The Crucifixion Machine and the Quest for Efficiency

The Relief Industry, Administration

There are few better accounts with which to begin an assessment of municipal relief administration than that of an anonymous Depression-era employee of Vancouver’s Relief Department. The recollection is drawn from an interview by Barry Broadfoot in the early 1970s and published in the classic *Ten Lost Years*:

It got so I hated those people coming to our office for relief. Really hated them, and I guess now I know it was the system I hated and not them, because they were just the end result of the system. I didn’t mean the young men, or even the middle aged fellows who were single or who had left their families. It was the chaps my age, in a way, the ones without jobs, of course, who might have had a house and certainly a wife and kids. . . . It was the way these men had lost their spirit, almost their will to survive, and they’d come shuffling into that office and ask for something more and I’d sometimes scream at them, “Get the hell out of here. Go down to False Creek and drown yourself. There’s the way, right down the hill, and now, beat it.” They’d just stand there and take it and then say something like, “My kids need shoes to go to school,” or “My wife has pleurisy and I can’t get no doctor to come and see her,” and you’d just have to grit your teeth and reach for a form. . . . I didn’t like what was happening to me. In that office I could see the rottenness of the relief system, what it did to people, the graft, and oh yes, there was plenty of that, and the phoney contracts and the phoney people and especially the politicians. You know, there is something
about politics that brings out the very worst in people. . . . So I’d blow up at these people who would come in, and after, I’d apologize, and they would usually just look at me with those goddamned eyes they had. They didn’t hate me. Can’t even give them that much credit. I found myself turning into a hateful person, spiteful, taking it out on some person when it really couldn’t have been his fault. Yelling at my wife, cuffing my kids, snarling at my neighbours, and why? Why? Because I knew that I was part of a system which was wrong, and it was turning me wrong, and to protect my wife and kids I had to keep going wrong, and more wrong, just like you can’t be a little pregnant. . . .

Not enough money. Too many people. A lot of that money going to the wrong people. Wrong people running the relief office. Forms so complicated you wouldn’t believe, and you couldn’t help the person fill them out — and to this day I’m convinced those forms were made so complicated that nobody could fill them out. I know I couldn’t fill out three out of three correctly all the time. Getting deeper and deeper.¹

This reminiscence beautifully captures several registers of the Depression-era crisis. That the spending required to sustain the unemployed masses in Vancouver proved fertile field for corruption and maladministration is no great shock, at least not to twenty-first-century eyes, well accustomed as they are to revelations concerning what Gramsci called “bribery-corruption,” the path to power that lies somewhere beyond consent and coercion.² Nor is it surprising to learn of complicated forms and regulations that frustrated applicants’ quests for assistance: in 1936, City Comptroller W. Wardhaugh admitted, “The City has now reached a stage where regulations have become so elaborate in their nature as to be almost impracticable.”³ But the most powerful effect conveyed by the speaker is the transformation visited upon him as a result of the gaze of the unemployed, “those goddamned eyes they had.” To earn one’s living by being presented with a mask of subjection and a story of need — a ritual repeated many times a day, day after day, under the watchful eyes of efficiency experts — gradually disrupted this employee’s very sense of self, an effect that moved from public to private spheres and back again, infecting his relations with others everywhere he went. The “system,” in this account, entailed suffering not just for the poor people forced to endure this bureaucratic process but also for the people charged with administering the process, those who had to “keep going wrong,” “getting deeper and deeper” into the rationalized life in order to survive.

With its tragic account of how modern forms of governance can poison social relationships, the story of this anonymous 1930s Relief Department employee would not have been out of place in Siegfried Kracauer’s The Salaried Masses, the brilliant survey of the transformation of the world of white-collar
workers in late-1920s Berlin. Combining close attention to the effects of scientific management practices in the workplace with a sharp eye for signs of the attendant loss of community and the increased feelings of “homelessness” elsewhere, Kracauer’s name for this dramatic change was “rationalization,” the leading forces of which could be readily identified: “development towards the modern large-scale enterprise, with a simultaneous transformation of its organizational form; growth of the apparatus of distribution; expansion of social security and large associations regulating the collective life of numerous groups.”

Kracauer’s description captures many of the key indices of change in Vancouver’s Relief Department in the early 1930s. The transient crisis and the firing of George Ireland guaranteed that fundamental changes to municipal relief provision would follow the street fights and boardroom battles of the first winter of the decade. Officials discarded the basic policies of Ireland’s paternal regime, which placed great value in Victorian-era traditions of voluntarism and religious mission work, in favour of a modern hierarchical bureaucratic system, under which department employees administered relief to recipients in a thoroughly standardized and rationalized fashion. This transition was both rapid and thorough, in that most of the personnel and policies in place in 1929 had been purged by 1932. Over these years, faced with a hitherto unseen mass demand for state resources, Vancouver’s Relief Department became a home for Fordist projects in relief governance that combined the modern practices of the scientific management movement with those of scientific charity provision, sometimes smoothly and sometimes with chaotic results.

