, Canada’s foremost social worker, was in Medicine Hat, Alberta. This was just one of the many stops she made during her secret survey of the unemployment and relief situation in Canada’s four prairie provinces that summer on Bennett’s behest, and she was wondering about the logic of making her efforts more public. They remained private throughout the summer of 1932. That fall, Whitton presented the results of her tour to him in her “Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada,” a work which described the devastating environmental and economic impact the Depression had on these provinces, studied the existing relief systems, and proposed suggestions for a new approach to federally-funded aid. Indeed, Whitton’s efforts were kept private even after the report was submitted, and remained largely unknown through to the present. This thesis is about this little-studied episode during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was a moment that tells us a great deal about federal responses to relief and unemployment, and about which voices get heard in the determination of those responses, by examining the path not taken.

Although Bennett had gained office based on his promises to actively abolish the dole and end unemployment, by 1932 the failure of his two previous Relief Acts had forced Bennett to reconsider these central tenets of his platform. His 1932 Relief Act

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<sup>1</sup> Libraries and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), R.B. Bennett Papers, MG26-K, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 3 July 1932.

cancelled federal government support of make work projects, and instead saw the federal government funding only direct relief. While direct relief was Canada's most cost-efficient option, and therefore the most attractive to the fiscally-conservative Bennett, its implementation signalled that the prime minister had exhausted all other options. Direct relief was an absolute last resort. Its introduction was a shattering blow to Bennett. The failure of all other legislation forced a sober reevaluation of his previous response to unemployment and relief. While Bennett was known for his dictatorial leadership style, rarely following the advice of even his own cabinet members, the failure of all his previous relief and unemployment policies, and the transition to direct relief, necessitated a change in approach.<sup>2</sup> In response to this need for reevaluation, Bennett turned to Whitton, asking her to undertake a summer tour of the four prairie provinces where, due to the double menace of economic and environmental factors, the Depression had struck hardest. She was to observe the West's unemployment situation, and investigate how relief was provided in the many settlements she visited. Upon her return, she was to synthesize her findings into a report informing the federal government on the unemployment and relief situation, and offering her expert suggestions for change.

Whitton, the director of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare (CCCW), was more than ready to advise Bennett. As a professional social worker, leader of the nation's largest organization of child and family welfare organizations, and fellow Conservative party member, Whitton's background made her an ideal advisor. She began her tour of the four prairie provinces in early June. She travelled through Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, by train, car, and boat. She set an

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<sup>2</sup> Baron Max Aitken Beaverbrook, *Friends: Sixty Years of Intimate Personal Relations With Richard Bedford Bennett* (London: Heinemann, 1959), 82.

exhaustive pace for herself, rising early, retiring late, and filling her days meeting with government officials, representatives from volunteer organizations, and local citizens in each of the many cities, towns, and smaller municipalities she visited. Upon returning to Ottawa in late August, Whitton compiled a report for Bennett. Totalling almost six hundred pages, it provided a detailed history of the Western region, a background to the current depression, an in depth analysis of the unique needs of each province and its major cities and municipalities, and also Whitton's suggestions for an improved relief system. Her finished document, however, was far from impartial. Whitton's approach to social welfare was deeply conditioned by her personal ideology and her report for Bennett was no different. Despite the suffering and despair she encountered while on tour, she allowed nothing to alter her hard-line, conservative approach to social welfare. Whitton saw no need for new funds; instead, her report highlighted the many areas where Whitton felt federal funds were wasted, or doled out to unqualified recipients. Her central recommendation also reflected Whitton's personal ambitions, rather than impartial opinion. While on tour, Whitton became astounded by the many relief administrators she met who had gained their positions by virtue of political connections rather than social welfare experience. Due to the transition to direct relief, and the introduction of the individualized means test, rather than mass registration, Whitton believed that the administration of relief necessitated a specialized knowledge of social welfare. Unsurprisingly, the need for new administration by trained social work professionals became the overarching theme of the report. Although Whitton scorned welfare administrators who gained their positions due to political patronage, and insisted on the need for impartiality, Whitton's finished report was a highly biased document that

reveals as much about Whitton's conservative ideology and professional aspirations as it does about unemployment and relief in Western Canada.

Interestingly, although Whitton's work for Bennett marks a unique moment in his tenure as prime minister and an important event in Whitton's professional career, few scholars have extensively studied this time in Canadian Depression-era history. Only James Struthers, Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, and Nancy Christie offer any real consideration of Whitton's advisory role during the Depression. And, while these authors have points of agreement, their assessment of Whitton's approach, and influence on Bennett, differ.

James Struthers offers the most detailed analysis of Whitton's report in his article, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s," and, to a lesser extent, his book *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941*. As Struthers shows, unlike many of her more liberal colleagues who had begun to demand the government increase relief expenditures, Whitton instead felt the problem lay not with the amount of funds being spent, but with their distribution. In her opinion, placing the administration of relief in the hands of trained social welfare professionals would eliminate the waste and inefficiency surrounding the federal government's relief system, and would also elevate the role of social workers in Canada. Therefore, Struthers argues, Whitton's report focused mainly on the perceived abuses of federal funds she discovered while on tour, using her exposure

of this extravagance to justify her central recommendation: that trained social workers be placed in charge of relief administration at all levels.<sup>3</sup>

In their biography of Whitton, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right*, Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, agree with Struthers' assessment, yet also discuss the difficulty of understanding her staunchly conservative approach to relief, which she retained even after her tour of the prairie provinces allowed her to view the ravaging effect first-hand. As they conclude, her report's insistence that many people receiving relief did not deserve it shows that "Whitton clung to views about dependency that thoroughly undervalued the enormity of the situation" and were increasingly at odds with the more liberal members of her cohort.<sup>4</sup>

Rooke and Schnell and Struthers, however, disagree on their evaluation of the eventual influence Whitton's report had on Bennett's ensuing relief policy. Struthers contends that, as "the only detailed unemployment relief study" Bennett commissioned, Whitton's report "had enormous influence in conditioning his subsequent response to the depression."<sup>5</sup> Although, as Struthers acknowledges, Bennett ignored Whitton's suggestion that social workers be placed in charge of relief administration, Struthers contends that the report had an effect on Bennett's policies "in ways that Whitton hardly suspected at the time."<sup>6</sup> He argues that Bennett seized on Whitton's accusation that provinces and municipalities were wasting federal funds to justify large cuts in relief funding. Rooke and Schnell, however, question Struthers' assessment of Whitton's

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<sup>3</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 75-79; James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s," *Canadian Historical Review* LX11, 2 (1981), 169-185.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 90.

<sup>5</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

impact on Bennett. They argue instead that there is little evidence to suggest that Whitton's report guided Bennett since, given his record of wishing to avoid increasing the federal government's involvement in unemployment and relief, "it is obvious that Bennett's perceptions and actions were set well before Whitton offered her services and that the outcome was not particularly different from what it would have been without her."<sup>7</sup>

While Nancy Christie's book, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, does not directly discuss Whitton's report for Bennett, Christie does offer an assessment of Whitton's approach to relief during the Depression as compared to that of her more liberal colleagues, that differs significantly from that offered by Struthers and Rooke and Schnell. In Struthers', Rooke's and Schnell's studies, each author contrasts Whitton's conservative, traditionalist views of relief with the more liberal beliefs of colleagues such as Harry Cassidy, the director of the University of Toronto's School of Social Work, and Leonard Marsh, the director of social research at McGill University, both of whom advocated increased government responsibility and funding of relief. Christie, however, finds this praise of Cassidy and Marsh over Whitton problematic.

While Christie agrees with Struthers', Rooke's and Schnell's evaluation of Whitton's conservatism, she notes that these authors fail to take into consideration "the gender dimension."<sup>8</sup> Christie certainly demonstrates how the moral imperatives which drove social work at that time operated against needy women. In an examination of Whitton's response to calls for improvements in provincial mothers' allowance legislation, Christie critiques Whitton for fighting against those who argued that the

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<sup>7</sup> Rooke and Schnell, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 212.

allowance be viewed as a right rather than an extension of temporary charity, or that abandoned or divorced women qualify. However, as Christie contends, despite Whitton's traditionalism, her work rested on the importance of family casework, the process by which a social worker investigated individual families to assess the causes of their poverty and their relief needs, which focused on how all individuals, including women and children, were affected by unemployment. In the 1930s, however, social workers sought "new, more scientific" prescriptions, introducing a "macro-economic, objective" analysis of unemployment favoured by Marsh and Cassidy.<sup>9</sup> Whereas social workers like Whitton had defined the family in traditional, organic terms and viewed them as an interdependent group, these new technocrats defined the family as an economic unit headed by a male breadwinner and discounted the contributions of wives and children.<sup>10</sup> While Christie notes that Cassidy's work did emphasize the contributions of married women to the family economy to some extent, Marsh's work "focused exclusively on the wage economy," and, therefore, "women were entirely left out."<sup>11</sup> Marsh defined normal families as those where the chief breadwinner was a male and contended that, given his definition of normalcy, families in which the woman was the chief wage-earner "could not rightfully be considered families at all."<sup>12</sup> As Christie contends, in light of this new perspective on the technocratic definition of the family, men like Marsh and Cassidy appear as "darker prophets."<sup>13</sup> While Rooke and Schnell and Struthers all mention that Whitton's report did deal specifically with the care of unemployed women as separate

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<sup>9</sup> Christie, 200.

<sup>10</sup> Christie, 204.

<sup>11</sup> Christie, 201.

<sup>12</sup> Christie, 204.

<sup>13</sup> Christie, 297.

from men, none of these authors questions how the advance of the macro-economic approach to welfare was slowly erasing a consideration of women's place within the working world, or remarks on how Whitton's inclusion of women within her report differentiates her approach to relief from that of her contemporaries.

Alongside Struthers, Rooke and Schnell, this thesis agrees that Bennett's reasons for pushing aside Whitton's report were financially motivated. However, it does not focus entirely on whether Whitton's exposure of the many perceived abuses of relief convinced Bennett to introduce cuts to relief funding. Instead, it contends that Bennett did not implement Whitton's central recommendation that trained social workers be placed in charge of relief administration since this proposal was too expensive. Whitton's report claimed that these social workers had the experience needed to better identify who needed relief, and ensure proper distribution of government funds, a proposal which should have been attractive to the fiscally-conservative Bennett. However, replacing the pre-existing relief system with administrators who would demand a professional salary was still too costly a measure for Bennett to accept.

While Whitton's report reveals much about its author, an analysis of Bennett's reaction to it also sheds light on Bennett's approach to unemployment and relief during this time. Although Bennett commissioned the report, after receiving it from Whitton in the fall of 1932, he never mentioned it again. The report was not publicized and, apart from introducing the Department of National Defence Camps, a solution which Whitton had advocated, Bennett did nothing with Whitton's recommendations. His commissioning of the report, however, marks a moment, three years before the announcement of Bennett's New Deal Legislation, which promised unprecedented

federal government intervention into the economy and an influx of public spending, when Bennett considered reforming the relief system. Yet, instead of taking action, Bennett did nothing to change the status quo. When he introduced his New Deal Legislation, Bennett claimed he had always planned these reforms, but had had to wait until his party “achiev[ed] some stabilization and improvement in conditions.”<sup>14</sup> His failure to seize on this earlier opportunity to introduce a solution to Canada’s unemployment issues, challenges the sincerity of his New Deal legislation.

Literature analyzing Bennett’s response to the Depression is divided between the work of those who attempt to present a more sympathetic picture of Bennett’s response to the Great Depression, and those who view his reaction as seriously flawed. Far from deeming Bennett a reformer, most authors point to Bennett’s refusal to recognize the need to introduce reforms and change existing approaches to relief and unemployment as the key factors in his 1935 defeat by Liberal leader Mackenzie King, yet some try to strike a middle ground. In his work, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party under R.B. Bennett*, Larry A. Glassford offers the most recent portrayal of Bennett’s reaction to the Depression. While Glassford’s work is not a full biography of Bennett, it provides an analysis of his life during his political career. As Glassford contends, the standard answer to the question of how the Bennett administration evolved from people’s saviour to people’s enemy during its five year tenure is that “severe depression, misguided (if not pig-headed) policies, and administrative ineptitude” combined to cause the government’s fall.<sup>15</sup> Instead of

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<sup>14</sup> Bennett quoted in Ernest Watkins, *R.B. Bennett: A Biography*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), 253, 256.

<sup>15</sup> Larry A. Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party under R. B. Bennett, 1927- 1938*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 99.

furthering this hypothesis, Glassford contends that “what must be emphasized was that this government did experiment, did innovate, did try its hand at reform, even in the midst of the worst years of the Great Depression.”<sup>16</sup>

As Glassford states, although many argue that Bennett should have departed from “conventional remedies,” to the nation’s economic and unemployment woes, these opinions all have the benefit of hindsight. “It is not surprising,” he argues, “that, in a crisis, the familiar plans would be tried first.”<sup>17</sup> Glassford notes that, by introducing his first Relief Act of 1930, Bennett showed a willingness to forcefully address relief by instituting this “precedent-breaking” statute which allocated \$20 million towards unemployment relief.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, even though the federal government faced increasing amounts of debt, it still moved forward in certain areas, increasing the transportation subsidy on Canadian coal, increasing the amount of money it contributed to old age pensions from 50 to 75 per cent, and converting “the bulk” of its election platform promises into legislation by the summer of 1932. Bennett also “broke new ground” by setting up the Bank of Canada to regulate credit and issue currency.<sup>19</sup> Even Glassford, however, does not view the New Deal as Bennett’s genuine attempt at reform. Although he notes that the New Deal represented a “bold gamble” for the Conservative Party, he deems Bennett’s claim to be a reformer as a “new guise” rather than true transformation.<sup>20</sup> He states that the New Deal marked a chance for Bennett to “reclaim centre stage,” and offered him a “plausible hope for re-election.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Glassford, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 114, 116, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 154.

Glassford's response to those who accuse Bennett of failing to adapt to the new demands of the Depression and instead choosing to maintain the status quo, is that it is unfair to blame the Conservative party for governing conservatively. "By habit, by preference, by their very nature, we would expect members of a Conservative party to be...hesitant about reform," he contends.<sup>22</sup> Although Glassford's support of Bennett is echoed by Gad Horowitz in his book, *Canadian Labour in Politics*, Horowitz bases his argument on a different interpretation of the Canadian Conservative party. As Horowitz argues, Canadian Conservatives cannot be seen simply as the Canadian version of American Republicans. "A Republican is always liberal," he states, but a Canadian Conservative "may be at one moment a liberal, at the next moment a tory; he is usually something of both."<sup>23</sup> Given this definition of Canadian Conservatism, he argues, it is possible to argue that Bennett was, especially at the moment of introducing his New Deal, genuinely for reform.<sup>24</sup> Few other scholars of Bennett's response to the Depression, however, survey Bennett's years in office in such a manner.

In H. Blair Neatby's work *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties*, Neatby, like Glassford, credits Bennett for creating the Bank of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and establishing the Wheat Board. Overall, however, he deems Bennett a political failure for not addressing the unemployment needs of Canadian citizens during this time.<sup>25</sup> In *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935* editors Michael Bliss and L.M. Grayson present 168 letters sent from the poorest of Canadian citizens to Bennett during his five year tenure, most containing requests for

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>23</sup> Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Horowitz, 22.

<sup>25</sup> H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada), 69.

financial aid. Bennett, a known philanthropist, far from ignored these notes. It was not uncommon for him to send a personal reply along with up to \$5 of his own funds. Eventually he established a fund for such requests which was administered by his official secretary.<sup>26</sup> As Bliss and Grayson suggest, however, Bennett's giving was far from a private gesture; it was reported in the national media and offered the administration a well-needed publicity boost. Furthermore, Bliss and Grayson noted a marked increase in giving as the 1935 election day approached. "It is not unfair to reason," they state, "that Bennett and his aides had also realized the vote-getting side-effects of philanthropy."<sup>27</sup> As their analysis suggests, although this pattern of generosity illustrates Bennett's concern for the nation's impoverished, this pity for suffering citizens did not translate into a willingness to change his approach to the Depression.

James Struthers' work, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941*, provides one of the most damning analyses of Bennett's approach to the Depression. Bennett may have been a Conservative, but he was also a man voted into office to end unemployment, and should have been willing to undertake bold action to see this promise through. Instead, as Struthers finds, Bennett's tenure was marked by his refusal to accept that the federal government should take on any new responsibility for relief. Instead of recognizing that the federal government needed to assume a greater role in the provision of relief, the Bennett government instead insisted that relief was primarily a provincial and local responsibility. While it is undeniable that Bennett's Relief Acts put more federal funds towards relief than any previous initiatives, Struthers contends that "despite his extravagant campaign rhetoric," Bennett did not

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<sup>26</sup> L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>27</sup> Grayson and Bliss, xxiv.

believe the Depression was more than a temporary phenomenon. He was willing to spend so much money because he felt that these grants of funds were one-time payments. This belief, Struthers contends, is to blame for the ad hoc nature of Bennett's relief policies. Since Bennett believed the Depression would not last, he felt no need to create considered policies.<sup>28</sup> The Bennett New Deal, in Struthers' opinion, was nothing more than "an act of sheer opportunism born out of political desperation."<sup>29</sup> Desperate for re-election, Bennett introduced this legislation as a futile bid to win over the Canadian public in the months leading up to the federal election.

Struthers is joined in his assessment by the work of authors such as Lorne Browne. In *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*, Browne argues that the Bennett administration "utterly refused to undertake the type of massive government spending...which might have made a serious dent in the level of unemployment," due to a need to appease the business community, the traditional supporters of the Conservative Party.<sup>30</sup> Alvin Finkel's recent work, *Social Policy and Practise in Canada: A History*, also supports this view. Bennett's response to the Depression, especially the New Deal, was not radical, according to Finkel, especially when compared against measures proposed by the Communist-supported Worker's Unity League, the federal Labour Party, or the newly sprung Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. While Bennett's New Deal proposed to introduce unemployment insurance, Finkel argues that Bennett did so only because his contributory, non-redistributive

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<sup>28</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 47-48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>30</sup> Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 30.

version of unemployment insurance had gained popularity among his capitalist supporters.<sup>31</sup>

Although a review of Whitton's report for R.B. Bennett reveals much about its author, this study of Whitton, her work for Bennett, and his eventual response, provides insight into Bennett. While his New Deal legislation of 1935 appeared to be his first attempt to change his approach to Canada's relief and unemployment situation, Whitton's 1932 report marks a moment, three years earlier, when Bennett considered, and rejected, changing his policy towards Canada's impoverished. We can better understand his response to the Depression and his later New Deal through analyzing this moment during the history of his tenure. The first chapter examines R.B. Bennett, the Canadian Depression-era experience, and Canada's relief system in the years prior to 1932 when Whitton began her tour. As the chapter contends, Bennett began his term confident that unemployment, and the Depression, were temporary phenomena and, as such, spent little time devising his short-term Relief Acts. However, since he did not create new administration and organization, but instead relied on Canada's existing, outmoded relief system to distribute his emergency funds, and since the Depression only worsened throughout his time in office, by 1932 he needed a new approach and contacted Whitton.

The second chapter examines the reasons behind Bennett's choice of Whitton to take on this advisory position. It follows her early years at Queen's University, her work with the Social Service Council of Canada, and her leading role as Director of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, analyzing how this background in social work, the experience she gained conducting large scale surveys into mothers' allowances and

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<sup>31</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 110-114.

juvenile immigration, and her proven conservatism uniquely qualified Whitton to advise Bennett during this time. The third and fourth chapters discuss Whitton's summer tour of the four prairie provinces and the report she produced following this trip. Although Whitton certainly used the extensive information she gathered throughout the summer, like her surveys on mothers' allowances and juvenile immigration, her report on unemployment and relief was likewise conditioned by her traditionalist approach to welfare, and, additionally, her professional aspirations. Whitton hoped that Bennett would follow her advice and allow social workers to replace pre-existing relief administration at all levels.

Bennett, however, all but ignored Whitton's report. As this thesis contends in the fifth chapter, by commissioning Whitton, Bennett seemed willing to consider reforming Canada's relief system. When confronted with her recommendations, however, he proved unwilling to put forward the federal funds necessary to enact Whitton's suggestions. Instead, he chose only to create make-work camps, a short term, ad hoc, emergency measure that echoed his previous reactions to Canada's relief and unemployment issues. While Larry Glassford's analysis of Bennett offers a sympathetic perspective of his leadership and administration, arguing that Bennett was willing to reform, by analyzing this little studied moment in the early years of Bennett's tenure, this thesis aims to contribute new evidence to the work of those who question the motives behind Bennett's sudden attempt at reform. It contends that Bennett's failure to follow through on this chance to change his approach suggests a general unwillingness to enact such reform, and a preference for the status quo. As this thesis argues, Bennett's failure to reform the system at this time calls into question the sincerity of the New Deal legislation and

suggests that financial considerations were the most important determinants for Bennett in assessing responses to the worsening economic situation. Aligning itself with the argument of those authors who view Bennett's 1935 New Deal as a last minute attempt to win votes rather than a true recognition of a need to reform, this thesis states that Bennett was at best a reluctant reformer who refused to take action until it was politically necessary for him to do so.

As historian Alvin Finkel has written, a work of history is "far more than a collection of facts and dates," but also "embodies a set of social values."<sup>32</sup> Just as Whitton's approach to social welfare was coloured by her conservatism, this work's analysis of Whitton has been shaped by its author's liberal viewpoint. As a result, this thesis critiques Whitton's and Bennett's approach to providing social welfare of Canadian citizens during the Great Depression. While Larry Glassford has argued that we cannot blame conservatives for responding to the Depression conservatively, this thesis questions that logic. Neither Whitton nor Bennett lacked concern for the plight of Canada's impoverished. Whitton's report and personal notes taken while on tour reflect her pity for many of the impoverished people she met along her survey, and Bennett was known for sending money from his personal funds to many citizens who wrote him begging for aid. However, even in the face of mounting poverty and unemployment, both believed the Depression was an emergency situation only, and felt that the federal government should avoid intervening. Although this thesis does not present a new argument, it presents new evidence to support the work of those liberal authors who critique Bennett's failure to develop new policy to combat unemployment during the

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<sup>32</sup> Finkel, 2.

Great Depression, and who view Bennett's New Deal as little more than a final attempt to secure votes.

## Chapter 1: R.B. Bennett Encounters the Depression

Hearing of his defeat in the federal election of July 1930, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King confided: “the truth is I feel I do not much care, the load is very heavy...I shall be glad to throw on to Bennett’s shoulders...the finding [of] a solution for unemployment...My guess is he will go to pieces under the strain.” As King concluded, “he has promised impossible things and put himself in an impossible position.”<sup>33</sup> Like King’s words suggest, his opponent, Conservative party leader R.B. Bennett, inherited the prime ministership during a time of chaos. Bennett assumed his position during the Great Depression, the greatest economic recession of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bennett entered office confident that the Depression was a temporary phenomenon, and that his party’s plans to stabilize the economy and end unemployment would soon restore general prosperity. Yet, by 1932, with unemployment at 25%, it was clear he could not fulfill his pledge. Due to the unforeseen extent of the Depression, Canada’s reliance on an outmoded welfare system, and the failure of Bennett’s ad-hoc relief legislation, by the spring of 1932 he was in desperate need of new welfare policy.

Although Canada had experienced recessions before, nothing prepared the country for the arrival of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Aside from the United States, no other industrial nation was as grievously affected during this period.<sup>34</sup> Canada, however, proved uniquely susceptible to the ravages of this economic downturn. The primary cause of Canada’s economic collapse during this time was its reliance on outside markets for its goods. The nation’s economy heavily depended on foreign trade and,

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<sup>33</sup> Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), W.L. Mackenzie King *Diaries*, 29 July 1930.

<sup>34</sup> L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), viii.

when markets for its exports faltered, so too did the Canadian economy. The end of the First World War had ushered in an economic recession that began in 1921, but by 1924 the economy was experiencing rapid growth. While agriculture remained a staple export, the development of new industries such as pulp and paper production, mining, and hydroelectric energy also allowed national economic growth.<sup>35</sup> Pulp and paper were the most important of these new products. In 1921, 805 million tonnes of newsprint was manufactured in Canadian factories. By 1925, the number had risen to 2, 725 million tonnes; 90% of this product was exported, with three quarters of it travelling south across the border to the United States.<sup>36</sup> Buoyed by the expanding American market for newsprint, paper, and pulp, by 1927 production began to outpace foreign demand for Canadian paper, a condition that the Depression only further exacerbated. Between 1921 and 1929, the mining industry also underwent a rapid expansion. During this time the production of silver doubled, that of gold tripled, and that of nickel, lead and zinc quadrupled as the market for these base metals grew.<sup>37</sup> The United States also emerged as Canada's primary trading partner for mining products, which fed the America's automobile, radio, and electrical industries.<sup>38</sup> The growth of these two extractive fields demanded power, creating a need for hydroelectric energy, and causing this industry to balloon as well. By 1930, Canada produced four times as much energy as it had in 1921.<sup>39</sup>

While the receptive markets of Canada's two major trading partners, the United States and Great Britain, helped expand the Canadian economy, the heavy investment of

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<sup>35</sup> John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 77.

<sup>36</sup> Thompson and Seager, 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

foreign capital also financed the nation's development. After the First World War, financiers from the economically-broken Great Britain proved unable to continue heavy investment in overseas markets, but the United States experienced no such downturn, and quickly moved to replace Britain as Canada's primary creditor.<sup>40</sup> Few Canadians questioned this dependency on outside investors and export goods. While prosperity reigned, there was little reason to check this trend. Even before the stock market crash of 29 October 1929, American markets for agriculture, and raw materials such as timber or metals, had decreased.<sup>41</sup> The crash itself had little real effect on Canada: Canadians had not invested in the market as heavily as American investors, so few faced financial ruin.<sup>42</sup> In the years following the Depression, though, outside investors were unable to continue to fund the expansion of Canadian production of raw materials. The economic downturn led to the rapid decline in demand for Canadian goods.