One of the central targets of the postmodern critique of Marxist histories is the latter’s supposedly universal and necessary dependence on an ostensibly crude analytical framework of depths and disguises. Marxists, so the story goes, are obliged to approach evidence with a surface-depth model, whether ideological or psychological, in order to “reduce” (via their “shrill economic determinism”) historical subjects to class, because attention to surfaces alone, we all know, means admitting that the languages of class were rarely spoken, and those of status were even rarer. The traditional Marxian focus on class, as the main analytical factor to be mined in making history intelligible, has often led to an unsatisfying rejection of surface phenomena, for example, social practices, as ideological through and through and therefore not to be taken seriously. In the Canadian context, for instance, we have learned that “Marxist writers have often described the goals and ideals of various government programs as ‘mere rhetoric,’ as an ideological cover for the ‘real interests’ of the ruling class,” the implication being that Marxists must consider most history as “mere rhetoric” since the “actual rhetoric” has little do with class, at least as Marxists tend to understand it. In contrast,
Foucault offers a nominalist account of the techniques and technologies of power in the modern age, with a focus on surfaces without depths, effects without causes, and localities without universals. As he explained in early 1979, “instead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practice, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices.” Setting aside the abstractions evident in Marxism, Foucault claimed, enabled the emergence of more effective leftist frameworks for understanding the workings of power, a rationale invoked by Canadian acolytes.

This position relies on problematic unspoken foundations — that governmentality and power-knowledge have little to do with the history of capitalism, save for instances of the factory as laboratory for disciplinary projects, and that discussions of these subjects will not benefit from the singular account of “government programs” offered by the likewise singular Marxist interpretive model. These underpinnings have needlessly narrowed the field of studies, neglecting already existing Marxist and quasi-Marxist knowledge and avoiding research agendas that would produce more. In reality, Foucauldian nominalism can be sustained only by taking up antinominalist positions in relation to capitalogic, and to economic and social history more generally. For instance, in the Canadian context, we have the concept of the “mixed social economy” of public and private welfare measures that excludes substantive consideration of the private market, although with important exceptions.

Fortunately, long-standing research on Fordism’s history in North America and elsewhere allows us to set aside many of the strategic fragments of anti-Marxist anti-nominalism that permeate Foucault’s published and unpublished work, especially during the latter half of the 1970s, and to address the points of contact between social relations of production, distribution, and consumption, and relations of governance.

Obviously, the script of Fordist rationalization of Vancouver’s relief industry differed considerably from scientific management projects involving heavy industry. Yet the similarities to be observed at the level of day-to-day practice in the workplace are striking. Vancouver officials struggled with the sizeable burden of administrative costs and, in response, devoted much time and effort to the fragmentation and isolation of numerous variables in the relief process. They had an eye to increasing the efficiency of administration and surveillance while lowering the overall cost to the municipality (other governments could worry about their own balance sheets). Each step in the process was tailored according to instrumental logics that officials believed would serve these sometimes contradictory interests — and this was the case for private charities as much as for public programs. Moreover, administrative abstractions played a vital role in the organization of relief on such a large
scale. By translating qualities into quantities, individual human needs into mass categories of provision, these abstractions allowed elected politicians and appointed bureaucrats to negotiate among themselves and to implement changes to relief policies in categorical terms: a change from grocery order to scrip, for instance, was implemented wholesale for hundreds if not thousands of jobless people and their dependants, regardless of the diverse needs and preferences of those placed into these groups. In a similar fashion, entire groups could be declared ineligible for civic relief. Finally, like offices across the country, the department’s internal procedures also came under watchful regulation. With the help of auditors, officials took apart and reorganized the administrative practices employed during Ireland’s long reign. The end result was an extensive network that allowed for the surveillance not just of relief recipients but also of the department’s workforce. Gone was most of the employee’s power of discretion: rationalized decision-making procedures ensured a standardized approach to each applicant. In the midst of a capitalist crisis, Vancouver’s top political minds looked to business for new methods to organize the administration of relief to those already well versed in the abstract rhythms of capitalogic.

Yet this is also a story about transient effects: the developments surveyed here have as their absent cause the jungle building and other processes that allowed the unemployed to evade direct control, even in the forms practised in provincial work camps and private shelters. Because British Columbia, and Vancouver specifically, remained an inevitable destination for thousands of itinerants, despite municipal and provincial government campaigns for the RCMP and the railway companies to police the border and turn away transients, both the Relief Department and private charities saw their pre-Depression networks of relief provision rendered obsolete, incapable of processing mass demand in a proper fashion and necessitating the creation of new ones. These new networks, however, could not be said to adequately provide discipline for the thousands of transients, whether currently in the system or on the road, heading back to Hobohemia and temporary freedom from the market and the state. Not until the federalization of British Columbia’s camp system in October 1932 would Vancouver’s managers of relief provision believe that appropriate disciplinary measures could be taken against single unattached homeless men who sought food and shelter (although this same group eventually lost faith in this assessment). In this early period, the journey from itinerant to transient, whereby an unattached man became subject to administrative practices of relief provision, was as likely to prove destabilizing for the municipality as it was for applicants.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first details the widening financial and administrative crisis engendered by transients during Colonel H.W. Cooper’s reign as relief officer. Gradually, civic officials found themselves
overwhelmed by the deluge and adopted two measures in hopes of relieving the burden: a lobby campaign to force provincial and federal assumption of responsibility for transients and a private initiative designed to increase the number of recipients who fit within that category of relief provision. The second section charts the beginnings of the transformation of Relief Department practices through scientific management, focusing on the centrality of administrative costs to the overall functioning of municipal relief administration. This chapter ends with a look at the intensification of the reorganization under Relief Officer W.R. Bone. Ironically, the greatest changes to follow from the transient crisis had no effect upon itinerant homeless men. In the summer of 1932, Bone introduced a standardized set of workplace procedures designed to allow for efficient administration and investigation of both family relief applicants and departmental employees. These groups, and not the much-feared transient, experienced the full effects of Relief Department rationalization, resulting in food riots, mass protests, and union strife. Even in the case of our anonymous bureaucrat, the acts whereby he abstracted and objectified the life stories of other people to produce case files in return for wages were at the same time acts calculated in advance to maximize his productivity through a regime of time-work discipline. And his memories of the thousands of eyes? Those he got for free, although he surely paid a large price.

“The Situation is Beyond Our Control”: Mass Need Meets Mass Administration

The thirty-first of December 1930 was William McQueen’s last day as city clerk of Vancouver. One of his final tasks was to wire the following motion, passed that afternoon by City Council, to Ottawa; given its contents, we might wonder if McQueen registered the experience as an unfortunate end to his career:

Whereas the unemployed situation in this City is of such magnitude that it is beyond the capacity of the City to make adequate provision for the men and women unemployed.

Whereas there are thousands of people in this City who are hungry and are in need of clothing and shelter.

And whereas there is in this Dominion enough of all these things that the unemployed need.

Be it therefore resolved that we wire the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. R.B. Bennett, informing him that the situation in Vancouver is beyond our control.13
The spirit of civic optimism vividly articulated at the January 1930 conference on unemployment turned out to be no match for the force of material circumstance in the form of an ever-growing population of jobless and homeless transients. In normal times, unemployment declined in the spring as the industries reliant on unskilled common labour such as logging and construction began their season. The spring of 1930 saw no such decline; many resource-based industries found it impossible to sell existing supply stocks, and unemployment and underemployment, as well as demand for municipal relief, increased across the province.\textsuperscript{14} In Vancouver, the itinerant presence only expanded with the passage of time.

This section sketches the financial and political dimensions of municipal relief provision, setting the stage for a look at the shifting meanings of “transient” as an administrative category. With Vancouver quickly regaining its decades-old reputation as a mecca for boxcar tourists and the Relief Department threatening to collapse under the cost of doing business, officials responded with a two-pronged strategy: they would seek to force the provincial and federal governments to assume responsibility for transient bodies and to remove them from urban centres, and they would expand the category itself, administratively ensnaring an increasing number of unattached men and creating new generations of “transients.” Taken together, these positions did not resolve the crisis, but they did shift the locus of governmental responsibility, raising new sets of administrative questions.

In April 1930, City Council passed a resolution asking for help from the provincial government on the basis of an estimate that 60 percent of relief cases had resided in Vancouver for less than six months.\textsuperscript{15} By June’s end, after Colonel H.W. Cooper had become the relief officer, the department had already consumed almost $350,000 of its $500,000 budget, and City Comptroller A.J. Pilkington estimated that an additional appropriation of at least $250,000 was required to cover projected expenditures for the remaining six months.\textsuperscript{16} Officials complained to Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie that “this financial burden is far beyond what the City either can or should be called upon to assume.” Most of the problem, they felt, could be laid at the feet of transients: using statistics taken at the height of the influx in January 1930, they suggested that the “floating population” accounted for 80 percent of single cases and 30 percent of married cases. Hoping to prompt provincial action and to reduce their own budget, Vancouver officials ceased all relief programs for single men, transient and resident, on 10 May; married men who could not prove a continuous twelve-month residency lost their eligibility on 29 July.\textsuperscript{17} Civic officials opted to end relief for transients not because these people no longer required support but in defence of their argument about jurisdictional responsibility: these cases rightly belonged to other cities. Alderman Angus MacInnis criticized the policy as impractical, suggesting that officials could

\textbf{The Crucifixion Machine and the Quest for Efficiency} 121

doi:10.15215/aupress/9781926836287.01
not enforce the requirement of twelve months of continuous residence because “you’d have to bury them before a year was up.”

Despite the policy shift, relief remained an open wound for the civic treasury. In October, Cooper announced, “The number of unemployed in the City today, cannot be less than 10,000.” Department officials observed a marked increase in applications from white-collar workers, a dangerous sign of things to come. By the third week of November, the department registered over 4,500 married men, 5,200 single men, and 144 women. Cooper maintained that these figures understated the extent of unemployment because groups like clerical workers, seamen, and union members tended to avoid state relief programs if they could. The much-hoped-for abatement of relief spending was nowhere in sight, and the streets once again turned turbulent: December 1930 witnessed unemployed demonstrations led by the usual Communist organizers. The transient was at the centre of social disorder. In the early 1930s, the transient question always possessed a particular charge on the West Coast, subsuming other types of social conflict that wracked North America. Even the campaign to ban married women from wage work failed to gather much steam in Vancouver in this period: one Mrs. Fleming noticed that Alderman Atherton raised the issue at a City Council meeting but “did not get any support.” “Why don’t they wake up?” she asked, lamenting that public discourse about state expenditures somehow always managed to miss the point.