While the United States had emerged as the economic victor of the Great War, the Depression wrought havoc on the nation's domestic market. As a result of economic collapse in their home countries, few investors or citizens, had the means to invest in, or import, Canadian products. For a country that sold eighty percent of its raw goods to international markets, the disappearance of these external customers crippled Canada's previously booming economy.<sup>43</sup> The closing of outside markets to Canadian goods similarly impacted the purchase power of domestic buyers. Due to falling prices, farmers had little need, and scant funds, to continue the expansion of their operations. The twentieth century witnessed a shift in agriculture, with smaller, labour-intensive farms

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>42</sup> Bliss and Grayson, viii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, viii- ix; Thompson and Seager, 195.

being edged out by larger landowners who introduced the mechanized, large-scale, single-crop farming.<sup>44</sup> This drastic change in agriculture had itself contributed to unemployment. The mechanization of many farms lessened the need for seasonal labourers, forcing many of them to drift into urban centres.<sup>45</sup> In the face of shrinking markets, however, neither human nor mechanical labour was in demand. The advent of the Depression meant that farmers who had formerly relied on Canadian farm implements and auto manufacturers to supply the needs of their farms now had scant use for these products.<sup>46</sup>

Canada also proved particularly susceptible to the effects of the Depression because of the central place of agriculture in the economy. Of all groups of Canadian citizens during the Depression, farmers were the most visibly, and drastically affected.<sup>47</sup> The images of weathered farmhomes surrounded by seas of dust and dirt swirling where crops once flourished today represent the worst of the Depression. During the 1930s, Canadian wheat farmers suffered from constricted markets. For those farmers living within the Palliser Triangle, a semiarid area stretching across southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, troubling economic conditions were compounded by severe ecological factors.<sup>48</sup> Poor farming techniques combined with drought led to the ruin of many farms. To capitalize on high wheat prices, farmers concentrated on single crops, over-cultivating the soil, lessening its fertility, and increasing soil erosion which, consequently, aggravated the effects of long-term drought. Eroded soil quickly became dust which was easily

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<sup>44</sup> Thompson and Seager, 195.

<sup>45</sup> LAC, Charlotte Whitton Papers, MG30, E256, vol.25, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report, 11.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson and Seager, 193.

<sup>47</sup> Bliss and Grayson, ix.

<sup>48</sup> Although the region can, at times, support prosperous crops, it is naturally prone to cycles of severe drought, one of which hit during the 1930s.

swept up, turning windstorms into duststorms. James Earl Cross, a farmer from Swift Current, Saskatchewan, recounted dealing with a great duststorm in the spring of 1930. Sent by his wife to find his young son Jim, Cross set out while the storm was at its worst. Cross recalled “covering my face as best I could with my handkerchief I started out to meet [Jim]. When I found him about half way home he had become blinded with the soil and had taken cover in a ditch.”<sup>49</sup> Although this storm was particularly memorable, Cross noted that the 1930s were “the years of the dust storms,” that saw the dust penetrate every small crack of their home until “it would seem that [even] everything you ate was gritty.”<sup>50</sup> The Cross family lived near a large lake, which, in normal years, was thirty five miles long and five miles wide. During the drought of the 1930s, however, the lake completely dried up. The dust clouds were also joined by clouds of insects flying in, feeding on the crops, and leaving their eggs. Cross wrote of the futility of growing crops during this time since in May, just as the new wheat began to grow, the eggs would hatch. “It was a rather startling sight,” he recalled “to see these newly born hoppers pop out of the ground one after the other and immediately start feeding on the growing grain.”<sup>51</sup>

Not all farmers, however, encountered this drought. For them, the problem was not a paucity of produce, but a glut of it. Canadian farmers benefited from the end of the First World War. The collapse of European producers due to war opened world markets up to Canadian wheat. Soaring wheat prices fed the mass expansion of Canadian wheat production. European recovery, however, ended this dominance and also led to a crisis. Mechanization allowed for increased productivity both domestically and abroad and soon

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<sup>49</sup> James Earl Cross. “How the West Was Really Won: The Memoirs of Early Days in Saskatchewan.” Unpublished Memoirs, January 1966, in possession of author, 18-19.

<sup>50</sup> James Earl Cross, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 19.

the supply of wheat outstripped the world's need. When the products from bumper crops in countries such as Argentina or Australia joined those of the Americas on the international wheat market, prices fell. Whereas a prime bushel of No. 1 Northern wheat guaranteed a farmer \$1.03 in 1928, by 1932 this same bushel was worth only \$0.32.<sup>52</sup> Although farmers from the arid prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta suffered the worst, with the average farm income cut by four fifths, Canadian farmers from other areas were far from untouched and on average saw their incomes cut in half.<sup>53</sup> As well, in Western Canada, the heavy dependence on a single resource affected more groups than just the farmers. The cities and towns that surfaced in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta developed to service the farmers, and depended on the agricultural industry for their success. During years of prosperity, these were boomtowns, with industries growing alongside the produce. In times of recession, the fortunes of these urban areas fell alongside the crop prices.

Although Bennett's failure to devise informed, long-term policies that truly addressed unemployment led to his downfall, upon entering office he had little legislation to build on. Canada entered the Depression with a relief system that was still, in large part, modeled on the 19<sup>th</sup> century poor law inherited from Great Britain. This tradition was based on the concept of less eligibility, the idea that when relief was provided the amount was set at such a meagre rate that the lowest wages of an employed labourer would be more attractive than those doled out by relief offices. Canada entered the Depression saddled with this approach because little had been done to drastically change welfare since the time of Confederation. Then, most Canadians worked as farmers,

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<sup>52</sup> Thompson and Seager, 195.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

fishermen, loggers or miners and the majority lived off the produce from their own farms. Relief in times of unemployment came from family, churches, benevolent charities, or the members of the small, rural communities most Canadians lived in. Though citizens of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia knew some institutionalized protection as their governments had passed Poor Law legislation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Upper Canada rejected the Elizabethan Poor Law when instituting English Civil Law in 1792: the government took no responsibility for the impoverished and unemployed in that part of the country and viewed unemployment as a personal failure. Some late 19<sup>th</sup> century observers of Canada's unemployed, such as manufacturer Sir Herbert Brown Ames who studied working-class living conditions in his native Montreal, questioned "the conventional wisdom which defined poverty...in terms of personal inadequacy."<sup>54</sup> This popular view, however, was still widespread even as the twentieth-century increase in industrialization and urbanization soon rendered informal systems of relief inadequate. Change, however, was slow to come.

While Britain's system continued to develop in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canadian policymakers were reluctant to follow its example. Though many politicians called successive governments to institute reforms based on British initiatives such as the 1911 Unemployment Insurance Act, popular belief still held that unemployment could be cured if men either accepted lower wages, or relocated to the countryside where it was felt many agricultural jobs were waiting.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to Britain, Canada's "social welfare development was retarded; the federal government had practically no welfare

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<sup>54</sup> Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 28.

<sup>55</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 6-8.

responsibilities” until the late 1920’s and social reform was effected mainly at the municipal and provincial levels.<sup>56</sup> The first step towards the modern era of welfare legislation in Canada was taken by the province of Ontario when it introduced the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1914.<sup>57</sup> The Act provided a mandatory income for labourers when job-related illness or injury left them unable to work. Significantly, the legislation marked a departure from the principle of less eligibility, providing a limited contributory insurance scheme as a worker’s right rather than as charity. By 1920, similar legislation had been introduced by every province but Prince Edward Island.

Nineteen fourteen marked the first Congress of the newly-formed Social Service Council. The Congress was the culmination of the “religiously motivated, social reform movement in Canada” that emerged before the First World War and resulted in “an outpouring of concern by Canadians in reaction to the... poverty, and the oppression of labour that accompanied Canada’s move into the industrial age.”<sup>58</sup> It gathered members of the social gospel movement, the urban reform movement, members of labour unions, and representatives from all levels of government together to discuss social security problems, yet the arrival of the First World War meant the speeches went largely unheeded. War, however, brought new realization of government responsibility to its citizens. The war necessitated a new strategy of family welfare as it was difficult to convince soldiers to enlist without offering provision for the families left at home without a breadwinner. During the war the Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF), established in the time of the Boer war to see to the needs of soldiers’ families, created the idea of mother’s

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<sup>56</sup> Ronald Mendelsohn, *Social Security in the British Commonwealth: Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1954), 77.

<sup>57</sup> Guest, 40. For a detailed study of the development of needs-based welfare programs in Ontario see James Struthers’ *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Guest., 33.

allowances by paying women for “their national service in keeping the family inviolate during a time of crisis.”<sup>59</sup> Though the fund kept women on a level of bare subsistence, by recognizing women’s work within the family as a distinct contribution and national service, mothers’ allowances marked an important recognition of the importance of maternal role that continued after the war. As well, the use of the CPF in this case posed a direct challenge to the idea that the individual was autonomous for the state.<sup>60</sup> After the war, provincial Mother’s Allowance legislation emerged in place of the national CPF. Recognizing that children who were raised well would “grow up as industrious citizens, rather than state dependants,” provinces began introducing Mothers’ Allowances.<sup>61</sup> By 1930, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia had all introduced similar legislation.

In the years before the Depression, social legislation at the federal level was scant. Actions taken during the post-First World War recession marked the state’s largest step towards acknowledging federal responsibility for its unemployed. The Union government of Robert Borden created two measures to deal with post-war demobilization. It first introduced the Soldier Settlement Plan, providing veterans with homestead land and funding to begin farming, and then instituted the Employment Service of Canada (ESC), which established a national system of labour exchanges. The Settlement Plan encouraged returning soldiers to seek new lives out West, and the ESC first emerged to help find labourers for Canada’s farms. With the onset of demobilization, however, the

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<sup>59</sup> Nancy Christie. *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

ESC quickly expanded across Canada, opening 88 offices and placing 400,000 men by 1919.<sup>62</sup>

In response to mounting pressure, Borden considered instituting unemployment insurance. In 1920, he commissioned the Department of Labour to produce a working model of such a scheme.<sup>63</sup> By the summer of 1920, however, Borden had resigned and his successor, Arthur Meighen, was little interested in the policy. In the fall of 1920, Meighen informed parliament that there was simply not enough information available on unemployment insurance to inform a successful policy, effectively tabling the idea.<sup>64</sup> Meighen had larger problems to face as rates of unemployment rose. By the winter of 1921, with the cash-strapped provinces and municipalities pressuring the federal government to accept responsibility for unemployment, Meighen unveiled groundbreaking legislation. On 14 December 1921, the federal government announced a promise to pay for one third of all municipal relief costs, no matter what the amount the provinces' agreed to pay. Although this was not entirely a selfless gesture on the federal government's part, it marked the first time a North American national government accepted responsibility for its unemployed.<sup>65</sup>

The election of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, however, reversed this tentative step towards national responsibility for unemployment. Elected in early December 1921, King ended the practice in the spring of 1922. Although he called a conference on unemployment in the fall of that same year, its purpose was never to expand federal aid, but to return to the old order and the doctrine of self-reliance and

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<sup>62</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

local responsibility for welfare. King further distanced himself from Meighen's unemployment measures by drastically cutting government funding to the ESC. Although the 1919 Liberal platform promised to implement unemployment insurance King backed away from the commitment. By the time King was elected in 1921, however, the popularity of such a program of insurance had waned amongst the Liberal party and its supporters. To reach a victory King had relied heavily on the support of Quebec conservative members and Ontarian businessmen; neither side supported expensive welfare measures.<sup>66</sup> Once in office, King backed away from supporting relief measures. He maintained that the issue of unemployment was a personal, municipal, and provincial responsibility only warranting federal intervention when these traditional avenues of support failed due to a state of national emergency.<sup>67</sup> By 1924, the King government had effectively departed from its 1919 promises. While no constitutional barrier prevented the government from introducing unemployment insurance, when advising King on the matter, Labour Minister James Murdock admitted that implementing the measure would be viewed as "somewhat inconsistent" with King's implacable opposition to federal responsibility for unemployment relief.<sup>68</sup>

When rapid economic growth led to the end of the recession, pressure on King to implement a permanent federal unemployment policy eased. The introduction of government administered, non-contributory pensions in 1927 was the "chief contribution to modern income maintenance legislation" made during King's first tenure and even this

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 40.

was done reluctantly.<sup>69</sup> While the issue of old age pensions had been raised prior to and after the First World War, it was not until 1924 that the House of Commons appointed a special committee to study the issue. The Liberals promised to institute old age pensions in 1919, the Trade and Labour Congress of Canada lobbied for them, and the special committee struck by the federal government recommended that pension legislation be passed in 1925. However, it took until 1927 for a pension scheme to be introduced. Only after a narrow electoral victory did King, eager for legislative allies, respond to the pressure of Labour Members J.S. Woodsworth and A.A. Heap, by drafting an old age pensions bill.<sup>70</sup> Though the debt-ridden government allowed pensions for only those over seventy rather than sixty-five as was the case in Britain, and also set the maximum monthly payment at \$20, a cost shared equally between the federal and provincial governments, it was still a noteworthy recognition that Ottawa bore responsibility for the nation's impoverished.

Although King's government implemented old age pensions, in general his years in office preceding the Great Depression were characterized by his complete indifference towards the nation's unemployed. King himself best summarized his attitude towards the federal government assuming any new responsibility for relief in a diary entry of 23 May 1929. Commenting on a presentation by the Committee dealing with Social Insurance, and an amendment suggested by Labour Member of Parliament AA Heaps that the federal government should aid the provinces in the matter of relief, King wrote of his distaste for "relieving the Provinces of an obligation which is theirs."<sup>71</sup> Though he noted

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<sup>69</sup> Guest, 74.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>71</sup> King, 23 May 1929.

he refrained from speaking lest the press pick up his remarks, privately, he stated: “I think the whole business of State aid to Unemployment is a mistake.”<sup>72</sup>

Once on the campaign trail in 1930, King’s attitude towards unemployment would prove his downfall. In April, while still in the House of Commons, King had famously responded to requests that the federal government direct funds towards unemployment by stating that Ottawa would not give even a “five cent piece” to the provinces for “alleged unemployment purposes.”<sup>73</sup> Although King would later regret his words, deeming them “contrary to my whole nature and spirit of action,” Bennett and the Conservatives leapt on these remarks, using them to highlight Liberal complacency and neglect of its unemployed citizens.<sup>74</sup> If elected, Bennett promised, the Conservative party would immediately deal with the issue of unemployment by calling a special session of parliament. Furthermore, Bennett promised to protect Canadian industrialists and agriculturalists as well as increasing imperial trade.<sup>75</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Canadian electorate voted in favour of Bennett. King’s defeat came at the beginning of a massive economic crisis, one that the nation was ill prepared to face. The federal government’s apathy towards its jobless citizens in the years leading up to 1930 meant Canada entered the Depression “armed with only a few charities and municipal relief structures built upon the 19<sup>th</sup> century poor law.”<sup>76</sup>

The extent of unemployment, economic unease, and environmental factors distinguished the Great Depression of the 1930s from any that came before it. Inheriting

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid..

<sup>73</sup> Robert Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 155.

<sup>74</sup> Wardhaugh, 158,160.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>76</sup> James Struthers. “A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930’s,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXII. 2 (June 1981), 171.

the leadership of a country at the dawn of this recession put Bennett in an unenviable position: few politicians, no matter what their ideological background, governed with ease during this period of catastrophic uncertainty. The Bennett government, however, was not simply a passive victim of external economic forces; while the Depression was a factor, Bennett's failure to control unemployment also owes itself to the misguided, ad hoc, and uninformed relief measures introduced in the years prior to 1932.

Upon winning office on 28 July 1930, Bennett soon fulfilled his campaign promise to call an emergency session of parliament on unemployment by convening parliament on 8 September 1930. His first Relief Act was introduced during this session. The Act allocated \$20 million towards relief, the majority of which would be given to the provinces as the federal government's contribution to make work projects, with four million set aside for direct relief. All funds were disbursed as part of a cost sharing basis between the government, provinces, and municipal authorities. Although the \$20 million Bennett offered was ten times the amount the Union government had offered in 1921, the spirit of the 1930 Relief Act differed little from its 1921 predecessor. Bennett viewed this extension of aid as a temporary measure, designing the Act to expire by March 1931. Therefore, he spent little time gaining a sound understanding of the nature of Canadian unemployment on which to base this legislation. Instead, the Relief Act was more akin to aid doled out during brief moments of environmental catastrophe than true social welfare policy. The Act was an emergency measure; Bennett had little real understanding of what the policy would accomplish. His party had promised action and the legislation's

speedy introduction was of greater important than what it contained. It was simpler to act first and analyze problems later.<sup>77</sup>

Bennett based his 1930 legislation on the premise that unemployment was a temporary, seasonal problem that would disappear in the spring. Given this assumption, he felt little pressure to design permanent federal policies, or create new bureaucracy to oversee unemployment at the federal level. Instead, he was content to allow provincial and municipal authorities to continue administrating relief, and devising relief programs. The federal government neither inspected nor questioned provincial relief projects and, as a result, no uniform system of relief existed in Canada.<sup>78</sup> Instead, the administration of assistance, and the types of make work projects undertaken, differed not only from province to province, but also within the provinces, as local authorities controlled the organization and administration of relief within their territories. Relief at every level was often overseen by poorly-trained administrators who had little or no background in social welfare.

Given the temporary and haphazard nature of Bennett's earliest relief policy, and the escalating economic crisis, unsurprisingly by the spring of 1931, unemployment had grown. A letter of May, 1931 from the Sudbury Unemployed to Bennett captures the sentiment of Canada's jobless at the time towards their prime minister: "Mr. Bennette [sic], Since you have been elected, work has been impossible to get. We have decided that in a month from this date, if thing's [sic] are the same, We'll skin you alive, the first chance we get."<sup>79</sup> Pressured by worsening conditions, Bennett introduced a second Relief

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<sup>77</sup> H. Blair Neatby. *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Macmillan Press, 1972), 57.

<sup>78</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 48.

<sup>79</sup> Sudbury Starving Unemployed. "May 20/31" in Michael Bliss and L.M. Grayson eds, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 13.

Act on 1 July 1931. While this Act was designed to aid all of Canada's unemployed, it was particularly meant to ease the plight of those living in Canada's drought-stricken western provinces. A prairie tour by Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson awakened the federal government to the extent of impoverishment. Astounded by the effect of the prairie drought and the "scene[s] of desolation that beggar[ed] description," Robertson's experience provided the impetus for Relief Act in 1931.<sup>80</sup> The Act's immediate goal was to provide fuel and food for the residents of southern Saskatchewan, but, like its predecessor, the 1931 Act continued to allocate government funds towards the provision of relief on a cost-sharing basis.

As with the 1930 legislation, the 1931 Relief Act failed to lessen the impact of unemployment. Instead, the 1931 legislation did little more than extend the prior, ineffective social welfare policies and, while Bennett seemed confident in these measures, the public remained unsatisfied. By April 1932, Bennett called the first dominion-provincial conference on relief, and he again reworked the Relief Act, shifting from a policy of relief work to direct relief. This move was a shattering blow both to Bennett and the unemployed. For Bennett, whose entire platform centered on promises to abolish the dole and unemployment, accepting that direct relief was the nation's most cost-efficient option forced him to re-examine his entire approach to relief. For the unemployed, this switch in policy meant a humiliating means test before money, or food vouchers, were issued, further crushing the morale of these already downtrodden citizens.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 53.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

By hastily implementing the first Relief Act of 1930 directly after his election Bennett proved that dealing with unemployment was the central goal of his administration. Yet, although the prime minister was quick to deliver on his election promises to end unemployment, his did so believing that this allocation of federal government funds would not have to be repeated. By the spring of 1932, however, Bennett's attitude changed. Neither his first Relief Act nor his second of 1931 had brought any significant change to the nation's unemployed. In the spring of 1932, however, in the face of rising expenditures, Bennett was forced to abandon his promises to abolish unemployment and the dole. The 1932 Relief Act, instead, embraced the dole as the nation's sole means of targeting unemployment, a complete departure from Bennett's previous legislation. By 1932, therefore, Bennett needed new policy. While he had once been confident that the Depression was a temporary phenomenon that would disappear with the coming of spring in 1931, by 1932, conditions showed no signs of abating. Entering the 1930s with a relief system reflecting the policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century rather than one that responded to the new issues introduced by growing industrialization and urbanization, the government was, from the outset, left with little precedent to guide its approach. Due to its ad hoc and temporary nature, Bennett's relief legislation did nothing to aid the situation. By April 1932 Bennett was ready to examine his policy and reevaluate his response to unemployment, causing him to turn to someone capable of advising him: Charlotte Whitton.

## Chapter 2: Choosing Charlotte Whitton

On 18 April 1932 Charlotte Elizabeth Whitton, director of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare (CCCW) approached Prime Minister R.B. Bennett with a unique proposition. In the opinion of the CCCW executive, Bennett's decision to abandon his policy of work for relief in favour of direct relief had fundamentally altered Canada's welfare system. This switch, and the introduction of a means test involving an in-depth investigation of individual families, demanded extensive knowledge of social welfare and experience in casework. As Whitton noted, the members of her council were uniquely skilled in these areas, and wanted to open their expertise to Bennett in an advisory capacity. Although Bennett was known for his autocratic leadership style, rarely taking the advice of even his own cabinet ministers, the failure of all his previous relief policies, and the resort to the dole, necessitated a change.<sup>1</sup> Bennett, however, was unprepared to allow a formal committee of CCCW members to advise him. Instead, in response to this need for reevaluation, Bennett turned to Whitton herself, asking her to quietly undertake a study of unemployment and relief in Western Canada over the summer and fall of 1932. Whitton's background in social work, experience undertaking large-scale surveys, and Conservative inclinations made her an ideal advisor.

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett's strict leadership style has been well documented in the literature analyzing his life and actions as prime minister. As Larry Glassford notes of Bennett's prime-ministerial style, "Bennett adopted a vigorous, authoritarian leadership style that...prompted the charge of a one-man government" [Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party under R.B. Bennett 1921-1939*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 100]. H. Blair Neatby stated that Bennett "could be an arrogant bully. His cabinet ministers were rarely consulted on major policies and their opinions carried little weight" [Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972) 52]. Even Bennett's most adoring biographer, his personal friend Lord Beaverbrook, wrote that Bennett "exerted his authority to the limit...[h]e always regarded his Cabinet colleagues as subordinates" [Beaverbrook, *Friends: Sixty Years of Intimate Personal Relations with Richard Bedford Bennett*. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1959) 82].

Bennett's appointment of Whitton was hardly unconsidered: Whitton's background in social work specifically equipped her to embark on such a study. At a time when matters of government were chiefly overseen by men, the appointment of a woman to produce such a potentially important policy document might have been seen as unusual, but there is no evidence to suggest that Whitton's gender factored into Bennett's choice. Instead, Bennett, a long-time supporter of the CCCW, chose Whitton based on her qualifications which had been earned through her almost fifteen year involvement in social welfare. At the time of her appointment, Whitton was considered "one of the most outstanding women of her generation" on the basis of her work with child welfare.<sup>2</sup>

Although Whitton's career in social welfare began with her taking a position with the Social Service Council of Canada (SSCC) in 1918, her preparation for this work began at Queen's University, where Whitton pursued post-secondary education. Whitton was born in Renfrew, Ontario on 8 March 1896 and she attended primary school and the Renfrew Collegiate Institute. She went on to Queen's University during the First World War. As Whitton would later note, "the first thing that sent me into political operation...was our Queen's men."<sup>3</sup> Attending Queen's during this time of conflict proved significant: since the majority of the campus's male students, and even professors, volunteered for overseas duty, female students received an unprecedented amount of attention and encouragement. With the men away, women assumed positions of power on campus never before open to them. Aside from joining campus clubs, Whitton became the first female assistant editor of the university's *Journal*; this formative environment

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<sup>2</sup> James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930's," *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXII: 2 (June 1981), 173.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Whitton, interviewed by John Hamilton, *Distinguished Canadians*, CBC-TV, 14 August 1972. Online via *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. <[http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties\\_leaders/clips/15849/](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties_leaders/clips/15849/)> (1 May 2009).

allowed Whitton to develop both her confidence and leadership skills in ways unavailable to her in peacetime.<sup>4</sup> After graduating in 1918 with a Master of Arts in English, History, and Philosophy, Whitton moved to Toronto and took an appointment with the Social Service Council of Canada (SSCC), working as an assistant secretary.<sup>5</sup>

At the time Whitton joined the SSCC, Canada's social services field was in a state of transition.<sup>6</sup> In the past, social services had consisted of a loose system of associated charities whose representatives, mostly female, middle class volunteers, would visit those under their care, but by the time Whitton entered the field, this traditional concept of social aid was being replaced by the professionalization of social work. Gradually, specifically trained and educated staff were replacing these volunteers and taking charge of the Canada's social welfare system.<sup>7</sup> Although Whitton was not specifically trained in social work, she had been personally chosen for the job by J.G. Shearer, director of the SSCC, because of her Queen's education. Her post-secondary experience had given her

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<sup>4</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> The SSCC grew out of the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada. It was an alliance of representatives from the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Churches and also members of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada who united in an attempt to set up a committee to deal with the nation's social problems. In 1913, it renamed itself the Social Service Council of Canada, and held its first national Social Service Congress in 1914. By the time Whitton joined as secretary to J.G. Shearer, leader of the SSCC, the council had expanded, boasting a national program of lobbying and research, and maintaining standing committees on issues such as immigration, child welfare, and Indian Affairs. Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 33-35; P.T.Rooke and R.L.Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> For other versions of this argument, see Therese Jennissen and Colleen Lundy, "Keeping Sight of Social Justice: 80 Years of Building the Canadian Association of Social Workers," *Social Work's History: the CASW Historical Page* (Canadian Association of Social Workers On-line, 2006 ), 1-5. < [http://www.casw-acts.ca/aboutcasw/building\\_e.pdf](http://www.casw-acts.ca/aboutcasw/building_e.pdf)>; James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work," *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXII: 2 (June 1981), 169; L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), x, xii, xvi, xxi; P.T.Rooke and R.L.Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 19; Janice L. Andrews, "Female Social Workers in the Second Generation," *Affilia*, 5.2 (Summer 1990), 46-50, 58. Although Andrews' work studies the professionalization of social work in the United States during the middle generation of social work history (from 1920-1950), since, until the 1970s, Canadian social work was primarily influenced by the American tradition, her analysis of the profession's growth during the Great Depression in America can be applied to Canada (Jennissen and Lundy, 1-4).

the skills in research, critical analysis, and writing necessary to begin her career in social work. Even though Whitton's was not a social work degree, Shearer's quest to fill his Council with college graduates rather than lay volunteers is indicative of this general trend towards professionalization.<sup>8</sup>

While Whitton's tenure at the SSCC was brief, her years with the organization provided her with the social welfare experience necessary to seek a more prominent place in the field. Although Whitton held a secretarial position, she took the opportunity to sit on several of the SSCC standing committees and wrote for the SSCC's journal, *Social Welfare*.<sup>9</sup> During these years Whitton developed the ideas that continued to shape her work with social welfare: concern over immigration, censure of unwed mothers, and support for the welfare of children. By 1922, Whitton, having gained training and connections from her work with the SSCC, moved to Ottawa to take on a position with the then-fledgling Canadian Council on Child Welfare.<sup>10</sup>

When Whitton moved to Ottawa, the future of the CCCW was uncertain. It had formed just two years prior to Whitton's move in response to a growing concern for child health and welfare following the First World War. While the end of war marked a cessation in Canadian mortality due to military conflict, many of Canada's returning

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<sup>8</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 20. Shearer's quest to staff his organization with academically trained intellectuals rather than lay volunteers was part of the greater redefinition of the role of the university-trained intellectual outside the academic arena. In his book *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), Doug Owrarn studies how, between 1900-1945, the previously separate spheres of academia and government had come together. Whereas once intellectuals had taken few roles within political parties and the civil service, by 1945, both "depended on the expertise that university could provide" (326). As Owrarn contends, the twentieth century brought with it industrialization and new social and economic divisions and a need for state expansion (x). In light of these new issues, many academics who had previously remained "cloistered" within the university community came to believe that critiquing the government and merely waiting for it to respond was ineffective. Instead, these experts became activist intellectuals who took roles within government, the civil service, and organizations like the Social Service Council of Canada, to effect reform.