Complaints about the cost of relief provision to transients often dominated the council’s agenda. Yet many of the budgetary issues that led to civic debt can be traced to the added expenses associated with work relief programs, enshrined as the preferred form of provision by the federal government in the Unemployment Relief Act of 1930, and not to the itinerant hordes. The act was “a measure bold in conception, yet simple in operation,” in Colonel Cooper’s judgment: “Its sponsors at least showed courage and initiative in this experiment.” His optimistic assessment is not shared by most historians, who instead point to the financial drain on municipal resources that the program entailed. The act allotted $20 million — $16 million for work relief and $4 million for direct relief — to be administered by local governments. The federal share of work relief projects was limited to 25 percent; in order to qualify, municipalities were required to put up 50 percent of the cost, with a further 25 percent contributed by the Province. The cost of equipment and other materials as well as supervisory labour costs also belonged exclusively to cities. Cooper complimented the Unemployment Relief Act for “capturing the imagination of the public.” Its structure, nonetheless, made it an expensive proposition. Federal money was allotted on the basis of the ability of municipalities to fund their share of the project, not according to the extent of unemployment in that locality; cities with small budgets or large numbers of jobless found it difficult to raise the money to provide
enough work for all in need. While work relief remained the ideal form of relief provision to able-bodied men because it provided the municipality with both economic and moral dividends, or so it was thought, federal regulations made it impractical to launch projects that would put even the majority of unemployed men in Vancouver to work.

Work relief cost municipalities more than direct relief for several reasons. Projects required gang bosses, supervisors, engineers, and the occasional architect. They also involved an abundance of machines, tools, and other materials. Often, these had to be purchased for the specific task at hand; road-building projects, for instance, could require a greater number of shovels than possessed by smaller municipalities, and the use of equipment on work relief projects contributed to its depreciation. These schemes also often involved extensive capital outlays. During the early 1930s, Vancouver involved hundreds of unemployed men, most of them married residents, in the construction of the Fraser Golf Course, a municipally owned enterprise in South Vancouver. Many politicians favoured this project because once completed, it would produce revenue. Yet for the unemployed to be able to finish the first nine holes so that the course could open, the municipality had to commit money to purchasing a large number of lots that remained in private hands. At a time when many businesses were forced to undertake retrenchment measures, government spending of this type inevitably ruffled feathers. Finally, because this type of program was predicated upon an exchange — relief in return for work — it appealed to those who hesitated to accept charity because of its association with dependence. Relief Officer Cooper noted a marked increase in the number of single men applying for relief after the department began a program requiring them to work one day per week for their relief. “These men would not accept relief unless they gave some return for it,” he explained. This was the revenge of work discipline: more applicants came out of the woodwork to take advantage of the opportunity to work for relief, overturning accepted wisdom that work-test programs always reduced the number of applicants. In many ways, work relief projects had a disproportionate effect on civic resources compared to direct relief, so much so that Vancouver officials illegally diverted provincial relief funds to cover their own administrative spending on bylaw-mandated road work projects in 1933 and 1934.

Cooper eventually recognized that the policies laid out in the 1930 Unemployment Relief Act would not resolve the bulk of Vancouver’s difficulties because of the investment required of the municipality. The will to put transients to work was there, but the resources were not. Only one month after it was enacted by law, Cooper estimated that he needed an additional grant of $127,000 to cover expenses on work relief projects. Despite the lack of available funds, Cooper emphasized the moral and physical benefits accruing to those who required work of recipients: regardless of budgetary
constraints, married men should be obliged to work one day per week in return for their allotment of groceries in order to “prevent the deterioration inevitable to a long spell of idleness. A conscientious applicant would feel that he was in some measure earning his family's food, and it would also serve to eliminate any who might attempt to impose upon the humanity of the taxpayers.”

Gangs of single men found themselves clearing driftwood from English Bay beach and cutting logs into firewood to be used to heat the houses of married relief cases. Recognizing the limited disciplinary reach of his department, Cooper hoped that private citizens would band together to provide programs for single transients in order “to make profitable their enforced idleness.” However, as noted, federal policy made it too expensive for the Relief Department to arrange for work for all male relief recipients, resident and transient. In future, Vancouver's shrinking work relief budget would be largely reserved for male resident household heads and would be doled out not as a form of punishment but as a reward: in return for working, married men could earn an additional allowance. In this sense, Vancouver work relief projects in the mid-1930s acted as a bonus system analogous to Ford's profit-sharing system for automobile workers.

With expenditures continuously on the rise, the Relief Department's next significant policy shift was announced in March 1931, when Cooper's staff cut loose 2,500 single men, with the rationale that they could not prove residence in Vancouver for a continuous twelve-month period. That January, City Council had explored the possibility of establishing its own work camp for transient single men, only to realize the exorbitant cost of such a project. As a consequence, the council, attempting to force the intervention of the provincial and federal governments, chose to reduce drastically the number of transients drawing from civic coffers. Still, this wave of cuts left Cooper with 1,800 single men still on the rolls, along with more than 3,200 family cases. He did find a ray of sunshine, however, for the new residency qualification enabled staff to turn away the majority of new applicants; in the first week of March, only 24 applicants of a pool of 132 satisfied the domicile requirement. That month, the city also initiated court cases against clients suspected of fraud; three received suspended sentences and six landed in jail for periods ranging from fifteen days to six months.

The policy shift of March 1931 represented a concerted effort to force provincial and federal intervention. Yet both governments proved able to withstand civic intransigence, and as a result, the wholesale disqualification of thousands of single men served as a stimulus to radical political organizations and to independent transient initiatives to claim space within the city as their own. Representatives of the National Unemployed Workers' Association met with the Relief and Employment Committee and held demonstrations resulting in mass arrests, while members of the Independent Labour Party
wrote letters. “The Council when it embarked on this policy knew full well what it [was] doing,” cried one writer in the *Unemployed Worker*. “It knew when it cut these men off relief to ‘fend for themselves’ that they were condemning them to starvation, destitution and jail, to be at the mercy of the wolves.”

The combination of the mass purge of transients and new restrictive access guidelines forced thousands to seek food and shelter outside of established public charity networks. With the March policies, City Council had opted to attempt to restore the municipality’s fiscal health at the expense of subjecting thousands to relief discipline, gambling that the denial of civic relief to transient single men would cause them to go elsewhere. By June, with no improvement in unskilled labour markets in sight, four distinct jungles had sprung up within city limits.

In short, it took a year for Colonel Cooper to lose the war he had been hired to fight. By the summer of 1931, thousands of ungoverned transients had effectively claimed space of their own making, insinuating themselves within the cracks and crevices of the crisis-ridden liberal order and negotiating different paths to making a living on Vancouver’s streets. Alone, the Relief Department could no longer manage the transient crisis while also providing relief to other groups, especially married residents, who, as John Belshaw notes, had a measure of electoral power not possessed by transients.

Local politicians and civil servants would continue to look to intervention at the provincial and federal levels to remove transients from the streets and to prevent more from arriving. Even then, provincial labour camps would prove insufficient, as Vancouver would again be responsible for thousands of transient relief cases that September, when the jungles were razed to the ground, and again in January 1932, with the temporary collapse of the provincial relief camp system. The onset of spring brought the reinstatement of the ban on transients, but it remained tenuous, dependent upon conforming to changing provincial and federal regulations.

During this period, one key idea shaped the thoughts of civic leaders who exerted the greatest influence over policy: responsibility for the fiscal crisis and the occasional breaches of social order lay with single transient men, and without them, the Relief Department could meet the challenges posed by relief. In his final report, Cooper echoed this consensus. “Looking backwards,” he wrote, “we realize that the main difficulty . . . was that of the single men.” In one sense, this idea was from start to finish a fiction: married relief cases typically required a greater share of departmental resources due to the additional outlays to cover dependants, the more extensive forms of investigation, and the preferential treatment accorded them on municipal work relief projects. Nonetheless, the sheer size of the transient unemployment problem deservedly captured public attention in Vancouver in ways not seen in other major Canadian cities. The transient single man figured in...
discussions of policy primarily as an obstacle, that which most impeded the efficient functioning of municipal relief provision. In such a context, Vancouver officials fought to create a segregated system of relief governmentality in which one’s designated residence cut across every other social relationship, determining not just the amount but also the form of relief given and who picked up the bill. These policies would effect an increase in the number of transients in British Columbia and help to generalize the transient crisis outside of the city limits of Vancouver.

Throughout the 1930s, the Relief Department turned away “deserving” transient applicants — the most deserving of which we can imagine as Anglo-Canadian Protestant male household heads who had served in the military and voted for the right party — and expended resources instead on classically “undeserving” residents — single mothers with questionable morals, political dissidents, and so on — because policy accorded a higher value to entitlement claims based on residency than any other, including those based on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, moral conduct, military service, and one’s willingness to work. Simply put, the either/or pair of categories “resident” and “transient” was a fundamental administrative division made among applicants and the basis for their segregation into wholly different channels of relief provision: every other category in use in determining the type of relief was brought into service only after this initial division had been made.43

In those periods when Vancouver was compelled to provide relief to transients, they received as a general rule a lesser amount of food and shelter for a shorter duration than that given residents, and this holds true for most types of relief classifications. The category of “transient” also possessed considerable naming power, sticking with recipients wherever they went. Once a transient, always a transient, and this was true for every type of client: no one could become a resident for the purposes of relief while in receipt of relief, whether from public or private charities, save for a change in marital status. A person on relief had to find continuous employment in Vancouver for twelve months in order to have it considered their domicile by the Relief Department. While the possibility remained that one might through deceit manufacture evidence of fictional roots in the community, in most cases, transients remained transients no matter how long their stay in Vancouver. Such a policy actually worked against a reduction of the relief rolls in one key respect: unwilling to lose their status, unemployed residents commonly refused jobs of a seasonal nature if it meant leaving the city. A stint in British Columbia’s forests or Saskatchewan’s fields that lasted two or three months might not be worth the loss of one’s residency, particularly when said loss meant being ordered to a federal relief camp. The potential for this form of categorization to shape one’s destiny on relief cannot be overstated.
Nonetheless, the category that fixed one’s route through the Relief Department was itself in flux, made and remade through the dialectical interaction of this technology of municipal governance with outside movements and forces. Itinerants themselves—as masses of individuals making their own way through the streets and as organized groups brought together in meetings and demonstrations, parades and riots—certainly contributed to the making of the category that periodically governed their interaction with the market, and business groups, private welfare administrators, religious leaders, and others played key roles at specific junctures. The most significant structural changes to the administrative category of “transient” stemmed from the negotiation of intergovernmental agreements. On several occasions in the early 1930s, provincial and federal officials intervened to assume financial, if not administrative, responsibility for transient cases.