<sup>9</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; Splane, 3.

soldiers were unsuspecting carriers of the Spanish Influenza, a flu virus contracted on the Western Front that soon swept the globe, becoming an international pandemic and eventually causing more casualties than the War.<sup>11</sup> In response to the high rates of mortality, the Dominion authorities developed the Special Child Hygiene Division of the Department of Health. Members of the SSCC and other welfare organizations, however, were unsatisfied with this step as they felt a focus on just children's health, rather than their general welfare, too limited.<sup>12</sup> These organizations wanted the federal government to follow the lead of their American counterpart, which had just introduced a national Children's Bureau. Instead of establishing a bureau, the federal government held a conference on child welfare in 1920, and agreed to help fund the organization borne out of the conference: the CCCW.<sup>13</sup> Initially, the cash-strapped organization subsisted on a federal grant of \$1,000 and a limited amount of donated funds.<sup>14</sup> When Whitton moved to Ottawa to take on a position as the Council's secretary in 1922, she received no salary until 1925 when the government grant increased to \$5,000 and the Council raised a comparable sum.<sup>15</sup> Until 1925, therefore, Whitton took paid employment as the full-time secretary to Liberal Member of Parliament Tom Low, the federal Minister of Trade and Commerce. By the time of Low's defeat in 1925, the Council had developed to the point

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the influenza's origins and impact on Canada see: Elylt Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Using Winnipeg as a case study through which to view the pandemic's effect on Canadian communities, Jones analyzes the diseases affect on social boundaries, in particular focusing on how the pandemic impacted Winnipeg's working class in the year of the Winnipeg General Strike.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Richard Splane, *75 Years of Community Service to Canada: Canadian Council on Social Development 1920-1995* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1996), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Splane, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

that Whitton could abandon other employment; she officially accepted the position of Executive Secretary in 1926.<sup>16</sup>

Between 1920 and 1925 the CCCW grew from a small group of passionate volunteers to a nationally recognized organization with almost two hundred members, and was affiliated with nineteen national, fourteen provincial, and sixteen municipal social welfare organizations. The CCCW organized annual meetings, published the *Child Welfare News*, offered consulting services, and undertook its own studies of matters related to child and family welfare.<sup>17</sup> The CCCW could even count future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett within its ranks. Bennett became an official patron of the CCCW in 1926, and, based on Whitton's admiration of Bennett's political career and his respect for her social work, the two forged a friendship. A 1931 letter from Whitton to Bennett illustrates this relationship. Writing to chide Bennett for forgetting to pay his membership dues, Whitton concluded: "I do not need to bring to your attention the nature of our work...your unfailing support and sympathy have always been ours."<sup>18</sup> And, in 1933, when Bennett called upon Whitton to convey his regret that he would miss their Welfare and Relief Conference, he noted his "deep interest and sincere appreciation of the work [the CCCW] have been carrying on." As he concluded, "while the government endeavors to do...much to alleviate suffering and hardship, there is a field which they cannot enter and where those...interested in the welfare of their fellow Canadians can have a great work."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Although Whitton's official title was Executive Secretary, she was, however, also referred to as the Council's Executive Director, the two terms were used interchangeably (Splane, 3).

<sup>17</sup> Splane, 1-5, Rooke and Schnell, 48, 68-69.

<sup>18</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), R.B. Bennett Papers, MG26-K, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 28 March 1931.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Bennett to Whitton, 1 May 1933.

Whitton's prominence grew alongside that of the Council. By virtue of her position as executive secretary, and her famously brusque, witty, confrontational, and authoritative personality, she was the public face of the Council; the two were indivisible. By 1932, her work had transformed the CCCW from a volunteer organization to a clearinghouse for Canada's many family welfare organizations. At a time when few official government institutions, or universities, devoted resources to the collection of social welfare data or research, Whitton established the CCCW as the nation's chief collector of such research and statistics. She garnered further recognition when named as the Canadian assessor on the League of Nations' Child Welfare Committee in 1925, and took on several consulting and advisory roles.<sup>20</sup> By the time Bennett commissioned her Whitton could confidently claim the title of Canada's "foremost expert on social welfare policy."<sup>21</sup> As the *Winnipeg Free Press* noted of her after a 1926 visit to the city, she is "the brilliant representative of young Canada...[at the League of Nations] her vivid personality, her ability to size up a situation and her gift for expression won for herself and for her country, wide recognition."<sup>22</sup>

While Whitton's career in social welfare certainly prepared her to take on Bennett's unemployment report, experience in social welfare alone was not enough to prepare her to organize and produce the type of expansive and analytical document and survey Bennett requested. In the years preceding her work for Bennett, Whitton oversaw several large-scale surveys and investigations on social welfare issues, including a survey

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<sup>20</sup> Splane, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Christie, 168.

<sup>22</sup> "A Brilliant Canadian," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 October 1926.

of and campaign against juvenile immigration and reviews of mothers' allowance legislation for the provincial governments of British Columbia and New Brunswick.<sup>23</sup>

The skills acquired through conducting these surveys prepared her to produce the kind of report Bennett needed. Beginning in 1924, the CCCW, directed by Whitton, undertook a survey of juvenile immigration and instituted a national campaign against the practice. In the years between Confederation and the Second World War, thousands of British children were shipped to Canada. The children, for the most part either orphaned or abandoned members of Britain's impoverished class, were ostensibly sent to Canada on the premise that the New World would offer a chance for a better life than that available in Britain. They would be adopted by Canadian families, and then could commence a new existence away from the pauperism that characterized their early life. While some of the children experienced this life, in reality the majority were not adopted but, instead, spent their new lives labouring as farmhands or domestic servants. While the program was initially popular, by the 1920s Canadian and British opinion had turned against it.<sup>24</sup> Opposition to the practice united usually divided interest groups: trade unions, women's societies, country sheriffs and doctors, and social-welfare organizations all joined in criticizing the practice, claiming that the mass influx of inexpensive labour

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<sup>24</sup> In Britain, growing unease amongst the ruling Labour party, its representative groups such as the Labour Women, and the public in general led to a widespread questioning of juvenile immigration. When representatives of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railways voyaged to Britain asking the government to allow them to bypass the childcare organizations in charge of immigration and instead just ship the children directly, the government balked. The government decided to take action, commissioning a survey of juvenile immigration in the spring of 1924. Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 189.

fostered unfair labour competition and moral degeneracy, and that lax supervision laws meant many of the children found little protection from cruel work practices.<sup>25</sup>

While these groups all protested against the same issue, they failed to establish common cause. At the time, the movement opposing juvenile immigration divided into camps of those who would end the practice out of compassion, those who would do so out of prejudice, and those motivated by “a cunning combination of both.”<sup>26</sup> In 1924 however, the CCCW and Whitton formally entered the debate, announcing that the Council would spearhead a campaign to cease juvenile immigration. The CCCW’s move to join those opposed to juvenile immigration strengthened the movement, and united the many groups fighting to end this practice. The CCCW, as a national children’s welfare organization, was particularly suited to lead the charge against juvenile immigration. It could rely on affiliates in every province to aid its campaign, and possessed the largest collection of child and family welfare statistics available at the time.<sup>27</sup> The nature of the campaign also suited the work of a council dedicated to watching over the care of children in Canada. At the annual conference of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) in the summer of 1924, Whitton spoke to this purpose, asking, “why are so many children brought to Canada? The only fair inference is that juvenile immigrants are being sought for placements in homes and conditions which the Canadian authorities will not accept for our own children.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rooke and Schnell, “Imperial Philanthropy and Colonial Response: British Juvenile Immigration to Canada, 1896-1939,” *The Historian* XLVI. 1 (November 1983), 58-59. For a detailed study of juvenile immigration to Canada, see Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants*; Marjorie Kholi, *The Golden Bridge: Young Immigrants to Canada 1833- 1939* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2003) and Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869- 1924* (Montreal: McGill- Queen’s University Press, 1980).

<sup>26</sup> Bagnell, 189.

<sup>27</sup> Christie, 167-168.

<sup>28</sup> Charlotte Whitton qtd. in Bagnell, 190.

The CCCW campaign was financed by the Montreal Women's Canadian Club and spanned four years. Within this time, Whitton launched what has been deemed an "all-out offensive" against those involved.<sup>29</sup> As the Council consisted of smaller provincial and local social welfare groups, Whitton could mobilize members at all levels, in every province to join the movement and provide specific statistics on the lives of juvenile immigrants within their jurisdictions. The CCCW also undertook its own investigations of the children. Although many of these statistics and case histories were sensationalized, the CCCW's findings captivated the public.<sup>30</sup> Whitton used all the platforms available to her in her critique of the practice, encouraging letter campaigns, and shaming the government in the media and at welfare conferences.<sup>31</sup>

In 1925, Britain released the Bondfield Report on juvenile immigration. Led by Labour Member Margaret Bondfield, Britain's first female cabinet minister, the report recommended severely limiting juvenile immigration, and ending altogether the transportation of school-aged children.<sup>32</sup> The combination of public animosity towards the practice, the CCCW-led campaign, and the British government's move to follow the Bondfield Report's recommendation to limit immigration, influenced Mackenzie King's government to follow suit. A three-year moratorium on juvenile immigration was imposed in 1925. Throughout their campaign, Whitton and the CCCW had been collecting the various statistics, case histories, and reports, using them to support a comprehensive survey of juvenile immigration. Whitton used the three year moratorium

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<sup>29</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy," 72; Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy," 58. For a biography of Margaret Bondfield please see: Philip Williamson, 'Bondfield, Margaret Grace (1873–1953)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/31955>> (27 June 2009).

to produce a study on the Bondfield report and to continue her investigation of juvenile immigration, resulting in a comprehensive survey.<sup>33</sup> The survey, entitled *Several Years After: An Analysis of a Selected Group of Juvenile Immigrants Brought to Canada in 1910 and in 1920 by British Emigration Societies*, was published and presented at a conference on immigration in Ottawa in 1928.<sup>34</sup> By late summer, the federal government made the moratorium permanent, ending British juvenile immigration to Canada.

Whitton wasted little time between her victory and the start of her next large survey. In 1929, Whitton began to take action against mothers' allowances. Mothers allowance legislation was developed in the years following the First World War both in response to widowed families of Canada's fallen soldiers, but also to the feeling that the post-war, peacetime society would be built on the strong, nuclear family unit.<sup>35</sup> Widowed mothers were also seen as deserving of state support, as it was in the interests of the state to have children raised in their homes. Without mothers' allowances, impoverished widows often had little other choice than to place their children in orphanages, since the cost of hiring outside care was too expensive. As many children's welfare advocates argued, the state had a "moral obligation" to provide this aid and ensure that children could be kept with their mothers.<sup>36</sup>

Through mothers' allowances, provincial government representatives, investigators sent to monitor those women receiving the government allowance,

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<sup>33</sup> Rooke and Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy," 58-59.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>35</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag "“Wages for Housework”: Mothers' Allowances and the Beginnings of Social Security in Canada." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14.1 (Spring 1979), 25. For a fuller discussion of the history of mothers' allowances in Canada, see: James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 19-49; Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 94-159; Margaret Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press,1998).

<sup>36</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 100.

physically entered the family home, bringing those deviant, distressed and immoral families into line, acting as “the active agent of middle-class values.”<sup>37</sup> Between 1916 and 1930, most provinces were quick to introduce such legislation. Manitoba instituted mothers’ allowances in 1916 followed by Saskatchewan in 1917, Alberta in 1919, British Columbia and Ontario in 1920, and Nova Scotia by 1930. Yet, although the provincial governments introduced this legislation, except for British Columbia, all defined mothers’ allowances as a limited form of needs based relief, not a right or a pension.<sup>38</sup>

By the end of the 1920s, however, this principle of limited government involvement was eroding.<sup>39</sup> In Manitoba, many called for a review of mothers’ allowance administration, and petitioned for the inclusion of unmarried and deserted women. Whitton, worried that the allowances would be seen as a right of mothers rather than a form of temporary charity, quickly accepted a position as head of Manitoba’s Royal Commission on mothers’ allowances in 1929. Her CCCW associates within the province helped her, lending their time and research to allow her to produce a comprehensive survey of the legislation. Once in Manitoba, she sent CCCW delegates to interview working-class families, and canvassed over five hundred former recipients of mothers’

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<sup>37</sup> Strong-Boag, 25. As Margaret Little contends in her study of mothers’ allowance legislation in Ontario *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920- 1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), mothers’ allowance legislation was founded on a maternalist ideology “firmly rooted in middle class experience and aspirations”(26). Advocates of mothers’ allowances placed importance on the virtue of domesticity and the central role of the male breadwinner and adopted a “unified moral position” based on the belief that poverty was linked to immorality and that those in need of the allowance also necessitated strict moral guidance (26-27). Although mothers’ allowance legislation did aid impoverished single mothers’, its emphasis on middle-class familial model was “oppressive” to these poorer women (xv). As Little discusses, defining motherhood as the ability to provide full-time care for children “asserted the class and race advantage” of the Anglo-Canadian middle class instead of meeting the actual needs of these impoverished mothers (xv). To women who received this allowance, the home investigators were the agents of this maternalist ideology and moral regulation. By visiting the homes and undertaking and regulation a mother’s financial, sexual, domestic, and child-rearing abilities according to a maternalist and moralistic criteria, the investigators forced these women to try to attain an impossible ideal instead of recognizing the complexity of their individual situations.

<sup>38</sup> Christie, 162.

<sup>39</sup> In the majority of cases, access to mothers’ allowances was restricted to widows, abandoned wives, single mothers, and abandoned or widowed commonlaw partners were excluded from applying for this aid.

allowances before “skilfully deploying” the information she collected in the Royal Commission’s report.<sup>40</sup> Although Whitton faced opposition from members of Manitoba’s Labour Party who fought for the revision and expansion of mothers’ allowance legislation, Whitton’s recommendations held. Instead of finding the system too narrow, Whitton critiqued the allowance’s generosity and the province’s lax systems of investigation. She also recommended that the government appoint trained social welfare experts to administer any system of allowances.<sup>41</sup>

Buoyed by her success in Manitoba, Whitton accepted the request of Conservative Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie to produce a similar review of British Columbia’s mothers’ pension system. British Columbia’s legislation differed from all others because of its designation as a pension rather than an allowance. The pension was also administered through the rights-based Workers’ Compensation Board. By defining the fund as a pension, the benefit became a right of motherhood, rather than an extension of charity, and lacked the stigma of mothers’ allowances in other provinces. Unlike the other provinces with mothers’ aid legislation, British Columbia also deemed women not living with their husbands due to adultery or abuse equally eligible for pensions, therefore increasing the number of women receiving the funds. With the arrival of the Depression, however, British Columbia sought to review and streamline its expensive policy, and appointed Whitton to report on the legislation and suggest how it could be brought under new control.<sup>42</sup> Whitton undertook a review similar to that of Manitoba, and again suggested new investigation standards and a stricter definition of mothers’ allowances

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<sup>40</sup> Christie, 166.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

and general relief.<sup>43</sup> Following her work with British Columbia, Nova Scotia's Conservative provincial government sought her aid, asking her this time to create, rather than review, mothers' allowance legislation.<sup>44</sup>

Whitton's personal involvement with these surveys and policy reviews prepared her to take on Bennett's commission. He asked her to travel throughout the four western provinces, investigating how relief functioned in each, and then produce a report offering an analysis of the situation, and her suggestions for a new policy.<sup>45</sup> None of these tasks were outside her knowledge. The juvenile immigration study had a national scope, allowing Whitton to synthesize and analyze information from all provinces. Furthermore, her work with mothers' allowance legislation gave her specific experience in Western Canada. Years after her report, Whitton would recall that Bennett chose her in part because of her previous work and connections which allowed her to easily "go into any place from coast to coast," and rely on existing contacts and knowledge to help her analyze the situation.<sup>46</sup> Having travelled to British Columbia and Manitoba to undertake her surveys, Whitton had a working knowledge of the cities and provincial governments in those provinces. Her surveys of mothers' allowances for these two areas required her to critically analyze how social welfare legislation currently functioned within those provinces, and then use this information to suggest legislative change. In Nova Scotia, Whitton was even directly involved with the crafting of original legislation.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>45</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 77.

<sup>46</sup> Charlotte Whitton, interviewed by John Hamilton, *Distinguished Canadians*, CBC-TV, 14 August 1972. Online via *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. <[http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties\\_leaders/clips/15849/](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties_leaders/clips/15849/)> (1 May 2009).

Whitton's experience undertaking serious research into unemployment issues also lent her the skills necessary to take on Bennett's request. She was known as a passionate researcher. She insisted that "sound opinions and excellent judgment" alone could not do much to truly address the causes of social issues. Instead, she maintained that "research into the causes of [these] evils...is just as necessary as special research in engineering and medicine." The lack of this kind of scholarship, and the absence of many willing to undertake it, was, to her, deplorable.<sup>47</sup> She despaired that it was easier to get \$500 to feed and clothe a needy family than get "\$25 to find out why that family needed aid."<sup>48</sup> In Whitton's opinion, authorities were too concerned with immediate action and therefore spent increasing funds trying to solve welfare issues instead taking the time to understand them. By 1932 Bennett had already tried the first option, throwing together ad-hoc, quick-fix social welfare legislation without giving much thought to the reasons why these mounting sums were needed. Given the absolute failure of his policies, he was ready to seek advice.

Although one of the most prominent social welfare experts of her time, Whitton was not alone in this elite group. There were other, capable social welfare scholars available to take up Bennett's task. As a staunch Conservative whose work with social welfare was conditioned by her ideological beliefs, Whitton was set apart from others within her cohort; while each studied social welfare issues, Whitton approached these with a conservative outlook that distinguished her work. One such colleague was Harry

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<sup>47</sup> "Activities of Welfare Association Outlined: Miss Whitton Deplores Lack of Research Work as to Cause of Evils," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 October 1926.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Cassidy.<sup>49</sup> Although Whitton's study was the first and only analysis of unemployment commissioned by the federal government, and the first to consider the West, she was not the first to produce such a report. In the spring of 1932, just before Bennett called upon Whitton, Cassidy, the director of the University of Toronto's School of Social Work, produced a review of unemployment and relief in Ontario at the request of the League for Social Reconstruction.<sup>50</sup> Cassidy began his research monitoring the operation of Bennett's 1931 Relief Act in July 1931 and ended it in the winter of 1932. As an economist, Cassidy was, like Whitton, an academically trained social welfare professional. Unlike Whitton, however, Cassidy's politics leaned to the left, and this liberal ideology provided the framework for his approach to social welfare.<sup>51</sup>

Whitton's report was sanctioned by the Bennett government, yet, as Bennett never officially recognized it, nor publicized her work in any way, her research went largely unnoticed. Conversely, Cassidy's work was the only report on unemployment relief and administration published. It presented a "devastating indictment" of the Bennett government's relief policies.<sup>52</sup> As Cassidy contended, the federal government's ad-hoc approach to relief policy was directly to blame for the nation's current crisis. Cassidy deemed the presumption that unemployment remained a seasonal issue "quite clearly incorrect," but, since all federal policy was based on this assumption, no answer to the

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<sup>49</sup> For a greater discussion of Cassidy, see John Irving, "Canadian Fabians: The Work and Thoughts of Harry Cassidy and Leonard Marsh, 1930-1945." *Canadian Journal of Social Work Education* 7.1, 7-28.

<sup>50</sup> The League for Social Reconstruction was founded in 1931 by historian and law professor Frank Underhill, who would later play an important role in the founding of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation by penning the party's Regina Manifesto. This coalition of businessmen, social workers, and academics in Montreal and Toronto dedicated itself to acting where the federal government would not by organizing real research and analysis into Canadian unemployment. Hiring Cassidy to survey relief administration in Ontario since the advent of the Depression was the League's first act. For a greater discussion of the League's history, see Michiel Horn's *The League for Social Reconstruction: The Intellectual Origins of the Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>51</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

crisis could be found.<sup>53</sup> Treating unemployment as a temporary emergency meant that no national coordination of relief services had been organized nor permanent policy created. Unemployment, he reasoned, would not end with the winter melt, and policies built to bandage over the issue rather than ones based on the sound research of social welfare experts could never adequately confront it.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he argued against the federal position that relief was a provincial and municipal responsibility. Using the example of the post- First World War recession, he found that the federal government had already moved from this doctrine by providing aid during this time, and that Bennett's administration had only continued the trend.<sup>55</sup>

While the federal government might argue for joint provincial-municipal responsibility, asserting that those two authorities held constitutional jurisdiction over the matter, Cassidy stated, "the stubborn facts of the situation...will force the Dominion...to assume even more responsibility for unemployment...[regardless of] whatever constitutional arguments they may be able to muster in favour of standing aloof."<sup>56</sup> He criticized the federal and provincial governments for not creating a unified system of relief administration. The failure to do so resulted in a disparity in organization from municipality to municipality. While some administrators were experienced and ran well-organized programs, others were poorly trained to handle the task of relief administration with "little experience that would fit them particularly to deal with it."<sup>57</sup> This led to the adoption of "expedients of dubious value and efficiency."<sup>58</sup> Cassidy also had little patience for the idea that "personal deficiency represented the prime cause of

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<sup>53</sup> Harry Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929-1932: A Survey* (Toronto: Dent, 1932), 29.

<sup>54</sup> Cassidy, 29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

unemployment for the majority of men” during this time, arguing instead that the magnitude of the Depression shattered this myth.<sup>59</sup>

Cassidy’s report both reviewed the current relief and unemployment situation in Ontario and made suggestions for change. He argued against the idea that municipalities held responsibility for relief, noting that provincial and federal powers needed to “take the lead” when creating and financing relief policies.<sup>60</sup> As well, while Cassidy agreed that “the broad principle of giving the unemployed work rather than a dole is thoroughly sound,” his review of Ontario’s relief system proved that “[d]irect relief must be accepted for the immediate future as our major method of assisting the unemployed.”<sup>61</sup> He demanded that food allowances match “the minima requisite for the maintenance of health,” and called for the provision of rental and clothing allowances.<sup>62</sup> He suggested that new provisions be made for the care of transients, single men and single women, and any other groups “neglected” by municipal relief structures,<sup>63</sup> and also wrote of the “enormous psychological value”<sup>64</sup> of providing recreational and educational services for the unemployed to bolster morale.<sup>65</sup> He ended his suggestions by arguing for the development of “adequate governmental machinery of a permanent nature”<sup>66</sup> to deal with relief, and placed the bulk of the responsibility on the federal government, concluding with this rationalization: “if the state wishes to secure the fullest loyalty...of its citizens, must it not assume a larger measure of leadership than in the past?”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>67</sup> Cassidy, 290.

While the report was ostensibly produced for the use of the League, its members made no secret of their hope it would fulfill a larger, national role. Even before the report's completion, W.F. Nickle forwarded a copy to Bennett.<sup>68</sup> In a memo warning the prime minister of the manuscript's arrival, Nickle predicted the report "could be of great value to you" as it presented the opinion of a non-partisan group "among whom are numbered several Canadian economists and publicists of distinction."<sup>69</sup> Cassidy forwarded the first six chapters of his report two days later.<sup>70</sup> The League hoped that Bennett would be moved enough to offer to have the report printed and distributed by the government.<sup>71</sup> While the group could publish it in a limited way, gaining government funding and official support would legitimize the report, allowing Cassidy's work a national audience. As Nickle implied, since the study was written by an impartial social welfare expert, under the umbrella of a non-partisan group of respected individuals, the report could escape the criticism and scrutiny that might befall a partisan government document. Although Bennett received the report and told Nickle he "hoped" to soon read it, Bennett cautioned that he might not have the time as "I am very pressed."<sup>72</sup> No evidence of Bennett's reading the report exists.

Despite the logic of Nickle's arguments, even if Bennett did read the report, it is unlikely he would have endorsed it. Cassidy's report represented the first thorough consideration of unemployment and relief administration, offering an informed analysis

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<sup>68</sup> William Folger Nickle was a lawyer and prominent Conservative politician from Ontario. Elected to provincial office in 1908 he joined the national Conservative party in the federal election of 1911, winning a seat in the House of Commons as the Member of Parliament for Kingston. He won again as Unionist in 1917, but left federal politics in 1919 to run again provincially. In 1923, Premier George Howard Ferguson appointed Nickle to Cabinet as Attorney General of Ontario. Nickle, however, retired from politics in the same year. By the 1930s, he was a leading member of the League for Social Reconstruction and, as a well-known Conservative party member, perfectly placed to bring Cassidy's report to Bennett's attention.

<sup>69</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 789, M-1446, Nickle to Bennett, 13 April 1932.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Cassidy to Bennett, 15 April 1932

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, Nickle to Bennett, 3 May 1932.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Bennett to Nickle, 26 April 1932.

of how and why federal relief policies had failed alongside rational and workable suggestions for new policies. The implementation of Cassidy's report, however, required an expansive financial commitment at a time when Bennett, facing ballooning expenses and mounting debt in every area, cared only for cutting costs. The report also required widespread federal government intervention and responsibility in the area of unemployment, which Bennett, a firm supporter of primary municipal responsibility and the Conservative belief in limited federal involvement, could not countenance.

Bennett did not disregard the idea of a comprehensive report on unemployment. He recognized the need for a report on relief, but, rather than appointing Cassidy, began a search for a new author soon after learning of Cassidy's work, seemingly limiting his pool to known Conservative supporters. In a note to Interior Minister T.G. Murphy of early April, 1932, Bennett questioned, "would not Charles F. Gray be a good man for unemployment relief inspection work if we have to carry on during the coming year? We have been pressed very hard to do something for him."<sup>73</sup> Gray, a Conservative supporter, was most notable for his tenure as Mayor of Winnipeg and especially his response to the Winnipeg General Strike. Convinced the strike was a Communist uprising, Gray supported the city council's decision to force striking workers back to their jobs, speaking out against the public demonstrations, requesting that Mounties and special police constables intervene, and even personally reading the riot act to demonstrators gathered at City Hall on 'Bloody Saturday.'<sup>74</sup> Although Bennett did not choose Gray as his author, his consideration of this man, and refusal of Cassidy, reveals much about Bennett's politics. While he was willing to undertake a report on unemployment,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Bennett to T.G. Murphy 1 April 1932.

Cassidy's work directly opposed the central tenets of the Bennett administration's relief policies.

Bennett found his author in Whitton. While she shared Cassidy's background in social welfare, she was a known Bennett supporter whose views on welfare reflected both social and fiscal conservatism. Whitton's work was chiefly guided by her belief in the primacy of the Anglo-Canadian nuclear family unit headed by a self-reliant, enterprising, male breadwinner. She believed that, as a relatively new nation, Canada could ill afford to harbour anyone whose race, morality, or work ethic diverted from this ideal. As she once spoke, "our full strength and resources are bent to the task of keeping this country strong, virile, healthy, and moral and we insist that the blood that enters its veins must be equally pure and free from taint."<sup>75</sup> Her approach to social welfare in the years prior to her work for Bennett directly exhibits this belief. While Whitton campaigned against juvenile immigration out of concern for the treatment of those children involved, she could also be counted amongst those whose arguments against the practice were motivated by the "cunning combination" of compassion towards the plight of the young immigrants, and hostility towards their admittance.<sup>76</sup> In part, Whitton disagreed with juvenile immigration because it allowed the wrong type of immigrant into Canada.

To Whitton, desirable immigrants were persons of Anglo-Saxon birth who moved to Canada independent of government assistance. Unwelcome immigrants were those of Oriental, Armenian, Jewish, or Central European heritage, and lower class British citizens.<sup>77</sup> Juvenile immigrants, although British, were, by virtue of their impoverished

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<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Whitton qtd. in Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 23.

<sup>76</sup> Bagnell, 189.

<sup>77</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 23.

class, deemed, “physically, morally, and socially degenerate.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Whitton subscribed to the science of eugenics, which held that traits such as morality, criminality, mental deficiencies or physical abnormalities were genetically inherited. She believed in the idea that humans are not the products of their environment, but actively shape it.<sup>79</sup> As scholars of Whitton have stated, her belief in eugenics was characteristic of conservatives, but set her apart from more progressive social welfare colleagues who held that a child’s environment was the “crucial variable” in the formation of his or her personality.<sup>80</sup> Whitton first wrote against juvenile immigration in a 1919 article for *Social Welfare*, “Child Labour.” Although the article focuses on a call for improved child protection laws, in it, she connected mental deficiency and immigration, agreeing that the offspring of “feebleminded” female immigrant domestics constituted the majority of illegitimate Canadian children.<sup>81</sup> In a 1924 article, Whitton further charged that their low intelligence and other genetic defaults led to illegitimacy and “subnormal” offspring.<sup>82</sup> With her ascension to Executive Secretary of the CCCW, Whitton was able to formally oppose juvenile immigration, turning these earlier views into her widespread campaign against the practice.

Whitton’s social conservatism also shaped her approach to relief. Whitton held a traditionally conservative attitude towards relief, seeing it as a last resort only. She supported the idea of less eligibility because she believed that any wage labourer was

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<sup>78</sup> Rooke and Schnell, “Imperial Philanthropy,” 66.

<sup>79</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 24.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. Although many conservatives subscribed to the theory of eugenics, it was not just the ideologically right who believed in it. As Angus McLaren demonstrates in his work, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885- 1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999), eugenics in Canada was not merely an obscure pseudo-science subscribed to by a “tiny fringe group of kooks”(7). Instead, as he shows, some of Canada’s most well-known liberal thinkers, such as Tommy Douglas, were also known supporters of eugenics.

<sup>81</sup> Charlotte Whitton, “Child Labour,” *Social Welfare*. (January 1919), 142-144 qtd. in Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 55.

superior to the man on relief.<sup>83</sup> She had what has been deemed an “organic” view of society, feeling a population functioned best when divided into smaller, self-supporting units who looked after themselves with no need for state intervention.<sup>84</sup> Whitton was a “strident defender” of the conservative tenet of limited government intervention.<sup>85</sup> Unless it faced extreme extenuating circumstances, she felt that a society functioned best when citizens made their own fortune, relying on their thrift, inventiveness, and ambition. She advocated against expanding existing relief programs, and argued against those who would push the federal government to assume a larger responsibility.<sup>86</sup> Whitton’s belief in the primacy of the work ethic meant she deemed those who could not find the means to support themselves lazy, responsible for their own condition, and therefore undeserving of outside aid. Her strict distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor made her unable to consider the artificiality of such a boundary and acknowledge the complex nature of poverty. Relief, therefore, had to be doled out carefully, administered by social welfare experts with the training in casework to ascertain who truly necessitated it.

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<sup>83</sup> Whitton’s support of lesser eligibility and belief in the importance of enforcing the work ethic was typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes towards relief in Canada. As James Struthers argues in *No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), the belief that unemployed workers were at fault for their situation, and could find work at any time by accepting a lower paying job, dominated the Canadian approach to unemployment in the years until the Second World War and particularly influenced R.B. Bennett’s relief policies (6-9, 85). The federally-funded relief rates were designed so as to make accepting this aid a greater shame than accepting the most menial of wage-paying positions. Similarly, in *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), Nancy Christie contends that, in Canada, “all welfare prior to the Second World War...had as its goal the promotion of the work ethic” (4). As Dennis Guest demonstrates in *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1997), this residual concept of welfare, which held that only minimal, temporary relief should be granted, reigned in Canada until the 1940s. After this time, the mass social reorganization brought by the Second World War introduced an institutional concept of welfare which viewed social security programs as a federal government responsibility and “a first line of defence” against mass unemployment (4).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>85</sup> Christie, 189.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Whitton's views on poverty and right to relief were apparent in her campaign against mothers' allowances. She supported giving aid to those, like widows, who had temporarily fallen on hard times due to events outside their control, but she felt that too often the existence of relief encouraged those whose conditions resulted from so-called personal flaws to collect relief.<sup>87</sup> Although she supported allowances given to needy widows, whom she viewed as morally superior to unwed or deserted women, she opposed sending funds to these other women. As well, she argued against those who would deem mothers' allowances a right. In her opinion, the allowances were a temporary palliative a widow could take advantage of in a time of need, but should not be divorced from traditional ideas of pauperization. Like all other forms of relief, she felt that mothers' allowances should be set at low rates so as to encourage the family members to work together as an economic unit and support themselves.<sup>88</sup> While some of her more liberal social welfare colleagues advocated the redefinition of mothers' allowances, arguing they be made into rights-based pensions, Whitton stood fast to her belief that the allowance remain a charity. Even widows, she argued, were not entitled to the allowance simply by virtue of their position, but needed to provide evidence of true need.<sup>89</sup>

Whitton's traditional, conservative stance towards welfare matched Bennett's. The two shared a belief in the tenets of limited federal government intervention, and less eligibility. Both felt that federal government relief should remain a temporary solution to unemployment, and that, in a normally functioning economy, thrifty, self-reliant men could easily make their own fortune. Bennett's switch to a policy of direct relief in 1932,

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<sup>87</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 88.

<sup>88</sup> Christie, 149, 163.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

however, changed the nature of relief in Canada. Unlike aid earned through participation in a make-work project, which could be administered by people with little specific social welfare experience, the arrival of direct relief brought with it the widespread introduction of the means test. This was an investigation of a family's home, property, and history to identify whether or not the family was bereft enough to collect direct relief. The administration of relief was no longer one of mere registration; it necessitated a new approach to administration. Bennett had once insisted that the Depression, and mass unemployment, were temporary. As dismal economic and environmental conditions continued, and his hastily introduced previous welfare policies failed, Bennett became willing to consider a new policy. While there were certainly other experienced social welfare experts in Canada during this time, like Harry Cassidy, by virtue of her social welfare expertise, her experience undertaking the type of comprehensive survey and policy analysis Bennett required, and her Conservative credentials, Whitton emerged as the expert most qualified to undertake Bennett's work. By 26 April 1932, Bennett had responded to Whitton's request that the CCCW be allowed to aid him, answering: "I should like to see you and talk over the subject matter of your letter."<sup>90</sup> Although no record of their conferences exist, in a letter of 31 May, Whitton refers to their many meetings, where, presumably, the two planned the outline of her summer tour of the western provinces and the report that would result. As Whitton confidently informed Bennett while presenting him with a tentative schedule of the tour, "I plan to be entirely free from the responsibilities of my own office here as from the fifteenth of June."<sup>91</sup> Soon

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<sup>90</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Bennett to Whitton, 26 April 1932.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Whitton to Bennett, 31 May 1932.

after, Whitton was en route to the prairies, where she would undertake an impressively comprehensive survey of welfare and unemployment.

### Chapter 3: Whitton on Tour

Whitton left Ottawa on 3 June 1932 and arrived in Winnipeg by the 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> A previous commitment, the Canadian Conference on Social Work, kept her from beginning her work until 13 June, although she “motored to Gimli and Lakeside Fresh Air Camp” on the 12<sup>th</sup>, where she observed 102 mothers and children on relief.<sup>2</sup> With her arrival in Manitoba, Whitton plunged into her work, establishing the demanding schedule that she would follow in each province which saw her begin work by 8:30 or 9:00 am, and continue on tour-related interviews throughout the day. She spared few moments for personal business: her breakfasts, lunches, tea times, and dinners doubled as meetings, and her commitments often lasted long into the night, and it was not unusual for her to schedule interviews past nine or ten. Even when travelling from one city to another by train, Whitton would fit in meetings with local authorities. As this punishing itinerary reveals, Whitton’s mind was set to the purpose of completing the survey, and although she took time off to attend church, she set little time aside for herself, waiting until 10 July to take her first personal day upon arriving in Vancouver.<sup>3</sup>

Whitton arrived to find Manitoba facing an increasingly dismal position. Although its economy was not as dependant on the wheat market as its prairie neighbours Saskatchewan and Alberta, the falling prices of wheat, oats, barley, and other grains, combined with prolonged drought, dust storms and infestations of grasshoppers and

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<sup>1</sup> Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Charlotte Whitton Papers, MG30 E256, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for R.B. Bennett 1932- Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I,” Itinerary, 3 June- 5 June 1932.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Itinerary, June 12 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 10 July 1932.

cutworms, wreaked havoc on the province.<sup>4</sup> In Manitoba's south-west wheat belt, the effect of grasshopper plague was so ruinous that it drew comment from outside the province. A headline of the *Regina Leader Post* for 1 June 1932 proclaimed, "Hoppers Bad In Manitoba," noting that Manitoba's provincial government was distributing a special pest control to the area to "lure the grain-eating pests" to their death before "thousands of acres of sprout grains" disappeared.<sup>5</sup> The province was also suffering financially, struggling to cut funds everywhere in order to avoid bankruptcy. The budget emerging from the 1932 spring legislative session introduced an additional one million dollars cut from government expenditures, in addition to increased levies on goods like liquor and tobacco. The budget also raised the business tax, and reduced the levels of exemption for personal tax.<sup>6</sup>

Whitton's visit also fell during Manitoba's provincial election. The Progressive premier John Bracken, having just entered into a coalition with the province's Liberal party, was running for reelection. He based his campaign on a harsh critique of Bennett and of the provincial Conservatives, attacking the federal party's high tariffs and faulty unemployment relief policies.<sup>7</sup> Writing to Bennett on election day, 16 June 1932, Whitton noted the results, remarking, "as I write the newsboys are crying the "Extra" of the Bracken government's return."<sup>8</sup> Bracken's critique of Bennett was common to the prairie premiers. Unable to meet their unemployment relief costs, and on the verge of bankruptcy, all demanded that the federal government accept a larger share of the relief

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<sup>4</sup> Kendle, *John Bracken: A Political Biography*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 106.

<sup>5</sup> "Hoppers Bad In Manitoba." *Regina Leader Post*, 1 June 1932.

<sup>6</sup> Kendle, 124.

<sup>7</sup> Kendle, 125.

<sup>8</sup> LAC, R.B. Bennett Papers, MG26-K, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett. 16 June 1932.

burden. Bracken felt the responsibility was “very largely if not wholly federal,” and met with Bennett often to plead for increased aid to little avail.<sup>9</sup>

After attending the social welfare conference, Whitton began her tour in earnest, spending the 13<sup>th</sup> June meeting with Miss Childs, a supervisor of Mothers’ Allowances in Winnipeg, and gathering information about the budget, the wages given out, and the estimated cost of living for those receiving this aid.<sup>10</sup> She also met with Dr. Montgomery, the provincial Minister of Health and Welfare, to collect relief figures and discuss malnutrition.<sup>11</sup> Over the rest of the week, Whitton met with J.S. Woodsworth, the Labour Party Member of Parliament for the riding of Winnipeg North, and representatives of the Winnipeg Men’s Unemployment Association, One Big Union, and the Winnipeg Free Press.<sup>12</sup> Although most of her time was devoted to these meetings, she took the opportunity to view, rather than just analyze at one remove, how relief functioned in Winnipeg, visiting relief services and attending meals at soup kitchens.<sup>13</sup> By June 17, Whitton had left Winnipeg for Brandon, meeting with relief officers, public health nurses, provincial welfare officials, and members of public and representatives of private social welfare agencies.<sup>14</sup>

As Whitton wanted to gain a full understanding of relief in Manitoba and the subsequent provinces she visited, she did not restrict her tour to the largest centres. Instead, she visited several rural and smaller municipalities such as Souris, Pipestone,

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<sup>9</sup> Kendle, 111, 113, 114, 119, 123-125.

<sup>10</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for R.B. Bennett 1932- Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I,” Itinerary, 13 June 1932.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Woodsworth, former secretary of the Canadian Welfare League, was a known socialist. Little over a month after his meeting with Whitton, he would gather with other representatives of labour and socialist groups in Calgary on August 1<sup>st</sup> to found the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.

<sup>13</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for R.B. Bennett 1932- Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I,” Itinerary, 15 June 1932.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17-20 June 1932.

Melita, Deloraine, Boissevain, and the Turtle Mountain area. As she discovered, there was a large difference between the relief needs of urban and municipal areas. Whereas in rural areas, relief was required due to the recurrent drought, in urban centres, the Depression resulted from the recent economic collapse.<sup>15</sup> The western provinces differed from others in Canada because of their rural and agricultural focus. During the Depression, the economic drought exacerbated the general economic crisis to an extent unseen in any other area. Therefore, to understand how the prairies experienced and dealt with unemployment and relief, Whitton needed to step outside urban areas.

When visiting rural areas, Whitton met with local reeves, clerks, and secretaries as well as members of local relief committees, private social welfare charities, and local farmers. She found the situation was steadily worsening. In Pipestone, the local reeve, D.L. Mellish, informed her that from January to July of 1932, relief had increased fifty percent to a rate that exceeded the entire amount spent on relief for the year of 1931 and he feared that this was true of most Manitoba municipalities.<sup>16</sup> Mellish, however, alongside other rural representatives like Pipestone's senator, the clerk of nearby Souris, and even prominent farmers, shared a conservative viewpoint towards relief. While they all agreed that costs were rising, none asked for more relief funds, and instead worried over the growing dependency of farm families, and the demands for higher standards of aid. Although none denied the role drought played in the economic downturn, they also placed the blame on farmers who, in better days, had over-expanded, purchased more land and machinery than they could afford, and, in the face of economic recession, were

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<sup>15</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada— Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 24, "Charlotte Whitton Report for R.B. Bennett 1932- Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I," Personal Notes, 20 June 1932.

struggling to make ends meet. The general attitude was summarized by a comment made to Whitton by Mr. John Hume, a local farmer, who stated “barring the districts where there is no water, the Western farmer is where he is because he spent before he earned.”<sup>17</sup>

While she met with these men and women to gain an understanding of the province’s recession experience, Whitton also wanted to gain a concrete understand how relief was being administered and distributed to those in need. To that end, although Whitton took some full notes of her interviews, and scribbled reminders to herself in the margins of her daily calendar, the existing record of her tour is largely one of the reports, statistics, and data she collected during her tour. In Manitoba she began the process she would follow throughout her tour, collecting reports on unemployment relief in the province and cities, and relief and unemployment statistics. Whitton likewise collected relief schedules, vouchers, and applications for both family and unemployed men in every community she visited.<sup>18</sup> Combined with the information and anecdotes she gathered through personal interviews, these documents provided the basis for her understanding of how relief functioned in each community.

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<sup>17</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for R.B. Bennett 1932- Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I,” Personal Notes, 20 June 1932.

<sup>18</sup> A previous CCCW initiative aided Whitton with this task. In February of 1932, the CCCW sent out a national request to Canada’s communities to provide information about the nature and amount of relief given in their respective areas. As the cover letter stated, “there is a great lack of information on this whole matter.” The CCCW asked the communities to fill out a lengthy questionnaire which asked how relief was handed out (in cash or in kind), what food staples were provided, especially fresh fruit, vegetables, and milk, what the food allowance was for differing sizes of families, if clothing and fuel were provided, if rent and gas were paid, and the total expenditure on families and homeless men. The CCCW provided a second questionnaire for the care of homeless men which asked about residence requirements, the types of shelter, food, clothing, and work provided, and inquired as to who paid for and administered this care. The communities were also asked to attach samples of relief applications, relief vouchers, grocery orders, and food and relief schedules to their responses. The communities were asked to base their responses on the period of January 1931 to December 1931, and the CCCW requested the questionnaires be returned by March 1932. Therefore, at the time of Whitton’s tour, as a result of these questionnaires, Whitton already possessed most of the statistical and technical information needed to begin analyzing how relief worked in Canada’s many different communities. (Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I.” Whitton to various Canadian communities, Memo re: Relief Orders and questionnaire re: Relief to Families in Canadian Communities, Relief Expenditures, and the Care of Homeless Men. 23 February 1932).

Whitton remained in Manitoba until 22 June when she arrived in Regina, Saskatchewan. Like Manitoba, financial and ecological catastrophe had destroyed the province's once strong economy. Unlike Manitoba, however, Saskatchewan's economy was less diversified. At the time of Whitton's tour, nearly seven out of every ten residents lived and worked in a rural area and, since the province's urban centres derived most of their profits from servicing the agriculture industry, when wheat prices dropped, few residents remained unaffected.<sup>19</sup> By the end of the 1930s, Saskatchewan would receive the somewhat dubious honour of being the country's most heavily indebted province.<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically, Whitton arrived in Saskatchewan during a brief respite. While 1931 and 1933 marked particularly bad drought years when heat, dust storms, and infestation were at a high, in early June of 1932, steady rainfalls had finally "put crops well ahead," soaking the province. The amount of precipitation during this time was nearly double that of the corresponding period in 1931.<sup>21</sup> As the wheat market saw no recovery, however, the increased rain did the farmers little good. Although the 1932 crops yielded the largest harvest seen since 1928, and graded higher than any crop grown in the twenty years preceding 1932, it marketed for only thirty-five cents a bushel, the lowest recorded price in decades.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 282.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "Steady Rains Put Crops Well Ahead." *Regina Leader Post*, 6 June 1932; "Soaking Rain Over Province." *Regina Leader Post*, 7 June 1932. Despite this record rainfall, the province still faced the effects of drought. On the same day the *Regina Leader Post* reported record rainfalls, a neighbouring article remarked on the loss of \$25,000 worth of goods in the southern area of the province after a "cyclonic windstorm" hit killing hundreds of livestock and ruining many farm buildings. As one editorial poetically remarked of the drought-ravaged Saskatchewan landscape, "occasionally an old timer...came to our desk and [spoke of better years] in which it had been known to rain...but the more we listened, while looking out on a parched landscape and hearing the dust-laden winds singing harshly through the whiskers of the alkali pioneers" the less we listened." ("Rain and All That," *Regina Leader Post*, 7 June 1932).

<sup>22</sup> Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 281.

While the rain may have cheered the province's farmers, for those on relief and struggling to subsist, there was little respite. In the months before and during Whitton's tour, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission began to withdraw its provision of aid and relief from the communities in which it had been operating. As the Commission reasoned, since "no one has starved and the livestock casualties have been less than normal," it was time to withdraw its services.<sup>23</sup> Reductions began in May and continued throughout Whitton's tour as the commission removed its services from all areas but those where crop loss and cutworm damage "made it impossible for locally constituted authorities to properly function."<sup>24</sup> In urban centres like Regina, local governments also struggled to meet the needs of their citizens. In that city, public green space was set aside as relief gardens for the more than 500 people requesting them.<sup>25</sup> As well, any given city council meeting quickly turned into either a battleground between those demanding, and those resisting, increasing the provision of relief, or a public forum where those in need could air complaints. Days before Whitton's arrival, Regina's frustrated unemployed men had written to the council, demanding the mayor offer them either work or relief.<sup>26</sup>

At the provincial level, the Conservative government of JTM Anderson was making every effort to meet the demands of its citizens and remain solvent. Like the Bennett Conservative administration, Anderson's government inherited Saskatchewan at the beginning of the Depression, in 1929. Dealing with the effects of this economic and environmental crisis consumed the government, effectively dictating its mandate for the

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<sup>23</sup> "Second Relief Area Reduced," *Regina Leader Post*, 6 June 1932.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> "More Than 500 Want Relief Garden Help." *Regina Leader Post*, 3 May 1932.

<sup>26</sup> "Jobless Men Name Mayor." *Regina Leader Post*, 10 June 1932.

ensuing five years.<sup>27</sup> Like his counterparts in Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, Anderson was growing increasingly frustrated with the Bennett administration. Whitton arrived in the province just as Anderson, Bracken, Premier John E. Brownlee of Alberta, and Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie of British Columbia convened there for an economic conference in Regina, a preliminary meeting intended to allow the premiers to prepare a common agenda of Western concerns to present to Bennett at the Imperial Economic Conference to be held in July in Ottawa. The day-long conference, held on June 20<sup>th</sup>, saw the premiers discussing matters of immigration, relief, and issues concerning the wheat and timber markets and preparing a memorandum briefing Bennett on their conclusions.<sup>28</sup>

As in Manitoba, Whitton spent her week in Saskatchewan visiting both urban and rural areas. Although she arrived in Regina at 3:15am on 22 June, she was up by 9am, meeting with Mrs. Jones, an inspector of the provincial Child Welfare Department, before meeting with members of the provincial Relief Commission, and later with the Deputy Ministers of Labour, Municipal Affairs, and Health. She left Regina on 23 June to begin driving through southern Saskatchewan, stopping in Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Milestone, Weyburn, Estevan, Bienfait, and other smaller rural communities, continuing the practice of meeting with both local officials and citizens. During these personal interviews, Whitton learned much about the conditions endured in southern Saskatchewan, and the opinions of those in the area. In Swift Current Whitton learned that the city council's largest concern was transient men. As a divisional point between

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<sup>27</sup> Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 304.