With each new program, a new birthday was born, marking the difference between resident and transient in the administration of a new relief program. For instance, for many transients, the key date was 1 May 1931. In July 1931, Premier Tolmie’s Committee of the Executive Council on Unemployment Relief issued a circular that explained in detail the regulations governing its program for the registration and relief of unemployment. Only those registered would be eligible for provincial relief; although plans for labour camps had not yet been formalized, it was clear that this was the preferred solution to the transient problem, with registration as the first step to enacting a program. Regardless, the circular must have sent a chill through the hearts of relief officers across British Columbia: provincial policy, to take effect on 1 August, defined a “transient” as one “who has been less than three months in the place in which he makes his application.” This stipulation clashed violently with the city’s insistence on a domicile requirement of one year. Those who resided in Vancouver for a period greater than three months but fewer than twelve thus occupied a liminal position, a transient in the eyes of Vancouver but not in those of British Columbia.

Before the destruction of the jungles and the opening of the provincial labour camps, intergovernmental conflicts over the category of “transient” had the practical effect of limiting access to relief for thousands of single men who had previously earned their living with seasonal labour. The assumption of responsibility for transients by the provincial and federal governments, however, changed the calculus by enabling cities to rid themselves of jobless men of all kinds, not just those officially designated as transients. During his tenure, Relief Officer W.R. Bone established several regulations in aid of the city’s quest for financial restraint that expanded the category of “transient” to include those it had previously excluded, such as the “unemployable.”
The establishment of provincial and federal relief camps removed able-bodied single transient men from the cities, while municipalities remained responsible for single jobless men considered to be unemployable because of physical or mental impairments.46

Such cases had long represented an unjust financial drain in the minds of Vancouver’s Relief Department officials. The story of “M-58,” a single man classified as a Vancouver resident, conveyed what Colonel Cooper saw as the weakness of traditional forms of municipal governance of relief recipients. Born in Ontario in 1891, “M-58” arrived in Vancouver in April 1924, pitching a tent on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve. In February 1925, he fell ill and entered the Vancouver General Hospital, where he stayed as a municipal relief case for four years until being removed to the Marpole Home for Incurables. In June 1929, “M-58” left Marpole; he alternated between the hospital and civic relief until October 1931, when Cooper became aware of his case. In Cooper’s mind, “M-58” belonged in the “transient” category, as “his domicile was attained solely by living in a tent upon the Indian Reserve,” a questionable claim to residency. However, because of incompetence under Ireland’s administration, the civic treasury had supported “M-58” for over six years, save for his stretch in Marpole, and Cooper could see no way out of this situation because “M-58” was a resident of Vancouver according to provincial regulations. By the time Cooper took an interest, “M-58” was living in the Central City Mission, spending most of the day in bed after being diagnosed with neurasthenia and refusing to eat unless food was “sent up to him.” “The Department,” Cooper gravely noted, “has no power whatsoever to exercise any form of control over him.”47 Under W.R. Bone, the Relief Department quietly adopted strategies designed to shed Vancouver of responsibility for all single adult men, regardless of residency regulations, thus creating a new generation of transients. First, Bone’s staff reclassified hundreds of previously designated “unemployable” single men as fit to work — we do not know whether “M-58” was one of them — and thus now eligible to be sent to a provincial or federal relief camp. This process, two provincially appointed investigators observed, violated the spirit if not the letter of the agreement between the City and the federal government.48

Another of Bone’s classification shifts designed to limit civic responsibility involved young men who came of age during the 1930s. Men before the age of twenty-one received relief as dependants of their unemployed parents. Once they reached twenty-one, however, their relief identity changed: they became single male adults without a home, divorced from their family in both policy and practice. On occasion, a few would be assigned meal and bed tickets and allowed relief in the city, but they were more likely to be classified as employable single men without a permanent residence and ordered to a relief camp. Nor were these men — now considered transients by the Relief Department — guaranteed resident status in Vancouver once their stay
in camp was at an end. This demographic group was in no sense homeless or transient save for the arbitrary divisions devised in policy and enforced in practice. Bone’s rationale was practical: men in camps fell under the purview of the federal government, while most of those outside of the camps were considered provincial charges. With each such young man liberated from his family, Bone’s staff struck a blow for fiscal restraint, emancipating Vancouver from responsibility. In this way, a select group of municipal staff created hundreds of relief “transients,” people who, because of their decision to apply for municipal aid, administratively became outsiders, an unneeded presence in the city that many thought of as home, at least for now.