<sup>28</sup> "Prairies Plan To Act Jointly." *Regina Leader Post*, 3 June 1932; "Prairie Premiers Meet Today To Define Conference Policy." *The Globe*. 20 June 1932; "West Wants Markets Opened to British Goods." *The Globe*. 21 June 1932.

Regina and Calgary, Swift Current often saw up to 800 transients pass through in a day, with many of them jumping off and loitering in the area. As a result, the mayor informed Whitton, Swift Current's key request was that the federal government develop a national policy for dealing with transients.<sup>29</sup>

Whitton's personal notes again attest to the generally conservative ideology towards relief held by many of those officials she visited. Miss Morton, a school nurse in Weyburn, remarked that many rural families on relief were enjoying a lifestyle above any they had previously expected and were "much better off than wage earners." Many of the heads of these families had been unemployed well before the Depression and, as a result of emergency relief, experienced the "best winter" they had had in years. The growth of dependency fostered by emergency relief greatly worried the nurse.<sup>30</sup> Morton's viewpoint was confirmed by Whitton's other interviews. Mr. J. Furness, a relief commissioner in Swift Current, felt that relief budgets, clothing, and food allowances were too high and therefore "suggestive" to those who would seek to avoid true employment in favour of a better life on relief. The clerk of nearby Pambrun echoed Furness and Morton. Relief was certainly "too liberal," and its appearance had created both a dependency and expectancy amongst prairie farmers that they could look to the government to save them in both emergency and "ordinary" bad times.<sup>31</sup>

Although the opinions of these local officials offered a harsh assessment of local farmers, their words did not prevent Whitton from appreciating the incredible toll three years of drought had wrought on the local farms and landscape. While driving, she was

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<sup>29</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in Saskatchewan," Personal Notes, 22 June 1932.

<sup>30</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in Saskatchewan," Personal Notes, 25 June 1932.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Personal Notes, 27 June 1932.

astounded by the worsening conditions, writing that, “whole areas were covered with blown soil, ditches filled up, crop barely above ground, blown out or eaten by cutworm.”<sup>32</sup> As she would remark to Bennett upon reaching Alberta, the position of southwestern Saskatchewan was troubling, “I am afraid the situation is very bad again and will need federal aid,” she noted.<sup>33</sup> By 27 June Whitton finished her tour of southern Saskatchewan and boarded a train for Calgary, spending the first few days attending the Canadian Women’s Press Club Conference there, and eventually parting on 5 July.

As Whitton would find, Alberta’s cities and municipalities were facing many of the same issues as their prairie neighbours. Much like Bennett, the province’s fiscally conservative premier, John Brownlee of the United Farmers of Alberta, was opposed to the growing tendency of citizens to view government intervention as the answer to their economic issues. While he did not object to giving assistance to those in genuine need, he felt that implementing large-scale, publicized relief policies would only encourage a trend towards dependency. As he remarked “people will demand, as a matter of right, work or relief measures of any kind if made applicable to the whole of the Province, even if they could get along without same if not offered as a general policy.”<sup>34</sup> His commitment to maintaining a balanced budget and provincial solvency led Brownlee to impose drastic cuts on expenditures and raise taxes. Despite these actions, however, 1931 marked the first deficit of his premiership, and 1932 brought another of over \$4,000,000.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 3 July 1932.

<sup>34</sup> John E. Brownlee qtd. in Franklin L. Foster, *John E. Brownlee: A Biography* (Lloydminster: Foster Learning Inc., 1996), 186.

<sup>35</sup> Foster, 198.

As an agricultural province, Alberta's farmers also battled problems of drought and slumping wheat and grain prices. During the summer of 1932, Alberta's main problem was the need to find export markets for over 300,000 bushels of wheat. As Brownlee contended, fiscal and social reforms could do nothing to "change the basic problem that we cannot compel any foreign country to take our wheat or pay more for it than a competitive price."<sup>36</sup> In the face of worsening conditions, Brownlee's conservative stance towards government intervention in matters of unemployment and relief lessened. Like Bracken and Anderson, Brownlee also called on Bennett's administration to assume greater responsibility for relief and save the provinces from certain bankruptcy. On 2 July, days before Whitton's departure from Alberta, Brownlee presided over a two-day conference of his provincial cabinet, resulting in a manifesto based on the ideas of liberal and socialist groups, Ontario's League for Social Reconstruction, and the national Labour movement. The ten point manifesto called on the federal government to nationalize Canada's financial and credit system, enforce a more equitable division of wealth, ensure public ownership of public utilities, and, most importantly, to revise the Constitution "a redeeming of the responsibilities of Federal and Provincial authorities to the end that our Constitution shall be more in harmony with the economic requirements of the age."<sup>37</sup>

Compounding Alberta's economic problems, at the beginning of June the province was hit by a record flood. The steady rains that, in Saskatchewan, brought new hope to the dusty landscape, instead pounded down over Alberta, ravaging the southern and central regions, "inundat[ing] farms, roads, and railway tracks, and threaten[ing]

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<sup>36</sup> Foster, 200.

<sup>37</sup> "Cooperative State Urged in Manifesto of United Farmers," *The Globe*. 4 July 1932.

settlers of Calgary and a number of Southern Alberta towns and villages.”<sup>38</sup> Heavy precipitation, combined with the melting snow from the mountains, caused many of Alberta’s waterways to overflow, the Bow and Elbow Rivers swelled to over five feet their normal volume, causing damage to many settlements in their paths.<sup>39</sup> By the time of Whitton’s arrival, the flood had subsided.

After her first days in Calgary, Whitton continued on to Banff and Lake Louise. Unlike Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Alberta also depended on tourism. Its northern mountain landscape was, as it is today, a popular destination for tourists with Banff and Lake Louise acting as two of the most popular resort areas. As Whitton noted of her visit here, the area’s dependence on tourism proved its downfall. In a time of economic crisis, few were willing to spend funds on vacations. As Whitton found, in each place there was “less than a score” of guests, yet the resorts maintained a staff “far in excess of registration.” Whitton deemed the situation “depressing” and predicted that those who were there “will likely move on.” “I cannot see how those mountain resorts can stay open,” she concluded, as “they must drop thousands every day.”<sup>40</sup>

From Lake Louise she continued to Medicine Hat, meeting with the mayor and relief officers as well as members of the Unemployed Men’s Association, a group of “conservative” unemployed men who met regularly and raised funds to provide for basic necessities such as shoes for their children. Whitton vastly approved of this group, mentioning that they represented “a sincere and honest effort to keep the men sane and from being discouraged.”<sup>41</sup> She also applauded their attitude towards the situation.

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<sup>38</sup> “Floods Maroon Five and Cause Big Loss on Alberta River,” *The Globe*. 3 June 1932.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 3 July 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.13, “Report on Unemployment Relief in Western Canada- 1932,” 199.

Instead of organizing in order to agitate, the men had come together to boost their morale and help each other; they were an exact example of the kind of small, organic community Whitton favoured. As well, the men had nothing but respect for Bennett. “They do not complain about the small relief orders,” Whitton noted, acknowledging that the men understood that the federal Government was “having a difficult time.”<sup>42</sup> Whitton left Medicine Hat for Lethbridge on 4 July, stopping there a day before journeying to Calgary, briefly meeting with the City Relief Commission, then travelling to Blairmore, British Columbia.

At the time of Whitton’s tour, British Columbia was under the leadership of Conservative premier Simon Fraser Tolmie, formerly a federal MP and Minister of Agriculture who had led his party to victory based on his personality and heavy support from Vancouver’s business elite.<sup>43</sup> While Tolmie assumed office in 1928 at a time of province-wide economic growth, the rapid closure of outside markets for British Columbia’s many raw materials such as fish, timber, minerals, and agricultural products, meant that this western-most province also suffered alongside the other western provinces during the 1930s. The situation in B.C., however, was exacerbated by a problem unique to the area. Due to its temperate climate, B.C. was the popular destination for the majority of Canada’s unemployed, transient men. As well, B.C. escaped the drought and pest problems plaguing its prairie neighbours. Lured away from the frigid winters and drought and grasshopper filled summers of Manitoba,

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<sup>42</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 3 July 1932.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 253.

Saskatchewan, and Alberta these men soon flooded into the province, establishing makeshift living areas nicknamed “jungles” in most towns and cities.<sup>44</sup>

Tolmie, like Whitton and Bennett, firmly believed in the conservative ideology that deemed unemployment a personal failure. He resisted taking action to combat unemployment until 1931 when it reached 28% and he begrudgingly established relief camps for unemployed, single, male, B.C. residents.<sup>45</sup> Despite this effort, Tolmie’s cuts to government expenditures, and his moves to increase taxation, the situation yet worsened. At the time of Whitton’s visit, Tolmie had just acceded to the request of Vancouver businessman George Kidd, former president of the BC Electric Company. Kidd asked permission to lead a five-man committee of businessmen in an investigation of government finances, after which they would publish a report on the situation and include suggestions for reform. The report, issued in the fall of 1932, contended that the provincial government’s sole option was to reduce government expenditures, especially in the area of social services. When the report became public, its overtly conservative and reactionary tone enraged most citizens, and contributed to Tolmie’s defeat by Liberal leader Duff Pattullo.<sup>46</sup>

Once in B.C., Whitton spent the day in Blairmore in meetings with the town clerk and members of the town council. Whitton also met with members of the area’s mining community who had been on strike since early February. By that next evening, she had

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 268.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 268-269. Whitton was also informed of the likelihood of Tolmie’s defeat. During a meeting in Vancouver with representatives from the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies, she was told the Kidd Report “would force [the] resignation of provincial government, and that this was the reason for Patullo’s return from [the] North so suddenly.... Mr Patullo and group are meeting within 10 days to draw up [a] platform and are working particularly on [a] relief and unemployment plank.” Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in B.C.” Personal Notes, 15 July 1932.

left for Fernie, meeting with the mayor, and city council, and Mr. Harrison, the secretary of the Miners' Union of Canada, before heading to Cranbook with Thomas Uphill, the provincial Labour Party Member for the riding of Fernie. By 8 July she was in Nelson, touring a local soup kitchen and meeting with the local government relief agent, Mr. Cartmell. Travelling next through Penticton and Kelowna, Whitton again met with government and relief representatives, but also held meetings with members of local fruit growing cooperatives and Mr. Chambers, the president of the B.C. Fruit Growers. She continued her tour through the Okanagan valley until she reached Vancouver on 11 July. She stayed there until 16 July, visiting with municipal officials and representatives of local social agencies in Vancouver, but also driving to North Vancouver and Burnaby. She then made her way through Nanaimo and Qualicum before arriving in Victoria.

Since the provincial government of B.C., like those of the three prairie provinces, allowed the municipalities free reign over the distribution of relief, the practice of doling out funds differed from one area to the next. Therefore, when Whitton visited these towns and cities, she took careful notes on how relief functioned, who was eligible, who was excluded, and who was in charge of doling it out. When she met with the striking miners in Blairmore, she included in her notes a detailed description of how these men provided relief for themselves since, as striking workers, they were ineligible for government relief.<sup>47</sup> In Vernon, she found that government agents were “at sea with the lack of [an organized] provincial system.” In the absence of government-set, uniform relief schedules, the chief relief agent, Mr. McCloskey, “as with other agents” had been

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<sup>47</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in B.C.” Personal Notes, 6 July 1932.

forced to create his own relief schedule to deal with families and transients.<sup>48</sup> In Vancouver, she met with Mr. Cox, the provincial government's chief relief representatives for the city. As Whitton found, the relief office she visited with Cox was "flooded" with men, women and children seeking relief yet "there seemed little or no organized system in office" to deal with them properly.<sup>49</sup> As her observations showed, the province's relief system suffered from a complete lack of centralized organization.

In addition to these organizational problems, Whitton also learned much about B.C.'s problems with transient men, paying most attention to those men not in work camps who were still wandering the province. In Penticton, she learned that 50 to 205 transients passed through the area per day.<sup>50</sup> In Vernon, the government relief agent she met with called himself "exasperated" by the transient situation. The agent confided that he felt the transient men needed to be "dealt with drastically by a [a] national system, drafted into camps, registered, and put under military [control]."<sup>51</sup> The officials and representatives Whitton met were united in a growing unease over how people, especially unemployed men, would react if conditions continued to worsen. In Prince Rupert, the Anglican Bishop of the diocese told her that "everywhere people [were] at wit's end: no work: no sales" their spirits had broken, he confided, so much so that "anything might happen."<sup>52</sup> In a letter she received from Alan Webster Neill, the Independent Member of Parliament for Comox-Alberni, Whitton was warned that "what we need most of all is some magic power which will convince the [federal government] that if they do not stop

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<sup>48</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in B.C." Personal Notes, 9 July 1932.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 18 July 1932.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 8 July 1932.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 9 July 1932.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 28 July 1932.

passing the buck and announce a definite arrange for relief...there will be riots [that will] perhaps spread until [they assume] the proportions of a small revolution.”<sup>53</sup>

Whitton stayed in Victoria until 20 July before driving to Qualicum, Campbell River, Courtenay, and Port Alberni over the ensuing days. She spent the 24 through 28 July aboard the Columbia Mission Boat *Columbia* observing how the crew brought medical, missionary, and general welfare to “scattered and isolated families” and First Nations’ groups living in remote areas such as Church House, Alert Bay, Port Neville, Salmon River, Knight Inlet, Beaver Cove, Inglewood, and Village Island. On the 28 July she was “taken out in gasoline launch to catch C.P.R. Steamship” to Prince Rupert where she stayed until 1 August.<sup>54</sup> From Prince Rupert, Whitton turned back, spending the remaining days of August winding her way back through Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, taking time to visit the municipalities and urban centres missed during her first pass through the three regions. She arrived home in Ottawa on August 29 and began writing her report in earnest, submitting it to Bennett by early October.

Whitton’s summer tour of Canada’s western provinces is notable for its breadth. While on tour, Whitton undertook a comprehensive assessment of the unemployment and relief conditions on the prairies and visited as many cities, villages, towns, and farming settlements as she could, canvassing the opinions of government officials, members of volunteer charitable organizations, and prairie residents. On the surface, Whitton’s tour appears to reflect an attempt to understand the issues facing those at every level of the relief system, yet Whitton’s impression of the west was led by her prior assumptions. In effect, Whitton constructed her own Depression while she went, as her

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<sup>53</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in B.C.” AW Neill to Whitton, 18 July 1932.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Itinerary, July 24-30.

personal notes reflect. While she might record the opinion of those farmers and administrators who believed that federal government relief was fostering an unnecessary dependency, it is unclear if she ever interviewed those who disagreed with this viewpoint, as she makes no reference to them. As well, her personal notes, and the information she kept, reveal that she encountered a concern over the problem of transient men, and over inefficient administration. As a social worker, however Whitton, had a personal interest in the administration of relief and a pre-existing worry over the problems posed by transient men. Therefore, although Whitton's tour certainly afforded her some comprehension of unemployment and relief in Western Canada than many other Canadians could claim to possess, she chose to take away only that which bolstered her preconceived biases and assumptions, using these pieces of evidence to bolster her report.

## **Chapter 4: Whitton and The Report re: Unemployment and Welfare in Western Canada**

Whitton returned to Ottawa on August 29th and spent the ensuing days compiling the report with a stenographer: it was finished by September 20th. What emerged was an over five hundred page study. Whitton's report had the dual task of educating its readers about the conditions of unemployment and relief in the prairies while providing suggestions for the reformation of Canada's existing relief system. Altogether the report offers a comprehensive history of Western Canada's Depression experience, recounting the arrival of the first European settlers, and then tracing the west's evolution until the 1930s. Whitton's suggestions then build on this background material; she analyzes the existing system, and makes recommendations for change.

As Whitton's work provides an extensive record of Depression-era conditions on the West, it acts as a unique, first-hand record of how Western Canada dealt with both economic and environmental catastrophe. As previously revealed through her work with juvenile immigration and mothers' allowances, however, Whitton's approach to her social welfare was deeply conditioned by her personal ideology and her report for Bennett was no different. Although Whitton toured through the areas of Canada where poverty had hit hardest and despite the suffering and despair she encountered, she allowed nothing to alter her opinions. She remained unshaken in her hard-line, conservative approach to social welfare. Just as her personal biases tempered her reaction to impoverishment, her professional aspirations shaped her approach to relief administration. The number of relief administrators working in western Canada who had gained their positions by virtue of political connections rather than any true qualification

appalled Whitton. By switching from a program of public works to direct relief, Bennett changed the nature of relief in Canada. The administration of relief now required more than mass registration, but necessitated a specialized knowledge of social welfare, one that the social workers Whitton led all conveniently possessed. Unsurprisingly then, the need for new administration by trained social work professionals became the overarching theme of the report. Although Whitton scorned welfare administrators who gained their positions due to political patronage, and insisted on the need for impartiality, her finished report was far from a dispassionate, impersonal analysis. Instead, Whitton's finished report was a highly biased document that reveals as much about Whitton's Conservative ideology and professional aspirations as it does about unemployment and relief in Western Canada.

Just as Whitton's ideology tempered her approach to social welfare during her career prior to her work with Bennett, her 1932 report also reflected Whitton's belief in social and fiscal conservatism. While her extensive tour afforded her a more complete and personal understanding of the prairies' Depression experience than almost any other Canadian citizen, her tour did nothing to soften Whitton's approach to social welfare. If anything, Whitton's beliefs were solidified by the tour, as her report presents opinions on race, right to relief, primary provincial responsibility, and fiscal conservatism largely unchanged from those displayed in her work prior to 1932.

Once again, Whitton's belief in the superiority of Anglo-Canadians directly affected her work, this time tempering her understanding of unemployment and relief in Western Canada. Whitton's intolerance towards immigrant groups of Central European heritage was apparent from the beginning of her report. As with juvenile immigrants

from Great Britain, few of the mainly Central European immigrants to Western Canada had moved to the area independent of government aid. Instead, many had been seduced by the federal government's international campaign to promote the settlement of the last best west by knowledgeable agriculturalists. Won over by promises of prosperity and inexpensive land, these foreign settlers had flooded the formerly under-populated prairies, soon outnumbering the smaller, established communities of Anglo-Canadian settlers.<sup>1</sup>

Whitton saw a direct correlation between the presence of these foreign-born residents and the current dismal situation. When providing the background to the 1930s recession, she maintained that present conditions, in part, had their origins in the federal government's "Immigration Folly."<sup>2</sup> "An unwise immigration policy" she wrote, brought "to the country an ever increasing volume of settlement which...by placing upon the land a large proportion of peasant population of low living standards, increased the difficulties of the older settled [Anglo-Canadian] population."<sup>3</sup> As Whitton argued, original settlers of the west had established a community "characterized by high living standards," that was jeopardized by the mass arrival of foreign "peasants."<sup>4</sup> Whitton viewed the West's initial settlers as the embodiment of the self-reliant, enterprising Anglo-Canadian nuclear family units supported by a central male breadwinner. Isolated, these families worked together to support themselves, relying little on outside aid. As the customs, language, lifestyle, and farming methods of these new, mainly Central European residents differed

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005) 64-70.

<sup>2</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Charlotte Whitton Papers, MG30, E256, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 1, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

from those of the settled, Anglo-Canadian elite, Whitton deemed these immigrant citizens to have little of the thrift, self-reliance, and morals of their neighbours.

Whitton found that the need for relief grew with the mass arrival of immigrant peoples who were more likely to seek relief. “The foreigner, so long advertised as the sturdy land worker to settle our prairies, does not stay on the land, if staying there is difficult...[instead] he crowds the cities [seeking relief],” she admonished.<sup>5</sup> Once in the cities, “language differences, their tendency to segregate, their corporate loyalties, their susceptibility to seditious propaganda, [and] their known proclivity to hoard money...greatly complicate an already difficult problem.”<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Whitton felt the Depression acted as a catalyst, rather than a cause, of unemployment and increased reliance on relief. To her, the immigration of unfit citizens was a “fundamental” problem, “common to the whole prairie land,” that weakened the foundations established by the west’s earliest English settlers long before 1930.<sup>7</sup>

Whitton’s belief in the supremacy of Anglo-Canadians also influenced her analysis of relief distribution. For Whitton, race determined right to relief, and immigrant citizens had little valid claim. Whitton contended that these new immigrants were of the “peasant” class, and accustomed to a lower standard of morality and living than that which characterized Canada’s Anglophone population. While relief rates and modes of distribution differed from province to province, and even municipality to municipality, they did not adjust to a person’s race. Therefore, once accepted, Anglo and immigrant citizens received the same aid. Whitton argued against this blanket treatment of all those

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<sup>5</sup> LAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Papers, MG28, I10, vol.13, “Report on Unemployment Relief in Western Canada- 1932,” 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.

receiving relief. Due to their low living standards, she argued, immigrants did not need to receive relief at the rate given to Anglo-Canadians. The lack of distinction, she found, allowed large groups of foreigners to enjoy “a standard of variety and adequacy of food supplies, fuel, clothing and rental payments, beyond anything that they have ever known.”<sup>8</sup> Whitton’s protest against the amount of relief aid can also be attributed to her belief in lesser eligibility; she was equally adamant that Anglo-Canadian citizens not receive relief at a rate allowing them to appreciate a higher lifestyle than they had previously experienced.<sup>9</sup> Immigrant residents, therefore, were doubly disadvantaged, for, in Whitton’s eyes, both their race and class worked against their right to relief on the same level as Anglo-Canadians.

In addition to immigrant groups, Whitton’s intolerance also led her to scorn the west’s First Nations inhabitants, particularly those peoples living in areas “between Reserves and Whites” who were “contaminat[ed] both in health and in moral standards,” and who received emergency relief.<sup>10</sup> To Whitton, these men and women were worse than the immigrants, as they at least could receive aid on-reserve instead of draining relief funds. Like immigrant groups, Whitton criticized members of this group for their “low standards of housing, living, health and morality.”<sup>11</sup> She scorned them for their

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<sup>8</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 8.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Whitton’s remarks regarding the “casual worker” who even in the best of times were often gainfully employed who were now collecting relief and enjoying a higher quality of life because, for the first time in their working lives, they received a steady income. Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I.” CW personal notes re: meeting with Mis Fowler of St Faith’s Anglican Mission. 13 August 1932.

<sup>11</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 15. In her work *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia 1900-1950*, Mary-Ellen Kelm addresses the impact of colonization on the health and healing practices of British Columbia’s First Nation’s population, particularly analyzing how the bodies of these peoples became “sites of struggle” in the fight between traditional and imported modes of healing (175). As Kelm contends, Whitton’s view that First Nations people were naturally diseased was not unique.

“gypsy” mode of life, and lack of community responsibility.<sup>12</sup> When calculating Manitoba’s future relief needs, she noted that ‘Breed’ settlements had been enjoying relief “on a basis that...[was] unjustified.”<sup>13</sup> Whitton felt these groups warranted relief in the form of clothing only. They deserved no provision of fuel or shelter, and, if they received food, it should be “only very small assistance” as Whitton believed that game and fish were plentiful enough to provision any in need. Almost as an afterthought, she noted that “the grocery and other needs and tastes of this population are not varied,” but that exposure to emergency relief would “develop them,” accustoming these peoples to a lifestyle beyond anything Whitton felt they deserved.

Whitton’s intolerance towards immigrant groups rendered her incapable of realizing the universal nature of poverty. Her prejudice dominated her approach so completely that, while she could pity the suffering of English families, she could not do the same for their immigrant or First Nations neighbours. Her viewpoint is most clearly illustrated through an event recalled in her personal notes while on tour in Manitoba. While stopping in the Grahamdale area, Whitton took special note of two families. First, she wrote of visiting a Russian family. The family consisted of a single mother with eight children ranging in age from three months to eleven years. To Whitton, the children appeared “indescribably filthy.” The entire family were without shoes, and the mother was in “old waist and filthy skirt.” Whitton dismissed the family, calling them the “lowest peasant stock, living in filth,” and added as an afterthought that they “came out about five years ago.” She next recalls meeting the Bowers family, originally of

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Kelm states that, in the early twentieth century, the “persistent impression,” held that “Aboriginal people were, by nature, sick” (xvi). (Mary-ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia 1900-1950*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Ontario. In contrast, although the Bowers were also impoverished, Whitton found little wrong with this Anglo-Canadian family. She deemed the children, “thin and ragged,” but noted they were still “bright, good looking children, 14, 11, and 7.” While the father was dressed in shabby, mended clothing, she found him “polite, intelligent...large, [and] well-built.” Mrs. Bowers received pity from Whitton, as rheumatism had left her crippled and unable to walk. While the Bowers lived in equal poverty to the Russian family, Whitton did not scorn their home, or meager furnishing; instead, she lamented that their belongings “showed better days.” Although Whitton knew nothing of the history of either family, by virtue of their race, she believed the Bowers more admirable than their Russian neighbours. Most impressive to Whitton was that Mr. Bowers had not yet gone on relief, and was considering it reluctantly.<sup>14</sup>

The disparity between her two descriptions shows the depth of Whitton’s intolerance towards these “other” ethnic groups; she argued against their right to relief based on their perceived racial inferiority. Rather than recognizing that external economic and environmental factors operated equally on all citizens, she remained firm in her opinion that relief should depend on race and that Anglo-Canadians had the most valid claim to it.

While Whitton maintained that race should determine access to relief, she also felt that aid should be restricted to those who, by her definition, genuinely needed it: Whitton’s demand for a clear demarcation between the deserving and undeserving poor is consistently addressed throughout her report. Whitton was not opposed to the idea of relief as a response to “crop failure...and the general convulsion of the economic structure

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., “Charlotte Whitton Report for RB Bennett-1932 Unemployment Relief in Manitoba I” CW personal notes, 13 August 1932.

of the world.”<sup>15</sup> She recognized the urgency of the situation and the need for relief funds; if the relief program was designed to deal with a temporary crisis, and provided emergency funds only to those directly affected by the current emergency, she would accept it. Whitton likened emergency relief to aid doled out in response to natural disasters. As she defined it, federally administered relief, in this situation, was “but a palliative... a bridge flung across a chasm of need, despair, and destitution, on which it is hoped that the recipients may be sustained with as little impairment as possible of health, morale, and courage until the next peak of prosperity and enlarge work opportunity presents itself.”<sup>16</sup> This temporary aid was acceptable, what she argued against was the abuse of this relief by the undeserving unemployed.

For Whitton, the deserving unemployed were Anglo-Canadian men who found themselves jobless in the 1930s due to economic factors beyond their control. Although she noted that unskilled labourers made up the greatest percentage of the unemployed, she did not prize skilled labourers over unskilled workers.<sup>17</sup> As her belief in lesser eligibility dictated, collecting a salary from even the most menial of jobs was better than accepting relief. Like Bennett, she preferred a system of government-funded make work projects to direct relief as, under this program, at least the men would be earning their relief through their own labour.<sup>18</sup> The undeserving poor were those who, in Whitton’s estimation, were jobless due to their own personal failings, not the economic crisis, and who took advantage of Bennett’s emergency aid, collecting the dole and using the money to fund a lifestyle far more comfortable than they had ever appreciated before 1932.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 127

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 103.

Whitton conceded that this latter category “particularly” applied to large groups of foreign labourers. To her, race was a deciding factor when determining whether or not personal failure had led to joblessness, but it also encompassed all men, regardless of race, marital status, or the nature of their specialization.<sup>19</sup>

Whitton recognized the need for emergency aid but worried that this charity threatened to foster widespread dependency on federal largesse. If Whitton’s tour revealed anything, it was that in many cases those on relief were enjoying a higher standard of living than ever before. Since by her classification these men had never enjoyed a continuous income, and often only just scraped by, relief became the first stable source of income these men had seen. Therefore, they were unqualified to receive it as they used relief to better themselves instead of reluctantly accepting it due to economic emergency. Instead of demanding more relief, after her tour of the prairies Whitton found that almost 40 percent of those on relief did not really need it, and called for less, rather than more, relief spending.<sup>20</sup>

Whitton’s discussion of the deserving and undeserving unemployed first appears within her opening review of the the existing problem. Her discussion of relief in urban centres includes a pointed sub-heading: “The Casual Worker Goes on Relief Works, - and Thrives!”<sup>21</sup> As she explained, generalized relief policies with loose guidelines brought “into employment on relief works... a large group of the population who at the best of times are not regularly employed and who have organized their life and resources on a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>20</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 7.

basis of ‘scraping along’ on partial income.’<sup>22</sup> Whitton called for relief to be distributed “on a basis that makes a distinction between [the casually employed] and those who are really, or genuinely unemployed.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, she hoped, only those who had lost their unemployment due to conditions directly linked to the current economic recession would receive aid. Reviewing the volume of unemployed in Canada, she suggested five categories: the unemployed, the seasonally unemployed, the casually employed and regularly unemployed, the unemployable, and the displaced. Unemployed persons were those whose need was temporary, due to emergency conditions, the seasonally unemployed were members of those professions which underwent seasonal lay-offs, like those in construction or farm labourers, and the unemployable were those who, because of age, handicap, or other real social or physical issues, could not work. The fifth category, the displaced, referred to “the thousands whose occupations have disappeared in profound scientific, industrial, or agricultural changes.”<sup>24</sup> Whitton’s concern lay with the third group, the casually unemployed, those who “were always in need of relief and assistance...absorbing out of all due proportion, the resources of Canada’s unemployment relief.”<sup>25</sup>

Whitton argued that a key failing of Bennett’s public work projects was that so often the permanently unemployed, rather than the emergency unemployed, benefited from them. In this way, public works were “deflected not into the removal of an emergency but the raising of the standard of employment and living of the great volume

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 138.

of the underemployed.”<sup>26</sup> At various times throughout her report Whitton refers to these casually employed men as “chronically” partially employed, as if equating these men’s unemployment with an illness. For Whitton, chronic unemployment was a sickness, “the evil disease from which the social structure steadily suffers.”<sup>27</sup> As Whitton suggested, amongst these casually unemployed, relief only helped maintain an already sorry situation, undermining the work ethic she viewed as the cornerstone of society. Quoting Sir William Beveridge,<sup>28</sup> Whitton noted, “the casual labourer is the rock upon which all hopes of thrift, or self-help...no less than all schemes of public assistance are shattered.”<sup>29</sup> To get a hold on the situation, Whitton suggested that these “floating labour reserves” of idle men be “de-casualized,” through removing them from urban centres and rail lines and placing them in make-work camps.<sup>30</sup>

This plan had a dual purpose for Whitton. By identifying the transient men, and removing them from cities and railways, they would cease to be a threat. Separating the casual workers from those who were genuinely unemployed due to the current economic crisis, or who had dependents, would also regulate the labour market, making it available for those who wanted to work. The removal of these transients would allow relief to act as Whitton believed it was intended to, allowing unemployment relief to be organized “on an emergency basis of meeting the needs of the genuinely and presumably temporarily unemployed.”<sup>31</sup> Once this division had occurred, Whitton argued, those who deserved relief and aid could finally benefit. For the genuinely unemployed, she proposed entirely different work projects. She called upon the Employment Service

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,137.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.,127.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,138.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.,139.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 105.

Councils to undertake “conference and negotiation” with employers in key industries, asking them to adopt shorter work hours and create as many positions as possible while still providing enough income so that none would “be depress[ed]...below minimum decent standards of living.”<sup>32</sup> She also proposed that temporary work projects be developed for those genuinely unemployed still in need of jobs. Though she treated casual labourers militantly and dispassionately, Whitton felt for those who were, in her eyes, the victims of recent economic and environmental disaster. When discussing make-work projects, she emphasized, “these should be organized, however, so as to afford real work not silly dallying at cutting dandelions in the public park.”<sup>33</sup> She worried that these men would easily become demoralized, toiling at such demeaning tasks. Whitton assumed that, for genuinely unemployed men, putting aside their pride to accept the relief they needed would be difficult enough, and, therefore, relief efforts had to respect their dignity.

When discussing the deserving and undeserving unemployed, Whitton generally referred to the classification of male workers. Her report, however, does not ignore female workers, but analyzes their situation separately and to a far lesser degree. While her discussion of male workers runs throughout the report, the female unemployed are dealt with in a page. As Whitton argued, at the time of her tour the problem of unemployed women had “not reached serious proportions.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, she contended, since many younger female workers lived at home, their care was the responsibility of their family unit and the male breadwinner at its centre. Whitton felt that care of these

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19.

women could be included as “part of the volume of family welfare.”<sup>35</sup> She also argued that many unemployed former factory, shop, or clerical workers were simply too proud to accept domestic work, but that “skilful handling of employment services,” would soon diminish this number.<sup>36</sup>

While she felt that the problem of unemployed women was “not... a difficult one,” she did not simply amalgamate them all into the category of family welfare. To some extent, she also divided unemployed women into categories of deserving and undeserving. Whitton provided little discussion of which groups of unemployed women qualified for unemployment relief, stating that only those who proved “that were it not for the present conditions they would be self-supporting” qualified.<sup>37</sup> She spent most of her analysis identifying who did not warrant emergency aid. She found that the largest proportion of unemployed women on relief did not merit it as they had “never been steadily employed” were “of middle age or near it,” “frequently [suffered from] personality difficulties,” or presented “moral problems.”<sup>38</sup> Federally-funded aid, Whitton stated, was often supporting women who “at the best of times have but a precarious existence,” when they had no genuine claim to it.<sup>39</sup> She deemed these women ineligible for emergency relief and demanded that they receive aid through traditional channels. In comparison to her dire predictions for the future of unemployed men if control was not imposed, Whitton was not worried about jobless women. As she concluded, “brought

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development Papers, “Report on Unemployment Relief in Western Canada—1932,” 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>38</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 41.

under control, and properly organized, [the problem of unemployed women] should not be unduly heavy...in the West.”<sup>40</sup>

Due to Whitton’s belief in a strict definition of work ethic, she could feel no pity for those she deemed casually unemployed. Whitton’s conservatism prevented her from recognizing the impossibility of distinguishing between the genuinely and chronically unemployed. While the Depression acted as the motivating force behind much of the impoverishment of the 1930s, the experience of poverty was so personal and unique to each individual that it defied a system that would generalize and categorize them. Whitton was unable to accept that these men were often the products of external decisions and events beyond their own control and that they also warranted a relief program that respected their dignity and pride, rather than assumed they possessed none. In Whitton’s opinion, genuinely employed male breadwinners were the bedrock of stable society. To her, their willingness to work, and reluctance to take relief, proved they possessed none of the idleness, thriftlessness, or moral laxity that she felt characterized the casually unemployed. While Whitton devoted most of her discussion to unemployed men, where she does discuss unemployed females she also divides these workers into categories of deserving and undeserving poor. For both men and women, emergency relief was reserved for those whose poverty directly resulted from the economic and environmental downturn, and it had to be protected from those who fell outside this category. In her mind, if the Depression amplified rather than caused a person’s impoverishment, he had no claim on federal relief funds.

While the report reflected Whitton’s beliefs about who qualified for relief, it also reveals her preoccupation with what level of authority should pay for it, and her

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 42.

conservative belief in limited federal government intervention. Whitton, like Bennett, viewed the Depression, and therefore the federal government's extension of aid, as temporary. While she agreed that the federal government should occasionally step in to restore order, she maintained that it must avoid full responsibility for relief. She believed that society functioned best when it did not have to resort to federal government intervention in daily life, but instead was left alone.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, she based her report's suggestions concerning federal unemployment aid on the premise that relief should be provided at the local and provincial levels, and that the federal government "desir[ed] to avoid...any assumption of direct administrative responsibility" for relief, but instead would maintain a supervisory role only, exercising "a modicum of control and organization through insistence upon satisfactory conditions in the handling of relief within each province."<sup>42</sup>

Although the issue of unemployment was not new to Canada, the extent of the Depression, and the ever increasing demands of needy citizens, were unique to this crisis. Even though Canada had experienced recessions prior to the 1930s, popular belief until this time held that a healthy person should never be in want of a job since work could always be found by accepting a lower wage or by returning to agriculture. While the federal government had a record of stepping in to aid its citizens during times of economic recession, such as after the First World War, these moments were the exception to normal practice. Until the Depression, relief was seen as primarily a provincial

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<sup>41</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 50.

responsibility. Even at these levels, relief was given out grudgingly, and at such low levels that it remained a very last resort for all but the most desperate.<sup>43</sup>

Primary provincial responsibility for relief was more than just tradition. Under the terms of the British North America (BNA) Act of 1867, provinces and municipalities were the only levels of government responsible for relief. With the onset of mass unemployment, however, the cost of providing aid to all in need far outstripped the provincial and municipal ability to fund it. During the Depression, the country reached an impasse. The Bennett government considered relief a local and private matter, one falling clearly under provincial jurisdiction, and, therefore, resisted calls that it take on more responsibility. The provinces, however, lacked the financial ability to supply the necessary aid, and called on the federal government to assume a larger role. No system of social welfare could develop unless the provinces found new funding, the BNA Act was amended, or the federal government devised a way to fund welfare initiatives without violating the Act.<sup>44</sup>

Whitton's approach to relief in Western Canada was shaped by her belief that federal aid was a double edged sword: it was a necessity given the current conditions, but also the first step toward permanent responsibility. She felt that provincial premiers had taken advantage of Bennett's provision of relief, and were foisting their financial obligations onto their federal counterpart, irresponsibly allocating their resources and eagerly abdicating their legal responsibility for the provision of welfare. She supported this argument by highlighting the examples of aid for off-reserve First Nations peoples and veterans. Since the matter of who should take care of these groups was

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<sup>43</sup> Waiser, 283.

<sup>44</sup> Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991), 10.

jurisdictionally confusing, Whitton accused the provinces of taking advantage of these grey areas and incorrectly classifying these men as a federal responsibility. Care of Canada's First Nations peoples was a federal matter; the federal government was legally bound to provide aid to the west's First Nations citizens. The federal Department of Indian Affairs did assume full responsibility for those First Nations peoples living on-reserve. Welfare measures for Aboriginals were the charge of this department and were separate from any general federal relief plans. The provision of aid for those First Nations peoples living off reserve lands, however, fell outside the purview of the Department of Indian Affairs, who extended welfare only to those First Nations living on-reserve. It had not been officially decided, however, how to meet the relief needs of those First Nations peoples living off-reserve, and, due to this uncertainty, Whitton found that many collected federal aid, rather than provincial relief.<sup>45</sup> Although Whitton conceded that off-reserve Aboriginal peoples posed "a very specialized problem," she argued that, due to their off-reserve status, the federal government was not responsible for these people.<sup>46</sup> Instead, she ordered, any receiving this federal aid inappropriately should "be thrown back upon the provinces."<sup>47</sup>

Like First Nations peoples, veterans were also a federal responsibility, and received Veterans Allowances from the Dominion Department of Pensions and National

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<sup>45</sup> During the Depression, the treatment of Canada's on-reserve, jobless First Nations' peoples differed little from that towards unemployed Anglo-Canadians in that the Department of Indian Affairs strictly enforced the policy of self-sufficiency amongst First Nations peoples. Just like unemployed Euro-Canadians, able-bodied jobless First Nations peoples were seen as responsible for their own condition. Relief was granted as a very last resort, and was doled out meagerly by the federally-employed Indian Agents who were responsible for inspecting and evaluating every request. When Bennett switched from a policy of public works to one of direct relief, Indian policy too temporarily followed suit, recognizing the necessity of able-bodied unemployed to receive relief, but this switch was soon abandoned in a race to cut costs and trim relief numbers. For an extensive review of Indian welfare policy in Canada, see Hugh Shewell's *Enough to Keep Them Alive: Indian Welfare In Canada, 1873-1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Health granted in recognition of wartime service. With the onset of mass unemployment, however, some veterans received departmental aid in recognition of their inability to find work within the civilian community. This aid, doled out by the Department of Pensions, was not in recognition of unemployability due to wartime service or injury, but was essentially civilian unemployment relief and was often set at higher rates than municipal relief grants.<sup>48</sup> Whitton did not oppose their right to collect direct relief alongside other civilians, which was provided through a partnership agreement between federal, provincial, and municipal authorities. She found, however, that provincial and municipal authorities often refused the veteran relief on the three-way basis “because of a deliberate plan of unloading unto the federal treasury one hundred percent of any claim that can be lodged there.”<sup>49</sup> The men also could not always apply for employment on relief works since authorities assumed that the Dominion Pensions Department would simply “carry them.”<sup>50</sup> Whitton demanded that the provinces, and federal government, recognize that the Dominion Pensions’ Department was under no contractual obligation to provide this relief.

As Whitton’s work contended, in the case of both First Nations peoples and veterans, the time had come to halt federal payments and force the provinces to take on their constitutionally assigned-responsibilities. That the financially-strapped provinces were hardly in a position to take on increasing relief costs received little of her attention. Whitton’s firm belief in the division of federal and provincial powers remained unshaken. She did not address how the provinces were approaching bankruptcy and turning to the federal government in desperation. Instead, the remarks within her report paint the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,38.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 34.

provincial governments as eager to shirk their responsibilities and press their duties onto the federal authority.

For the federal government to avoid greater intervention, Whitton could see only one option. She insisted that the government enforce a national cut-off date after provincial and local relief administration had been reorganized, thereby limiting the number of unemployed.<sup>51</sup> After this, she argued, the federal government needed to organize all other participation in relief along a contributory basis. For all persons suffering from “assessable causes” of need, Whitton maintained that the state must remain a “contributor only.”<sup>52</sup> Whitton favoured unemployment insurance for this reason. With the costs split between the employer, employee, and public authority, the federal government escaped both heightened financial and administrative responsibility for the unemployed. Had such a scheme existed before the Depression, Whitton supposed, the federal government would have been able to make a contribution to a “well constructed” system of unemployment insurance, instead of hastily distributing money to relief works and direct relief, but receiving “nothing to show” for their payments.<sup>53</sup> Given the disintegration of all Bennett’s relief policies and the increasing trend towards total federal responsibility for relief as a result of what Whitton deemed an abdication of provincial responsibility and mismanagement of federal funding, the clear answer was to curtail federal involvement with relief. Her final message to the Conservative Bennett administration was clear, as Whitton hastily scrawled beneath the final typed words of her Main Report: “true conservatism lops from the tree the mouldering limb.”<sup>54</sup> The only

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 158.

answer for the future of relief in Canada was to dam the flow of federal funds, therefore reminding the provinces and unemployed of their rightful responsibility for welfare.

While Whitton's intolerance, definitions of the worthy and unworthy poor, and belief in limited federal government intervention shaped her approach to presenting and analyzing unemployment and relief in western Canada, underlying all Whitton's conservative positions was her commitment to fiscal conservatism. When analyzing the impact of immigration on relief and unemployment, she noted that, since immigrants were more likely to seek aid than Anglo-Canadian settlers, the cost of providing relief had steadily risen since the mass arrival of these foreign settlers.<sup>55</sup> She suggested the government allow only the genuinely unemployed to collect relief so as to restrict the numbers of men on relief and lessen the cost. Furthermore, Whitton's demand that the provincial government accept the full cost of general relief to all those unqualified for emergency federal aid, and her insistence on limited federal government involvement in relief ensured that responsibility for the cost of relief fell on the shoulders of provincial and municipal authorities. Additionally, Whitton singled out several other areas where she felt relief spending could be checked.

Too often, she argued, funds were wasted when direct relief was confused with, or used in place of, other forms of aid, such as with aid to off-reserve Aboriginal peoples, or veterans. Whitton also found that in many rural areas relief was confused with agricultural aid. Here, relief was used to "compensate the agriculturalist for losses due to the low prices of his products," allowing many farmers to "earn their groceries [through

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<sup>55</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.13, "Report on Unemployment Relief in Western Canada- 1932," 12.

accepting relief] and conserve their ready cash for interest and tax payments.”<sup>56</sup> In many cases, Whitton expressed pity for the farmers, especially those in Saskatchewan, who she felt were entitled to aid, since environmental conditions had created a temporary emergency situation.<sup>57</sup> She expressed despair while touring the drought areas.<sup>58</sup> Yet, Whitton also criticized single-crop farmers, and those who had concentrated on growing grain, expanded their farms, bought expensive equipment, and relied on credit to fund their growth. In personal notes taken during her tour, Whitton approvingly quoted the opinion of J. Furness, a relief commissioner from Swift Current, who ascribed “part of the condition of much of the West to the fact that the farmer ‘was not a farmer but an industrialist.’” As Furness explained to her, these farmers, who had expanded their land holdings to plant a single wheat crop, and “abandoned even the last part of mixed farming,” should be partly held responsible for their current economic condition.<sup>59</sup> While Whitton appreciated the plight of those whose land holdings had literally turned to dust, she chastised those who had no poultry, gardens, or other crops to fall back on. In her opinion, farmers who practiced mixed farming, and had livestock, fodder, and vegetables

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<sup>56</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada— Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 35.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Whitton’s sympathy for farmers came from her first hand knowledge of the crippling environmental conditions she faced. Her prairie tour found her driving through much of rural Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, the three areas she highlighted as most affected by drought. While on the road, Whitton was confronted daily with images of how drought had ravaged the prairie landscape, and she was hardly unaffected by the sights. Her reaction is illustrated through her personal notes of 27 June 1932. While driving in the Swift Current area with Mr. J Furness, a local Relief Commissioner, Whitton noted that conditions only “got worse” as they drove on. She describes whole farm fields “covered with blown soil,” and crops “barely above ground blown out or eaten by cutworm.” It was experiences like this that drove Whitton’s respect, and pity, for prairie farmers and their Depression experience Whitton Papers, vol.24, “C.W. Report for R.B. Bennett-1932. Unemployment Relief in Manitoba,” Personal Notes re: meeting with Relief Commissioner J. Furness in Swift Current 27 June 1932.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

to turn to when wheat failed, fared better.<sup>60</sup> This group of farmers abused relief, using the funds as an extra income, instead of properly managing their existing finances.

Whitton also felt that emergency relief was often used to maintain ventures that had failed even before the onset of depression and particularly identified which mining and logging ventures did and did not warrant aid. While Whitton predicted that surface mining in Estevan and base metal mining in Manitoba and British Columbia would continue to provide good wages and continuous employment, generally, she found that the unemployment situation in the mining sector was dire, and many workers had begun collecting federal relief. After investigation, Whitton reported that most logging and mining areas were undeserving of government aid. While the workers were genuinely unemployed, layoffs in these areas, she noted, could not be attributed to the emergency conditions created by the Depression. “[T]here are whole areas,” she stated, “where, over a period of years... various factors operate to cause continuous under-employment, heavy unemployment, and unprofitable operation.” She warned that “in many of these areas unemployment relief is indirectly utilized to subsidize an uneconomical... situation.”<sup>61</sup> Whitton was hardly unfeeling towards these impoverished citizens, but argued that their decline was inevitable and aggravated, rather than caused, by the Depression.

Whitton attributed the decline of these mining and logging communities to a natural evolution. The communities formed after the discovery of the natural resource and thrived alongside the industry as it grew. As part of their natural progression, however, once they had exhausted their supply of trees, coal, or metal, members of the community drifted to new areas, desperate to find new employment. With the onset of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid..

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 12.

the Depression and federal relief funding, Whitton charged, this natural evolution stalled, preventing what Whitton called these communities' "natural dissolution."<sup>62</sup> She cited the oil valleys of Alberta and the logging camps and mills in British Columbia as prime examples of this trend.<sup>63</sup> As she noted when discussing mining in Bienfait, Saskatchewan,<sup>64</sup> federal aid should not be used "indirectly to subsidize what may be an untenable situation."<sup>65</sup> The populations of these communities, in Whitton's mind, directly benefited from aid they little deserved. Continuing to help these communities would only perpetuate the situation while costing them increasing amounts of money. It was in the best interests of the federal relief budget to cut this aid.

While Whitton's social work background certainly gave her experience working with impoverished families, it did not afford her much patience or sympathy for them. It is unlikely that many farmers used relief to supplement their existing incomes. As well, even though miners and loggers might have lost their jobs when supplies of minerals and timbre were exhausted, their livelihoods were affected by the Depression. With the depletion of national and international markets and demand for all goods, employers had to cut jobs. Whitton also argued that these miners and loggers normally moved on to the next job opportunity, or changed professions, until they found work. With the onset of the Depression, however, few new mines or logging camps opened; in the face of economic emergency, no one was willing to fund such a venture. As scholars have suggested, Whitton's unwavering conservatism "seemed to atrophy her sensibilities"

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>64</sup> Whitton's tour of the deep-seam coal mines in Bienfait, Saskatchewan, came almost a year after the Bienfait Miners' strike of September 1931. For a full study of the strike see Stephen L. Endicott, *Bienfait: the Saskatchewan Miners' Struggle of '31* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Whitton Papers, vol.24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 100.

throughout the Great Depression.<sup>66</sup> Nothing she observed while on tour changed the approach to social welfare that had so characterized her work prior to the 1932 report. Instead, Whitton's social and fiscal conservatism again acted to shape her response to unemployment and relief. Whitton's conservative ideology, however, was not the only factor conditioning her response to unemployment and relief during her tour and throughout her report. Although Whitton ostensibly offered Bennett her services to aid him in developing his new welfare policy, her gesture was far from selfless; Whitton hoped that her aid, and report, would open new space for Canadian social workers to assume the reins of administration from the masses of untrained government employees currently in charge. As she indicated to Bennett in her letter of 18 April 1932, the switch from relief works to direct relief changed the nature of the existing relief system. "It is felt that this [transition] will require most effective organization of all our relief services, public and private," she wrote.<sup>67</sup> As the switch to direct assistance placed the means test, casework, and home visiting at the centre of Canada's relief system, Whitton believed that social workers, already familiar with these skills, were uniquely qualified to administer a new relief system.<sup>68</sup> Her report became the forum through which she could convince Bennett of the utility of appointing trained social workers in Canada's relief offices.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 90.

<sup>67</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Whitton to Bennett, 18 April 1932.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Although Whitton firmly believed that, due to their specific training in matters of welfare, aid, and casework, social workers should assume sole responsibility for the administration of relief in Canada, as an interested party, Whitton's judgment was hardly unbiased. There is a literature that questions the assumption that social workers were superior to and the natural successors of these earlier social welfare providers. In her book, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and article "The Professionalization of Benevolence: Evangelicals and Social Workers in the Florence Crittenton Homes, 1915-1945," *Journal of Social History* 22.1 (Autumn, 1988), 22-45, Regina Kunzel shows how, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, benevolent work with unmarried mothers shifted out from under the control of evangelical volunteers who based their

Whitton's most pressing professional fear was that social workers would be bypassed in favour of poorly trained government personnel. Expressing her worry in a CCCW booklet, Whitton wrote that the "question...that has come upon us in Canadian social work today [is] will it survive or be engulfed in popular acceptance of a great corps of personnel[?]"<sup>70</sup> On the eve of the Great Depression, Canada's social workers were practitioners of a little recognized profession. At the time, only two designated schools of social work existed in the country<sup>71</sup> and, even within Ontario, home of the CCCW and the Social Service Council of Canada, "no such thing" as a "professional 'corps of trained social workers'" existed.<sup>72</sup> The profession first truly expanded during the 1920s, as recognized by the inception of the Canadian Association of Social Workers in 1926. Other societies that formed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, like Whitton's Canadian Council on Child Welfare, or the Social Service Council of Canada, were not specifically organizations of social workers, yet their membership was dominated by them. Social

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approach on feminine virtues of piety and sympathy to social workers who sought to remove themselves from gender-based benevolence and sentimentality. Social workers instead claimed their professional training in scientific method, specifically their use of casework, better suited them to oversee benevolent work (*Fallen Women*, 36-64, 121-130; "Professionalization," 21-24). As Kunzel's work shows, this was an uneasy transition, and the supremacy of professional, impartial, social workers over sentimentally-motivated volunteers was contested by those who questioned the wisdom of treating those seeking aid so dispassionately as cases to be diagnosed rather than human beings (*Fallen Women*, 130-134; "Professionalization," 32). In her book, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880-1960* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), Linda Gordon also discusses the shift from volunteer to professional control of social welfare. As she identifies in her study of the child-saving establishment in Boston, by the Second World War, "most agencies were staffed primarily by professionals, and shared professional assumptions about the importance of expertise and the necessity to have only trained personnel handle child welfare problems" (69). As Gordon contends, in some ways, this transition represented a regression in the approach to family violence and child-saving as the 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessor to social workers had proved more reformist, more apt to challenge patriarchy, and placed greater faith in the importance of community-organizing over the individual. In contrast, the advance of social workers and their emphasis on individual cases, discouraged the past focus on the community and social reform (76).