With such policies, Vancouver’s Relief Department created a new generation of transients. It did so, in fact, with every episodic explosion in the number of homeless single men taking up temporary residence in the downtown core. Nonetheless, the transients created through Bone’s administrative innovations were of a somewhat different character. Previously, as in the winter of 1929–30 and at the end of the summer of 1931, the Relief Department had employed the category to provide relief to thousands of new applicants. After the provincial and federal camps were created, however, administrators could much more easily label a person “transient” in full knowledge that another

### Table 8: Cost of Unemployment and Indigent Relief in Vancouver, 1927–38

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Unemployment</th>
<th>Indigents</th>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Administration as % of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>41,184</td>
<td>184,077</td>
<td>32,025</td>
<td>257,286</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>44,412</td>
<td>169,363</td>
<td>41,645</td>
<td>255,360</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>87,003</td>
<td>205,089</td>
<td>58,278</td>
<td>350,370</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>167,002</td>
<td>289,828</td>
<td>81,176</td>
<td>538,006</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>239,229</td>
<td>326,776</td>
<td>152,660</td>
<td>718,665</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>389,830</td>
<td>287,627</td>
<td>221,365</td>
<td>898,822</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>672,777</td>
<td>202,210</td>
<td>203,430</td>
<td>1,078,417</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>743,536</td>
<td>167,923</td>
<td>190,145</td>
<td>1,101,604</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>863,117</td>
<td>147,229</td>
<td>171,648</td>
<td>1,181,994</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>500,536</td>
<td>212,463</td>
<td>169,453</td>
<td>882,452</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>423,201</td>
<td>225,285</td>
<td>165,822</td>
<td>814,308</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** “Unemployment” refers to the money spent on “legitimate” residents of the city, while “Indigents” refers to that spent on transients.

**Source:** Vancouver City Archives, Vancouver Social Service Department Papers, series 450, box 106-C-2, file 1, Memorandum re Cost of Unemployment and Indigent Relief, 1927 to 1938 Inclusive, May 1938.
government would assume physical custody and financial responsibility. In these instances, the Relief Department created transients by reclassifying men already in receipt of relief – young unemployed and old unemployable alike. These measures increased the financial burden on other governments, condemned thousands of unattached men to the relief camps, and provided the key impetus to the growth of unemployed political organizations. The transient crisis continued to shape politics in Vancouver, in part because of the Relief Department’s role in manufacturing constituents for the relief movement. We now turn to another effect of the crisis, the scientific reorganization of the administrative practices through which municipal relief was provided to transients and residents alike.

**Making a Modern Relief Department: Administrative and Disciplinary Imperatives**

In multiplying violence through the mediation of the market, the bourgeois economy has also multiplied its things and its forces to the point where not merely kings or even the bourgeoisie are sufficient to administrate them: all human beings are needed. From the power of things they finally learn to forgo power.

*Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno,*

*Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1947.50*

One of the strengths of the Frankfurt account of the emergence of rationalization is its emphasis on the transformation from the classical liberal era to the Fordist or “monopoly capitalist” era. We have already seen Kracauer’s deft analytical touch with what he calls “inconspicuous surface-level phenomenon,” from hair dyes to love letters, but Adorno was no slouch in this department either. Throughout his American work, one encounters countless vignettes of the decay and decomposition of the bourgeois individual and the free market era he embodied, and of the rise of the mass-administered world, in which no one person, not even Henry Ford, had the power of a king. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno argues that evidence of this mostly dialectical transformation presented itself in a host of forms associated with what we would call “daily life”: the morals of fairy tales; public speaking drills in the classroom; the difference between walking and running; the “reversal of values” in “the realm of erotic qualities” as they pertained to the bourgeois man’s relations with his wife and his mistress; the not-unrelated matter of the changing function of the lie; the “nonchalant gestures” of teenagers on the streets; the experience of watching animals in city zoos; and, in an
achingly touching passage, the cruelty he witnessed and experienced as a school boy. And the effects of the commodity form were as seemingly universal as the form itself: avarice, luxury, masochism, tact, and even solidarity itself — all qualities rationalized and made functional for the new (and most likely last) world order. Most relevant for our purposes, Adorno argues that the generalization of the commodity form and the rationalization of social forces meant that Great Individuals were obliged to “forgo power” and experience these processes of objectification themselves. “It is the signature of our age,” he baldly claims, “that no-one, without exception, can now determine his own life within even a moderately comprehensible framework, as was possible earlier in the assessment of market relationships. In principle, everyone, however powerful, is an object.” As we take up the issues associated with scientific management and the broader Fordist paradigm, it will, I hope, become clear that all involved with this history of abstract calculation and calculated abstractions ended up going “deeper and deeper” into a rationalized life.