<sup>70</sup> Qtd. in James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 76.

<sup>71</sup> The University of Toronto offered the first official training program for social workers in 1914, with McGill University offering a similar program by 1918.

<sup>72</sup> James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930's," *The Canadian Historical Review*, LXII. 2 (June 1981), 170.

work, however, was still struggling to be regarded as a profession, a distinct field with unique practices.

Whitton insisted that the social work be considered amongst any other professional jobs requiring specific educational training. Writing to Bennett a few months after her report she argued that “social work has its own techniques as have engineering and construction” and, just as a worker with no technical experience would never be asked to take on the job of engineer or construction manager she protested that “the processes and personnel of [the social work profession] cannot be automatically interchanged with [those of another] without serious mismanagement and loss.”<sup>73</sup>

Bennett’s choice of Whitton to undertake his survey was recognition that this particular social worker had a specialized knowledge of social issues, and was the most qualified to comment on issues of social welfare. Capitalizing on the opportunity to command the full attention of the Bennett administration, Whitton’s report became her platform for advocating the promotion of social workers.

Whitton placed her recommendation that trained, educated, social welfare professionals take over the administration of relief above all other recommendations, calling it the “sine qua non” of any new program of professional aid.<sup>74</sup> Her belief that social work professionals were the best equipped to manage a new relief system was bolstered by her tour. In every province Whitton found evidence of administrative mismanagement, usually due to the hiring of officials based on their political affiliation, rather than professional education. In Winnipeg, she was shocked to find that administration of the city’s entire relief apparatus was “entrusted to an official who was

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<sup>73</sup> Struthers, “A Profession in Crisis,” 175.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 177.

formerly superintendent of the civic woodyard, with a staff of 91 recruited from the ranks of the unemployed.”<sup>75</sup> After a meeting with a Relief Commission official in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, J. Furness, Whitton wryly commented in her personal notes that the “hard bitten old timer,” lacked training for his job as he had last been employed as an engineer and Dominion Lands Inspector.<sup>76</sup> Whitton did not find all areas of the West suffering from poor administration. In Swan River, Manitoba, Whitton met with Miss Street, a nurse and employee of the Manitoba Department of Public Welfare. The two toured “over [a] wide area south to Dauphin” and visited families. Obviously impressed with the well-trained and knowledgeable nurse, Whitton noted to herself that when a new system of welfare administration could be introduced, there would be “no need of new appointees” to distribute relief in this area. Whitton had found that the nurses and welfare representatives already working there were more than capable of supervising the system.<sup>77</sup>

Miss Street, however, was a rare exception: when it came time for Whitton to translate the observations of her tour into her proposals for Bennett, she focused mainly on the system’s administrative flaws. Whitton divided the suggestions made in her Main Report into two sections: general, and province-specific. In her review of the situation in each province, Whitton paid particular attention to the structures of relief administration. In Manitoba, relief was administered in three main areas: “Greater Winnipeg,” “Municipalities,” and “Unorganized Territory.” In her suggestions, however, Whitton focused most on Winnipeg, citing its chief problem as improper administration, and

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<sup>75</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 53.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., “CW Report for RB Bennett-1932, Unemployment Relief in Saskatchewan.” Personal notes, 27 June 1932.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., “CW Report for RB Bennett- 1932, Unemployment Relief in Manitoba.” Personal notes, 13 August 1932.

pointedly concluding that, “the utter fallacy of attempting to have an untrained investigator handle 1,000 families a week...is too obvious to require comment.”<sup>78</sup> She recommended that Manitoba select permanent staff to administer relief, one trained in the areas of child protection, general welfare, or public health.<sup>79</sup> In Saskatchewan Whitton did not recommend the implementation of new administrators, but instead demanded new organization. Saskatchewan’s greatest problems were a lack of centralization, five provincial departments had control of different areas of aid, and an excess of staff. Why, she argued, when the province was “already bountifully supplied” with civil servants, would Saskatchewan appointment more?<sup>80</sup> Whitton found British Columbia to be the worst off by far, suffering from the administrative problems of both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In B.C., political patronage, a deluge of casework and a lack of centralization and supervision created a system characterized by careless and ineffective administration.<sup>81</sup> Alberta was the only province spared Whitton’s critique. While the cities controlled relief distribution within their limits, elsewhere, relief was centralized and closely monitored by the Supervisor of Relief in the Department of Municipal Affairs. She found few reasons to critique this well organized and efficient system.

Whitton’s suggestions for the Dominion-Provincial system of direct relief also focused on the need for new administration. Whitton’s first suggestion dealt with the general administration of relief. The central problem was a “need for strong informed leadership” as the administration of relief, over all other aspects, was “particularly susceptible to many evils, not the least of which is exploitation...and its enervating

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 54.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 75.

effects in breeding indifference, despair, destitution, and pauperism.”<sup>82</sup> As Whitton noted, though the federal government must avoid taking over the administration of relief, through “leadership, conference, and supervision,” the situation would improve.<sup>83</sup> She recommended that a Cabinet Minister, potentially the Minister of Labour, be assigned responsibility for the study of the problem of unemployment and that he be granted an official to “take up directly the immediately pressing problems in this field.”<sup>84</sup> This official, she stipulated, must be selected “on the basis of proven experience in the field of welfare and relief problems,” as she feared a patronage-appointee would lack the experience necessary to ably undertake the position.<sup>85</sup> She likewise called on the federal government to insist that the provinces centralize relief administration under one department guided by the advice of non-partisan advisory boards.<sup>86</sup> Whitton also suggested the provinces implement a uniform system of relief within their borders. The lack of centralized administration meant that the organization and distribution of relief was being left to the discretion of the various urban centres and municipalities. This created a patchwork of systems within each province. The adoption of minimum requirements for staff, standardized schedules of relief budgets, and uniform residency clauses would greatly reduce the previously disorganized approach to relief.

For Whitton, new organization, implemented by trained social work experts, would revolutionize the distribution of relief. Despite the logic of this argument, Whitton was hardly a disinterested party. Whitton led the nation’s largest organization of social welfare professionals, and had already publicly expressed her worry that government

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

bureaucrats would take over from these non-partisan, yet trained, social work professionals. Whitton, a representative of private charitable associations, made no secret of her demand that public and private channels of welfare needed to cooperate. The federal government was a latecomer to the field. The constituent members of the CCCW and those of other aid groups already had knowledge, experience, and a volunteer base at the ready. Certainly, improved administration could have streamlined and organized the slipshod system Whitton reviewed, but it also would have allowed social workers, and, as their most public figurehead, Whitton, to assume a national position of prominence heretofore denied to them. Given this, the report's emphasis on the need for new, educated, administrators must be viewed as her way of cloaking professional ambition underneath a rational recommendation.

Although Whitton argued that expertise and specialization, rather than political affiliations, should determine who was fit to administer and shape Canada's relief system, she embodied both. While Bennett commissioned her on the basis of her specialized knowledge and prominent position within the social welfare community, he also chose Whitton because of her political affiliations. Bennett knew they both subscribed to a similarly conservative ideology; they shared a personal friendship, but, furthermore, Whitton's previous surveys of mothers' allowances and juvenile immigration provided ample evidence of her traditionalist outlook. He could confidently assume that Whitton's report would deliver a conservative perspective on the current unemployment and relief situation in the West, and on ways to reform the current trends. Whitton's final report did not disappoint. Although her extensive tour took her through areas crippled by drought and economic catastrophe, none of these piteous scenes changed the opinions she had

established long before assuming her work for Bennett. Whitton saw only a system under heavy abuse, in danger of ballooning out of federal control. In her opinion, poor classification standards that allowed many of those who least deserved aid to collect it, and the provincial tendency to foist relief costs onto their federal counterpart, led to an ever-increasing waste of federal funds that could only be checked if properly trained administrators took control of a reformed relief system. More so than ever, Whitton's conservative outlook towards relief combined with her wish to see Canada's social workers assume control of the welfare system blinded her to a greater appreciation of the nature of poverty.

## Chapter 5: Bennett's Response

Whitton's report was the only official analysis of relief commissioned by Bennett and it has been argued that it had "enormous influence" in shaping Bennett's policy.<sup>1</sup> Whitton hoped the report would spur the prime minister into reorganizing Canada's relief system. She had provided him with a document with observations and suggestions that reflected the conservative understanding of the right to relief, the limits of federal intervention, and, most importantly, fiscal responsibility. Both during and after the tour, Whitton urged Bennett to make her work public and assure Canadians that he was taking measures to address the unemployment and relief situation. Bennett never did. Instead, he all but ignored her report, acting on only one of her suggestions that make-work camps be established to host unemployed, transient men. Since Bennett faced mounting public pressure to act decisively and change the existing relief system, his rejection of all but one of Whitton's suggestions is somewhat surprising. Whitton's proposal that make-work camps be established to care for transient men was in line with Bennett's previous response to relief; it involved short-term effort, and was necessary to ensure social control. It is not surprising, then, that Bennett took this advice. In contrast, Whitton's central proposal, that professional social workers take over the administration of relief at all levels, still required the kind of large-scale reorganization Bennett strove to avoid. Despite the report's overall conservative tone, implementation of its key suggestion was too extreme for Bennett to consider. That Bennett declined this opportunity to invest in a practical solution to Canada's relief and unemployment issues, however, calls into

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<sup>1</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 77.

question the sincerity of his later radical New Deal legislation in 1935. His refusal to change the system in the years before an election was imminent is evidence that his New Deal marked a desperate attempt to hold on to power rather than an acknowledgement that reform was necessary.

While the establishment of make-work camps involved the kind of federal government responsibility Bennett worked against, the creation of these National Defence Camps fits, rather than deviates from, Bennett's agenda prior to 1932. Although unemployment had remained his chief concern, as the Depression and public anger at the situation continued, Bennett came to blame the escalating moments of unrest on foreign, subversive forces. During the Depression the Communist Party of Canada, through its organization the Workers' Unity League, began what has been deemed "a critical battle for the hearts and minds of the Canadian working class."<sup>2</sup> Through organizing the unemployed, signing up labourers from previously non-unionized professions, arranging strikes, demonstrations, and marches, the Communist Party gained both new popularity and recognition. Bennett viewed the organization as revolutionary and a threat to peace and the Canadian way of life. To combat the perceived threat, Bennett's relief legislation drew a deliberate connection between unemployment relief and stronger federal government policing of those in need of such relief. The 1931 Unemployment Farm Relief Act declared that the federal government maintained the right to use "the powers necessary to ensure...the maintenance of the peace, order and good government of the country" and imposed fines against any who would defy this edict.<sup>3</sup> Bennett also worked

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), 18.

<sup>3</sup> "An Act to confer certain powers upon the Governor in Council in respect to unemployment and farm relief, and the maintenance of peace, order, and good government in Canada." *Statutes of Canada*, 21-22 George

to strengthen Canada's police by naming Major-General James Howden MacBrien, a known anticommunist and anti-leftist, commissioner of the RCMP in August of 1931. Soon after MacBrien's appointment, the RCMP led a raid of the homes and offices of prominent Toronto Communists. Furthermore, by December of that year, the RCMP force was increased by three hundred men.<sup>4</sup> By the time of Whitton's report, "suppressing dissent...became as important to Bennett as restoring the economic health of the nation."<sup>5</sup>

Even before receiving Whitton's dire predictions on the impending threat posed by the thousands of transient men drifting through Canada's urban centres, Bennett was worried. A letter of early April 1932, composed prior to Whitton's commission, indicates his concern. Writing to Hugh Guthrie, then Minister of Justice, Bennett stated he had recently learned from a friend's correspondence with the General Superintendent of the C.P.R. in Calgary "that apparently quite large numbers of transient unemployed in the United States are riding trains up to within a few miles of the border and crossing the line on foot...they then ride the freights East, stopping off at different cities where relief is being given." Eager to substantiate and address the situation, Bennett asked, "to make a check at those points" to ensure the report was correct.<sup>6</sup> In June, Bennett received another letter on the situation from W.A. Gordon, the federal Minister of Labour. With his letter, Gordon enclosed a secret RCMP report on the unemployment situation in Edmonton that highlighted the case of single men. As the RCMP observed, "while [the

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V, c.58. qtd. in Bill Waiser, Bill Waiser. *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*. (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Waiser, 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), R.B. Bennett Papers, MG26-K, vol. 798, M-1452, R.B. Bennett to the Hon Hugh Guthrie, Minister of Justice. 15 April 1932. A telegram of 18 April 1932 from Guthrie to Bennett confirmed that police were to be sent to investigate the situation (Bennett Papers, vol. 798, M-1452, Guthrie to Bennett, 18 April 1932).

wants of] single men are easily fulfilled in that the essentials of his life are food and lodging, he is a difficult problem to deal with.” Since single men usually lacked dependents, they were free to travel in search of work. The RCMP found that often this search took the men “hundreds of miles” away from their official residence. Consequently, “the city in which he is then refuses him relief and in order to live in the meantime until he gets back to his original headquarters, he must beg or steal.” As the report warned, “agitation amongst married and single men is always rife and any new move by the Relief Office invariably calls for some criticism by this element.”<sup>7</sup>

Although news of potential agitation alone would have troubled Bennett, the report also discussed the action of foreign subversives working within Canada. It noted the RCMP’s identification of ten known agitators in the area, calling attention to the case of a Mr. Schmidt, an immigrant residing in Sturgeon Valley who had allegedly threatened to become leader of the local Communist Party directly after receiving his naturalization papers. The report warned that “Schmidt will blossom forth immediately he receives his naturalization and becomes a recognized citizen of Canada. He is considered by his friends as a rabid agitator.” As the report makes clear, unless something was done to control the movement and actions of unemployed transient men, leaders like Schmidt would continue to gain followers. The report concluded that the federal government should assume full responsibility for the situation. It provided further evidence to Bennett of a foreign, Communist threat developing within the ranks of Canada’s transient men.<sup>8</sup> Responding to Gordon, Bennett agreed with the sentiments expressed in the report,

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<sup>7</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 798, M-1453, D.S. Sargeant R. Armitage, Secret Report Re: Unemployment Situation-Edmonton, 1 June 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 798, M-1453, D.S. Sargeant R. Armitage, Secret Report Re: Unemployment Situation-Edmonton. 1 June 1932.

noting “I think the sooner we get down to deal with these matters on some sort of system the better.... the situation in my opinion is so serious that we should devote a special day to it in council.”<sup>9</sup>

Whitton shared Bennett’s fears over the possibility of unrest amongst Canada’s transient, unemployed, male population. During her tour, she noted how each area dealt with transients. Whitton’s fear of disorder amongst the unemployed is clear in her report’s suggestion of how to how to manage casually employed homeless men. The potential threat posed by these men is implied through her language. She addresses them using military terms: they are “an army” or “a reserve,” never a group. She warned that “not less than 100,000 single men [are] roving the country in a shifting army... quite apart from the comparatively small eddies still floating in some of our cities.” Consequently, she urged, “there is no question of more immediate urgency in the relief problem than this.”<sup>10</sup> Whitton feared that the men would recognize common cause, unite, and become a violent force, threatening the order and safety of Canadians. The enormity of the issue was such that Whitton ruefully departed from her gospel of provincial and municipal, rather than federal, responsibility for the administration and cost of relief. “Within this whole problem,” she warns, “there is one element that because of its flexibility and mobility cannot be restrained... within municipal or even provincial limits.”<sup>11</sup> Reverting to her familiar rhetoric of cost efficiency, Whitton added, “every interest of economy... would be served by the creation of some central system of control and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Bennett to W.A. Gordon, 20 June 1932.

<sup>10</sup> LAC, Charlotte Whitton Papers, MG30, E256, vol.25, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 16.

<sup>11</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 42.

machinery for the handling of the homeless man.”<sup>12</sup> Like Bennett, she especially worried over unemployed, transient immigrant citizens whose “corporate loyalties” and “susceptibility to seditious propaganda” made them “troublesome.”<sup>13</sup> Whitton’s chief concern was that the government adopt a unified policy for handling homeless men before the men themselves could unify. “The movement is organizing itself...putting forward demands for services and standards, and in general becoming a grave menace to law, order, property, and security,” she warned.<sup>14</sup>

Whitton then launched into her most aggressive and militaristic suggestion. In order to de-casualize the labour force, Whitton called for the Department of Labour to employ an “experienced, military administrator” within its service, and for the Department of Defence to open its armories, camps, and other resources to the Department of Labour.<sup>15</sup> Under her plan these transients would be drafted into concentration camps in “strategically located centres,” to serve the province through working on projects like irrigation schemes, land clearing and weeding, all while under “semi-military discipline.”<sup>16</sup> They would receive three meals daily alongside a minimal wage. While in the camps, Whitton expected them to undertake make-work projects, but she also planned for them to be gradually “fed back” into society and “transferred to the labour markets as employment demands.”<sup>17</sup> Whitton assigned the care and organization of these men to the federal government. Only through this strict, centralized, control of administration and registration could the menace of mass agitation be quelled. Her

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>13</sup> LAC, Canadian Council on Social Development Papers, MG28, I10, vol.13, “Report on Unemployment Relief in Western Canada- 1932,” 18.

<sup>14</sup> Whitton Papers., vol. 24, “Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada— Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report,” 44.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 101.

system was designed to prevent mass organization: any man found outside his registration area would be deemed ineligible for assistance, and any man found riding the rails or panhandling would be handed over to federal authorities. Whitton urged that a massive, national publicity campaign follow the implementation of this plan. In this way, the federal government could use its citizens to act as its agents, through encouraging them to cooperate and report all homeless men to officials at registration centres.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett agreed that semi-military measures were necessary to control this growing threat. In early October 1932 Cabinet passed Order-in-Council PC 2248, establishing the camps under military control. Between 1932 and 1936 144 camps were opened. The central and eastern camps opened first, within a month of the Order-in-Council, and Bennett was soon persuaded to grant funding to the National Parks Branch to open camps for single men in the mountain and prairie provincial parks.<sup>19</sup> Despite the act's similarity to Whitton's suggestion, it is difficult to know how much influence her work had on Bennett's camps; they had also been suggested to him by General Andrew McNaughton during the same time period.

Like Whitton, Major- General Andrew McNaughton also toured the West in the summer of 1932 inspecting various Canadian military centres. McNaughton distinguished himself as a hero during the First World War and was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in 1918. He continued to ascend through the administrative ranks of the Canadian army, working at the National Defence headquarters and becoming the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>19</sup> As Bill Waiser has noted, Bennett's provision of relief funds to the parks was, in part, politically motivated. As his riding encompassed Banff, this allocation of funds functioned both a relief measure as well a show of support for his riding. Waiser, *Labour Camps in Western Canada's National Parks 1914-45* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, Parks Canada, 1994), 2.

army's Chief of the General Staff in 1929.<sup>20</sup> It was the appalling condition of unemployed, single, homeless men along his route, however, that captured McNaughton's attention. After witnessing firsthand the plight of these transients, McNaughton was moved to approach the government with a scheme for make work camps. By 1932 McNaughton, like Whitton, was a nationally respected figure, "perhaps the most powerful public servant in the country."<sup>21</sup> Bennett and McNaughton shared a close working relationship; McNaughton served as chief organizer of the 1932 Imperial Economic Conference and as a member of the government's interdepartmental advisory committee to the St Lawrence seaway. While not officially commissioned to inspect unemployment in the West, by virtue of his position McNaughton could alert the government to the plight of these transients, confident his comments would be heard.

McNaughton also perceived transients as a threat to order and easy prey for Communist propagandists. He called such transients future members of Marx's "industrial reserve army, the storm-troopers of revolution."<sup>22</sup> He also referred to the men in militaristic terms, as "ragged platoons" of young men but, unlike Whitton, his intention was not to paint them as a dangerous opposing force.<sup>23</sup> Instead, McNaughton, somewhat prophetically, looked upon these men as "the prospective members of Canada's armed forces should the country become involved in war." In contrast to Whitton, who spent much time worrying about the morale and pride of her 'genuinely' unemployed, McNaughton felt that if these men were left alone, Canada would be guilty of "destroying, physically and mentally, the very best of our people," those that Canada

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<sup>20</sup> For a more complete, if somewhat laudatory, biography and analysis of McNaughton's role as director of the relief camps, see John Swettenham, *McNaughton: Volume I 1887-1939* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 2-286.

<sup>21</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 81.

<sup>22</sup> John Swettenham. *McNaughton: Volume I 1887-1939*. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 270.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

would soon turn to once the temporary economic recession had passed.<sup>24</sup> McNaughton's solution, in essence, was "to build up morale through work...[and] to proceed by persuasion and not by compulsion, and to do everything possible to facilitate the flow back of men to industry as soon as they should be [fit] and positions available."<sup>25</sup> Like Whitton, he proposed to do this through placing as many of this army of unemployed men who wished, in camps where they would receive lodging, food, clothing, and medical aid.<sup>26</sup>

That Whitton and McNaughton would produce such similar plans is hardly surprising. Since several provinces established make-work camps prior to their summer tours, the two organizers were not introducing a foreign idea. In the early days of the Depression, before the federal government implemented relief measures, relief was almost entirely a municipal, then provincial, responsibility. Lacking both funds and the administrative machinery to deal with sudden crisis, most municipalities scrambled to deal with the problem of transient men. Provinces were also reluctant to make concrete plans for these men, fearing that such a move would only make their province a magnet for desperate men. Therefore the only aid available was through the auspices of private charities. Local charities and churches traditionally provided food and shelter for the men, but these organizations were scarcely equipped to administer to the thousands without work or homes. Charities could only offer support for a few days. In larger centres hostels and soup kitchens administered by local governments could be found, but these were seldom designed to offer more than two meals a day and a few nights' lodging. It was hardly surprising that men took to riding the rails in search of a better

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 270.

situation; no other provision had been made for them. Saskatchewan was the first province to institute work camps for homeless men, providing them with food, shelter, and a small wage of about \$5 a month.<sup>27</sup> Alberta and British Columbia soon followed. While none of these pre-existing camps were under military control, they operated on the principle that transient, unemployed men should be sent far away from urban centres to work on far-flung public projects. Whitton encountered many such schemes as she toured, and paid careful attention to them both within her personal notes and in her later report as she analyzed how the provinces coped with relief.

The McNaughton and Whitton plans were so similar, and were proposed to Bennett so closely together, that it is impossible to tell which plan originally inspired him to create the camps. Both submitted their plans to Bennett in the fall of 1932. Both suggested that unemployed men be put into unemployment camps under the direction of the Department of National Defence. As well, each argued for the cost efficiency of setting up the camps under the military's supervision. The key difference between the plans turned on the issue of how to place the men in camps. Unable to see these transients as anything more than a potential threat, Whitton viewed them as lesser men than their genuinely unemployed counterparts. The latter possessed all the thrift, initiative, and independence needed to find a job, but were temporarily put out due to economic downturns. Conversely, casually employed men were a threat to security, and therefore, necessitated military order. Unemployed men would be virtually forced into the camps, monitored by a strict registration process. Additionally, the public would be asked to act as the government's spies, alerting local relief agents to any transients seen on the rails or

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<sup>27</sup> Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987), 47.

outside of the camps. In the camps, Whitton expected these men to live their lives under a semi-military regime characterized by constant supervision. Contrary to the plan envisioned by Whitton, the camps of McNaughton's plans were voluntary. Though run by the military, McNaughton wanted to avoid militarism. The men would not live under military discipline, and would not be asked to perform drills. Furthermore, those military officials overseeing the camps would dress in civilian clothing.<sup>28</sup>

While McNaughton may have felt the camps were necessary to preserve the morale of unemployed men, in reality, they were created to preserve order. Their purpose was to remove men from Canada's cities and railways, to place them where they could be monitored. As R.K. Finlayson, Bennett's assistant, noted, "it would be a great mistake to lose sight of the main objective that the government has in this work, namely to keep urban centres clear from such single men as more readily become amenable to the designs of agitators."<sup>29</sup> As well, although McNaughton may have originally conceived of the camps as places unemployed men could enter and leave voluntarily, the camps soon came to "symbolize all that was wrong with Ottawa's handling of the unemployment crisis."<sup>30</sup> After presenting his plan to W.A. Gordon, the Minister of Labour, and H. Hereford, the commissioner of unemployment relief, the pair invited McNaughton to

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<sup>28</sup> Swettenham, 273. In his work, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* Lorne Brown also notes McNaughton's distaste for establishing the camps under a military dictatorship. As Brown states, "the prospect of using the army to aid the civil power was not looked upon with favour by McNaughton. He may have been an authoritarian but he was a professional soldier who took no pleasure making war on civilian populations." (Brown, 48)

<sup>29</sup> R.K. Finlayson to A.E. Millar, 6 October 1933 qtd. in Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Waiser., 28.

submit his plan to cabinet where an Order-in-Council was passed, establishing the camps.<sup>31</sup>

Although Whitton's plan for the camps reached Bennett at the same time as McNaughton's, few sources mention her suggestions. Instead, McNaughton is largely remembered as the sole inventor of this relief measure. Historians are not entirely to blame for the omission of Whitton's role; Bennett favoured McNaughton's plan. He personally informed McNaughton that cabinet supported his plan, ordered a draft proposal, and endorsed McNaughton's leadership role.<sup>32</sup> Bennett's reasons for failing to recognize Whitton's advice, or approach her to aid McNaughton in creating the camps, are unknown. Although it would have been unusual for a woman to lead such an initiative, Whitton had already assumed a public role as a respected advisor to governments in matters of public welfare, which Bennett, by commissioning Whitton to undertake his unemployment study, had recognized. In her report, Whitton admitted that the threat posed by transient men necessitated military intervention. She would have approved of McNaughton's directorship. It is, however, puzzling that Bennett did not contract her to help draft the initial legislation; even though McNaughton based his plan on his experiences from his summer tour, transient men were peripheral to his main purpose of reviewing military operations. In contrast, Whitton's tour specifically focused on the unemployed. Despite her knowledge of the situation, Bennett did not acknowledge her work, and Whitton never publicly addressed the slight.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As Bill Waiser has noted, Bennett's provision of relief funds to the parks was, in part, politically motivated. As his riding encompassed Banff, this allocation of funds functioned both a relief measure as well a show of support for his riding. Waiser, *Labour Camps in Western Canada's National Parks 1914- 45*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 81.

McNaughton did the most to shape the relief camps. As author of the legislation establishing the camps, and as director of the program, McNaughton's ideas held more influence over the camps than Whitton's preliminary suggestions. While both submitted their suggestions, the government acted upon McNaughton's. McNaughton merits recognition for drafting the final legislation and overseeing the program, but Whitton deserves credit for her role in the history of these camps. Bennett knew of her suggestions regarding these camps when he was introduced to McNaughton's ideas; the coincidence that two such well-known figures encountered the same situation, drew largely the same conclusions, and produced plans that supported one another would not have escaped Bennett. Whitton's survey supported McNaughton's scheme, and Bennett also respected Whitton enormously as both a professional and a friend. Whitton's backing of this measure would have reinforced the import of McNaughton's work, and confirmed his appraisal of the situation.

Bennett's assumption of responsibility for Canada's transient population appeared to depart from his policy of non-intervention, yet this measure was an example of the kind of social control supported by Conservative ideology. Bennett shared the traditional Conservative viewpoint that supports public policies which enforce control over those who have digressed from socially defined values and roles.<sup>34</sup> Bennett's move to introduce make-work camps under the direction of the federal Department of National Defence, therefore, was unsurprising. As well, just like his relief policies, the make-work camps were designed as an emergency, temporary measure. They represented a short-term, rather than permanent, extension of government power over the lives of its citizens.

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<sup>34</sup> Joel Blau and Mimi Abramovitz, *The Dynamics of Social Welfare Policy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33.

Therefore, the establishment of make-work camps represents a continuation of Bennett's traditionalist approach to relief and unemployment during the Depression.

By contracting Whitton, Bennett indicated a willingness to make considered, educated change. However, Bennett did not take the kind of comprehensive reorganization Whitton most wanted. She deemed the re-staffing of relief administration by social work professionals at the provincial and federal levels the "*sine quo non* of any continuance of federal aid."<sup>35</sup> Given his previous stance towards relief, Bennett's unwillingness to spend either the time or funds necessary to realize Whitton's central suggestion was unsurprising. Both before and after Whitton's report, Bennett was reticent to act. Unwilling to develop either permanent policy, or hire trained staff to administer it, the fiscally conservative Bennett instead grew increasingly nervous as the government spent large sums providing unemployment relief.

At the beginning of his tenure, Bennett had pointed to Liberal mismanagement as a large factor in the economic crisis. The 1931 Throne Speech indicated as much:

The problems that stand between us and prosperity are manifold and great. To be effectually met, they must first be understood...[m]y Government has explored the origins of our difficulties and is firmly in the belief that many of our problems do not arise out of world-wide depression, but are antecedent to it; and that domestic factors have also largely determined the degree of economic distress from which the country is suffering.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Whitton Papers, vol. 24, "Charlotte Whitton Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada—Summer 1932 R.B. Bennett Report," 33.

<sup>36</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*. "Speech from the Throne," 17<sup>th</sup> Parl., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 12 March 1931, 3 <<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/parlinfo/Documents/ThroneSpeech/17-02-e.pdf>> (27 June 2009).

Bennett believed that Liberal inaction was, in large part, responsible for Canada's struggles with joblessness and poverty. He felt that the Conservatives' willingness to ruthlessly attack unemployment immediately would set his government apart. He gained office based on his promise of eradicating these social ills. Issues rather than political ideology drove the 1930 vote, and Bennett was the only candidate promising to call a special session of parliament on unemployment directly after the Conservative party gained office. At the time, Canadians wanted the return of prosperity, and valued this over any platform, ideology, or party leader.<sup>37</sup> Although Bennett gained victory by focusing on unemployment, making this issue the cornerstone of his platform, the administration's ability to quickly deliver on this promise became the sole action it would be judged on.

Until 1932, speed characterized Bennett's approach to relief. His administration's chief concern when constructing the first Relief Act was how quickly it could be issued, instead of what it contained. Bennett had promised action, but he had "only the vaguest idea of what [his measures] would accomplish."<sup>38</sup> The first five weeks in office leading up to the special session of parliament, therefore, have been noted for their haste.

Bennett was "a blur of motion" who "drove himself, his ministers, and his staff to the limits of physical endurance" while readying for the session.<sup>39</sup> The \$20 million allocated for relief set an unprecedented record in the extension of federal monies. Bennett increased fivefold the amount spent by the previous union government during the 1919-

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<sup>37</sup> Larry A. Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party Under R.B. Bennett 1927-1938* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 97.

<sup>38</sup> H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Macmillan Press, 1972), 57.

<sup>39</sup> John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 207; Glassford, 111.

1922 recession.<sup>40</sup> However, the Act acknowledged only indirect federal responsibility as the government assumed no new federal obligations.<sup>41</sup> To combat the new extent of unemployment, Bennett funnelled increased funds into the existing patchwork system of relief. Determined to avoid responsibility, Bennett attached few strings to his funds, instead allowing each province and municipality to allocate and administer the money as they saw fit. Since the federal government neither provided the stipend for, nor requested the hiring of, specially trained administration, the provinces and municipalities felt no obligation to employ able staff or invent efficient relief systems. Therefore, instead of creating a solid administrative base, setting national standards, or effecting any coordination across the various provinces, Bennett instead laid the bricks of his new relief policy on a ramshackle foundation.<sup>42</sup>

Bennett's 1931 Relief Act did little more than allocate more funds to the municipalities. Like its predecessor, the Act was "rushed" into Parliament on 1 July 1931, mainly to provide for the immediate food and fuel needs of drought stricken Saskatchewan farmers. Still the federal government avoided setting any new standards of administration, relying again on the existing relief structure to allocate and oversee the federal government monies. By 1932, worsening circumstances forced Bennett to reconsider these earlier assumptions, admitting that, "what at that time seemed to be a local condition... was a world-wide disease."<sup>43</sup> Serving as his own finance minister until 1932, Bennett had firsthand knowledge of the government's financial position. Federal government revenues dropped, yet expenditures remained relatively fixed. To Bennett's

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<sup>40</sup> Glassford, 111.

<sup>41</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 49; Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos*, 56-58

<sup>43</sup> Glassford, 118.

chagrin, by 1931, the national debt rose to over \$121 million, ensuring a deficit.<sup>44</sup>

Fearful of deficits, Bennett's 1931-1932 estimates attempted to cut costs in every possible area, yet, even though he managed a \$37 million decrease out of a total of \$240 million controllable items, Bennett was still in danger. Since relief expenditures, funds for capital projects, and the outstanding Canadian Railroad Deficit were not included in the total, the costs of these items "more than negated" Bennett's attempts to lessen spending.<sup>45</sup> By 1932, Bennett hoped to hand over responsibility for relief to the provinces. The beleaguered provinces, however, were unable to assume complete control of welfare, prompting Bennett to cancel his program of public works as relief measures in favour of direct relief, which was less susceptible to abuse, and could be specifically designed to aid only the most impoverished of citizens.<sup>46</sup>

Contracting Whitton to undertake a study and report of relief appeared to indicate Bennett's recognition that his previous methods of handling relief needed to change. It seemed Bennett was willing to consider reform. Whitton's report did not really mark a great departure from Bennett's previous relief measures. She presented him with a conservative document based on the traditional belief in lesser eligibility and fiscal conservatism. Almost all Whitton's suggestions, including her recommendation that skilled professionals replace untrained relief staff, were couched within the rhetoric of cost efficiency. Trained staff, however, had never been Bennett's priority because proper reorganization of the system required both the hiring of professionals instead of unskilled workers, and also an increase in staff. Since the beginning of the Depression, Canada's social workers had seen their workload double, with no matching increase in staff,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 119.

something that Whitton observed while on tour.<sup>47</sup> In a reorganized system, new staff would be required to properly handle the increasing volume of casework. Trained professionals would also expect a salary reflective of their specialized education. Recognizing this, Bennett had never before provided funds for the hiring of competent staff.<sup>48</sup>

Whitton's certainty that social work professionals would have improved the quality of Canada's relief system has been questioned by authors such as Regina Kunzel and Linda Gordon. By comparing the social scientific approach of social workers to that of volunteer administrators, these authors have shown that social workers did not always provide superior care. In particular, the social worker's emphasis on casework, and reviewing each individual applying for relief dispassionately before diagnosing their needs and prescribing a solution, removed the human element of benevolence. As well, although social workers claimed superiority based on their new, scholarly, professional training, their approach to social work was often less progressive than that of volunteer administrators. As Gordon shows, social workers were more likely to defend the patriarchal system and discourage social reform.<sup>49</sup>

While these authors would take issue against Whitton's claim that social workers were best suited to administer Canada's relief system, Bennett's decision not to act on Whitton's suggestions regarding social workers did not take into account their suitability, but instead, was motivated by cost efficiency. Had he been willing to spend the funds

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<sup>47</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 49-50.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Regina Kunzel, "The Professionalization of Benevolence: Evangelicals and Social Workers in the Florence Crittenton Homes, 1915-1945," *Journal of Social History* 22.1 (Autumn, 1988), 22-45; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880-1960* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

necessary to place social workers in charge of relief, presumably, Bennett would have done so. Whitton promised that social workers would soon end abuses of the system and needless extravagances by introducing new efficiency, and using their superior casework skills to definitively identify those who did, and did not, deserve relief funds, all of which supported Bennett's desired approach to relief. However, her request was still too sweeping and expensive for Bennett to undertake. Whitton asked Bennett to re-staff the relief system at every level, a request that would have required the federal government to set and oversee standards for these new employees and venture into an area where it had never previously assumed responsibility. Despite the overall conservative nature of Whitton's document, this suggestion went against Bennett's belief in limited government intervention and fiscal responsibility. As well, Bennett was still convinced of the temporary nature of unemployment, and the emergency nature of federal aid. The total re-staffing Whitton requested was suitable to a permanent system of relief and Bennett was not willing to enter the federal government into a longtime commitment.

Bennett preferred to remain at arm's length from the provision of relief. He focused on Whitton's charges of extravagance and abuse within the system and introduced budgetary reductions. Between 1931 and 1932, federal expenditure on relief dropped from \$42,341,690 to \$25,927,573.<sup>50</sup> While Whitton hoped her accusations would spur Bennett to action, she would be ultimately disappointed with his reaction. She wanted Bennett to use her proposal to reform the existing relief system through centralization and the appointment of specialized, experienced, and educated administrators. Instead, her recommendations only furthered Bennett's desire to

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<sup>50</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 91.

completely extricate his government from the responsibility of relief. By focusing on perceived abuses, rather than highlighting the suffering of Western Canada's thousands of impoverished, Whitton gave Bennett a skewed vision of Western poverty. While she did mention those who were in need of aid, it was her scathing critique of those who did not that stands out. Understandably, Bennett felt little compulsion to reform a system that, in Whitton's opinion, appeared to reward those who had other means of aiding themselves. As staunch Conservatives, both Bennett and Whitton prized the values of thrift, initiative, and self-reliance over all others, and viewed relief as a humiliating last resort. Whitton yearned for her report to open new doors for social work professionals, but Bennett was too eager to end federal involvement in relief spending; he had little interest in instituting reforms and creating a long-term plan for welfare.

Bennett's refusal to act on the report only further reflects his insistence that unemployment was a temporary condition and a provincial and municipal responsibility. Bennett would not endorse a new approach until 1935 when, on 2 January, he took to the airwaves to broadcast his New Deal legislation, famously declaring the end of the old order and *laissez-faire* government.<sup>51</sup> At the time of introducing these measures, Bennett claimed he had always planned these reforms, but had had to wait until his party "achiev[ed] some stabilization and improvement in conditions" and "prepared the way" for reform.<sup>52</sup> His rejection of Whitton's report, however, and the opportunity to introduce a solution to Canada's unemployment issues at this earlier date, challenges the honesty of

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<sup>51</sup> LAC, Stevens Papers, vol. 28, First Bennett Address, 2 January 1935, qtd. in Glassford, *Reaction and Reform*, 155.

<sup>52</sup> Bennett qtd. in Watkins, *R.B. Bennett: A Biography* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), 253, 256.

the New Deal legislation. It supports the thesis that holds the 1935 New Deal marked a futile bid to retain power in an election year, rather than a real support of reform.<sup>53</sup>

In early January 1935, Bennett surprised both his colleagues, and Canadian citizens, by delivering a set of speeches, broadcast on national radio, that promised to reform the existing relief system. As Bennett intoned to the nation, “the old order is gone....if you believe things should be left as they are, you and I hold contrary and irreconcilable views. I am for reform. And, in my mind, reform means government intervention.”<sup>54</sup> His five speeches outlined a new course for the Conservative administration. Bennett promised to introduce a minimum wage, unemployment insurance, introduce a progressive system of taxation, reorganize the civil service, and protect consumers against monopolies. The goal was “to ensure to all classes and to all parts of the country a greater degree of equality in the distribution of the benefits of the capitalist system.”<sup>55</sup>

The speeches appeared out of nowhere. In holding with his authoritative leadership style, Bennett had told no one outside of his brother in law W.D. Herridge, the Canadian Ambassador to the Washington, and his speech writer of his intent. Therefore, when he made the speeches, the promises contained in them were as new to his cabinet, caucus, and fellow party members as they were to Canadian citizens.<sup>56</sup> As well, although the speeches promised new policy, an “embarrassingly meager proportion” of this proposed new legislation had been readied, something that became all too apparent when

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<sup>53</sup> See: Larry A. Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party under R. B. Bennett, 1927- 1938* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 156-157; James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 47-48; Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 110-114.

<sup>54</sup> Bennett quoted in Glassford, *Reaction and Reform*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 126.

<sup>56</sup> Glassford, 155.

parliament reopened a week after Bennett's last broadcast.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the constitutionality of Bennett's proposals was questionable at best. The legislation called for increased federal government intervention into areas previously under the sole jurisdiction of the provinces. While the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), at that time Canada's highest court of appeal, had previously allowed the Bennett administration new power over radio broadcasting and national aviation, it was uncertain whether or not the JCPC would allow this new request to expand federal authority.<sup>58</sup>

Bennett had prepared for debate on the legislation promised in the radio broadcasts to continue for weeks. The Conservatives expected the Mackenzie King led Liberals to attack the New Deal, after which the Conservatives could dissolve parliament, call an election, and campaign on the premise that only their party was truly in favour of reform. Instead of challenging the New Deal in a prolonged debate, however, King called on Bennett to prove his willingness to reform. King asked his party to support the legislation and withhold further judgment until it had been proved constitutional.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when the unemployment, minimum wage, maximum hours of work, and weekly day of rest bills were introduced, the Liberals voted in favour.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, before any other legislation could be introduced, Bennett fell ill in February. Without its leader at the helm, the Conservative administration lost the momentum gained by the New Deal's introduction. Bennett adjourned the session for six weeks and, by the time

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<sup>57</sup> Thompson and Seager, 264.

<sup>58</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 128.

<sup>59</sup> The New Deal legislation was submitted to the JCPC in 1936, which, in January 1937, ruled most of the legislation *ultra vires*.

<sup>60</sup> Glassford, 160.

parliament was dissolved for an election in July, the New Deal promises had become “ancient history.”<sup>61</sup>

At the time, Bennett’s New Deal broadcasts and legislation were seen as more of a desperate concession than true attempt at reform. Most, especially those members of the Liberal opposition, felt that the legislation was again a hastily designed reaction to worsening conditions and his rapidly decreasing popularity during an election year. As Mackenzie King noted of the broadcasts in his diary, “It was really pathetic the absolute rot and gush he talked...[if] the people will fall for that kind of thing there is no saving them.”<sup>62</sup> Today, most scholars have also held that Bennett’s January 1935 broadcasts and ensuing few bills represented, at best, “an act of sheer opportunism born out of political desperation.”<sup>63</sup> Although Gad Horowitz argues that, if one recognizes that Canadian Conservative ideology has something “non-liberal” about it, Bennett’s New Deal legislation does not seem like such a bizarre departure from the party line, even Horowitz is hesitant to defend Bennett unconditionally. As Horowitz contends, once Bennett is recognized as a Canadian Conservative, “it is possible to entertain the suggestion that Bennett’s sudden radicalism...may not have been *mere* opportunism. It may have been a manifestation ...of a latent “tory democratic” streak.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, Bennett’s New Deal has most often been characterized as a “marketing coup;” Bennett needed to re-brand the Conservative party as an organization that was willing to take drastic action to bring prosperity to Canadian citizens.<sup>65</sup> He felt that by riding on the popularity of neighbour Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, he too could again cultivate the favour of

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<sup>61</sup> Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> LAC, W.L. Mackenzie King *Diaries*, 9 January 1935.

<sup>63</sup> Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 127

<sup>64</sup> Gad Horowitz. *Canadian Labour in Politics*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 22.

<sup>65</sup> Glassford, 157.

Canadians.<sup>66</sup> As scholars note, Bennett himself was not even the author of the broadcasts and legislation. Bennett's brother-in-law, W.D. Herridge was Canada's ambassador to Washington at the time. Working with the Roosevelt administration during this time granted Herridge a first hand view of the effectiveness of the New Deal in America. With Bennett's popularity waning, and an election approaching, Herridge convinced Bennett to devise a Canadianized New Deal. Bennett was not even involved in constructing his broadcasts. Instead, Herridge met with Rod Finlayson, Bennett's speechwriter, while Bennett was in Europe and these two men concocted the Canadian New Deal.<sup>67</sup>

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Bennett's almost total rejection of Whitton's report supports this view of the New Deal as desperate attempt to hold on to office. Her submission of the report in 1932 marked a moment, three years before the New Deal, when Bennett could have acted to reform the system, yet remained silent. His inaction at this time illustrates the opportunistic nature of the New Deal. He was willing to act on reform when it became politically expedient for him to do so. In 1932, reorganization was too expensive and interventionist a measure for Bennett to take. In 1935, reform remained costly and still necessitated new federal government responsibility, but it had become politically necessary to ensure the Conservative's survival in office. In 1932, in the face of the failure of his previous policies, Bennett sought new answers to the question of relief and unemployment in Canada. Yet, Bennett, as a social and fiscal Conservative, was unwilling to take the steps necessary to implement the logical suggestions of Whitton's

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.,157.

<sup>67</sup> Glassford, 153-155; Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 127-128; Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos*, 66-68; Thompson and Seager, 263-264.

traditionalist report. He chose only to create make work camps for the unemployed, a measure that confirmed, rather than deviated from, his conservatism. Afraid the federal government would lose control over the seemingly delinquent groups of restless transients, Bennett extended federal responsibility to include control over these men. This move marked an effort to ensure the social order, not a recognition that the federal powers should intervene into the lives of Canadian citizens to ameliorate unemployment.

Whitton's recommendation that trained personnel replace current relief administrators, while sensible, necessitated the kind of government expansion and expenditure of funds Bennett sought to avoid. He would only take these kinds of measures when his hand was forced, as it was in 1935. Whitton's six-hundred page relief report was to have been her masterpiece. Confident her suggestions and opinions would merit the attention of Canada's top policymakers, she expected her work would open the way for social workers. Bennett, however, ignored the report's central suggestion and made no move to replace the existing personnel. Given Bennett's respect for Whitton, his lack of reaction to her report seems puzzling. However, little evidence exists to explain Bennett's, and Whitton's, silence on this matter. The two maintained a correspondence about her report before, during, and immediately after her tour, and they most likely held at least one meeting about her findings at Bennett request in late August 1932 just after her tour's end. On 16 August 1932, Bennett sent Whitton a telegram asking if they could meet before the 27 of August to discuss her work.<sup>68</sup> Whitton once wrote to Bennett while on tour to say that she had "pondered the wisdom of making some short statement" to the public, notifying them that the government was undertaking a review of the "facts of the [unemployment and relief] situation," to be followed by a more formal, specific statement

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<sup>68</sup> Bennett Papers, vol. 706, M-1398, Telegram Bennett to Whitton, 16 August 1932.

after the report's finish, but no such statement was ever issued.<sup>69</sup> Once back in Ottawa, in a letter on 5 October 1932, Whitton asked if she might read a short statement to the members of the CCCW's executive clarifying that "at your request I made the report, on which I have been engaged this summer."<sup>70</sup> It is uncertain, however, if Bennett responded to this request. While the two may have met face to face to speak of the matter, given the seeming import of the report to Bennett's approach to relief, and Whitton's professional aspirations, the lack of evidence documenting Bennett's lack of response to her report is strange.

Instead of implementing the suggestions contained in Whitton's report and placing Canada's entire relief system under the administration of social workers, perhaps in an attempt to appease Whitton, Bennett once again promoted only Whitton and the CCCW. Upon the retirement of Dr. Helen MacMurchy the head of the Child Welfare Division of the Federal Department of Pensions and Health, Bennett allowed the CCCW and Whitton to take on this position, effectively turning Whitton into an official government advisor for the last year of his tenure. If Whitton had felt any bitterness towards Bennett, this move must have placated it, for she never spoke out against him, or let her professional disappointment condition their relationship. She so honoured her commitment to him that she never discussed the report in detail. Even in a 1972 television interview, thirty years later, she still would only allude to her work. After anecdotally recounting a memory from her tour, the interviewer asked, "what were you doing in those remote places?" She replied only "I was making a report confidentially to

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Whitton to Bennett, 3 July 1932.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Whitton to Bennett, 5 October 1932.

Mr. Bennett.”<sup>71</sup> She also staunchly defended him throughout her life, stating in 1972 that Bennett had been sadly misunderstood, and his actions misconstrued: “If ever there was a man that this country has wronged and that history will right, it is RB Bennett. That man I knew well, he was honourable and courageous.”<sup>72</sup>

An analysis of Charlotte Whitton’s report reveals as much about its author as it does the unemployment and relief issues facing Western Canada in 1932. Through a study of her report’s observations and suggestions, it is Whitton’s personal biases and professional aspirations that stand out. Instead of producing an impartial review of Depression-era conditions, and offering suggestions based on a professional consideration of the information she gathered while on tour, Whitton allowed her staunchly Conservative ideology, and professional ambitions, shape her work for Bennett just as they had with the surveys of juvenile immigration and mothers’ allowances Whitton undertook in the years prior to 1932. While Whitton’s summer tour of the drought and pest-stricken prairie provinces afforded her a first-hand view of some of the nation’s worst scenes of impoverishment, nothing she saw altered her strict beliefs on Anglo-Canadian supremacy, the division between the deserving and undeserving poor, limited federal government intervention, and fiscal responsibility. Even Whitton’s central suggestions that social work professionals take over the administration of relief had little to do with a concern for Canada’s suffering citizens. Instead, it offered

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<sup>71</sup> As Whitton recounted, the roads around Peace River and other remote locations were so terrible that her CPR car, donated to her after she had reached ‘the end of steel,’ started to break, and she ended up carrying its bumper in her backseat for the majority of the tour. Charlotte Whitton, interviewed by John Hamilton, *Distinguished Canadians*, CBC-TV, 14 August 1972. Online via *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. [http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties\\_leaders/clips/15849](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties_leaders/clips/15849).

<sup>72</sup> Charlotte Whitton, interviewed by John Hamilton, *Distinguished Canadians*, CBC-TV, 14 August 1972. Online via *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. [http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties\\_leaders/clips/15849](http://archives.cbc.ca/politics/parties_leaders/clips/15849).

employment to the many social workers she represented. Just as they had in her work prior to accepting Bennett's commission, Whitton's personal beliefs and desires rendered her insensible to an informed understanding of the nature of poverty.

Interestingly, although an analysis of Whitton's report reveals much about its author, this particular episode in the history of the Depression also casts light on Bennett. Through a study of Whitton's report, and Bennett's reaction to it, we gain a new understanding of Bennett's approach to unemployment and relief during the Depression. While it has been argued that Bennett was for reform, and that his New Deal represented an actual attempt to change the Conservative's *laissez faire* approach to governing and support of the traditionally conservative response to relief, Bennett's almost total rejection of Whitton's report casts doubt on this positive interpretation of Bennett's reaction to the Depression. Instead, as this thesis has argued, Bennett's failure to act on Whitton's report exposes Bennett as a reluctant reformer, a man who preferred to maintain the status quo until absolutely no other option was available to him.

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