To convey the often-staggering expenses associated with the management of relief, we begin with an economic table, produced in the course of a May 1938 audit of Relief Department expenditures over the previous decade (see table 8). The table recorded civic spending on unemployment and indigent cases, as well as on administration; I have added a column indicating the percentage of administration costs in relation to total spending. While the City had some success in arranging for other governments to assume financial responsibility for specific categories of recipient — transient families, for instance — the Relief Department remained on the hook for processing these individuals and beginning the case-file process. With the commencement of each new intergovernmental agreement, officials in Victoria and Ottawa promised subsidies to cover these activities, but these pledges were rarely fulfilled. Consequently, administrative costs consumed a considerable portion of civic relief budgets. In the years 1929 to 1932, Vancouver spent $513,479.32 on administrative costs, or 20.5 percent of its total spending, a truly striking amount equivalent to about 1,280,000 days’ worth of bed and meal tickets, enough to continuously sustain more than 3,500 transients for an entire year. The dramatic rise in administrative spending, in real terms and as a percentage of the total, served to underline the urgent need for managerial innovations. Interestingly, the figures suggest that the generalization of Fordist efficiency measures began to show positive results only when the department could take advantage of economies of scale: administrative costs in absolute terms and as a percentage of the whole declined in 1933, once total expenditures surpassed $1 million, only to increase again (as a percentage, although not in absolute terms) in 1936, when expenditures dropped below this mark.
These statistics manifested in dollars and cents the sweeping transformation of the civic administration of relief. Following the departure of Ireland, authorities under Cooper and Bone gradually remade the Relief Department into one that could administer to and provide for mass numbers of relief cases, while other governments picked up a large portion of the bill. This rationalization process both already depended upon and further facilitated ways of thinking about the poor in terms of abstract categories — relief officers spoke of “single unemployment cases,” “married unemployment cases,” and “deportations” in their biweekly reports; such categories owed more to administrative imperatives than to humanitarian or social work ideals. Faced with the never-ending influx of itinerants, mass need translated into mass administration, a new style of management to govern the vetting and surveillance of applicants, the provision of relief in commodity form, and the assessment of employees’ workplace performance.

Yet these statistics also serve as evidence of one of the key limits on this managerial transformation, that of the disciplinary imperative in regard to clients: that is, the desire to enact cost-cutting measures collided with the spending necessary to maintain and enhance the investigatory apparatus. Some politicians, for instance, came to criticize the punitive regulation of relief recipients as an unnecessary expenditure. In 1935, Alderman L. D. McDonald, a reformer and then-chair of the Relief and Employment Committee, criticized W.R. Bone’s emphasis on investigation and proposed dismantling the entire investigation section because of its lack of cost-efficiency. In 1934, according to McDonald, the Relief Department spent almost $50,000 on investigations of married resident relief cases in order to recover just over $2,000 from those who had abused the system, proving that only “a very, very small percentage of these unhappy victims are dishonest.” Instead, relief could be provided through the mail, he maintained, enabling a drastic reduction in costs and the “elimination of the present inhuman system of waiting in line at the Relief Office.”

Beyond the investigation section, other regulatory aspects of relief provision contributed to costs. During one of their regular audits of the department, accountants from Helliwell, Maclachlan & Co. concluded that the disciplinary aspects of relief provision limited the ability to effect cost-cutting measures:

The percentage cost of administering relief depends to a very large extent on the nature of relief granted. If relief consisted entirely of cash distributions, the cost of administration apart from investigation would probably be small. Relief given, however, consists of groceries, rent, fuel, cash, bed tickets, meal tickets, bread and milk tickets, etc. and the handling and recording of these items involves a great deal of work. Apart from routine reductions in staff which may be possible from time to time by reason of the fluctuating nature of relief, there are no economies we can suggest.
In most contexts, when faced with a choice between cost-savings and careful regulation, civic officials opted for the latter. Because of the additional expense entailed by disciplinary procedures that separated recipients from the free market, Cooper and Bone looked to rationalize these techniques as well. All told, the growing portion of the budget consumed by administrative costs signified the often-elaborate experiments in rationalization and discipline conducted by the Relief Department’s senior staff.

The first component of this project, the eradication of traditional forms of managerial authority and the establishment and concentration of new relations organized at the top of the administrative system, is perhaps best symbolized by the two relief officers who followed in Ireland’s footsteps, one a ball-and-chain disciplinarian and the other a white-collar manager. Colonel H.W. Cooper’s pre-relief career took him across BC’s carceral archipelago. After a long career of military service, he signed on as warden of the federal penitentiary in New Westminster. In 1928, he failed to win the job of Vancouver’s chief constable. Subsequently, he held the relief officer position from May 1930 until June 1932, when he quit to become warden of Oakalla Provincial Penitentiary. Before he departed, Cooper secured the Relief Committee’s assent to his preferred replacement, W.R. Bone, a previous managing editor of Victor Odlum’s Vancouver Star and one of Cooper’s key deputies, responsible for the operations side of departmental practice. Although different in their styles of management, both relief officers premised their authority upon strictly hierarchical flows of power-knowledge, centralized planning of relief policy and workplace procedures, and the blocking of outside actors — from the Communists to the Ku Klux Klan and everything in between — attempting to shape the process.

For instance, the Vancouver City Clerks’ Papers contain many letters from individual relief recipients to their aldermen, appealing for their help with the Relief Department. Following the chain of custody, we see that in most cases, these politicians (or perhaps their minions) simply forwarded the information to the relief officer; only a few vigorously pursued better relief measures through bureaucratic channels beyond an initial letter. When informed of a complaint via an alderman, the relief officer referred the matter to the relevant section head, who in turn dispatched a visitor to produce a report on the case. A relief clerk read the case file and discerned the appropriate type and amount of relief in the circumstances. To complain and be heard thus entailed a repetition of the investigatory process rather than an adjustment based on current evidence or on new evidence alone: constituents who sought help from their elected representative were thus met with one of the “visitors,” Relief Department staff members assigned to visit applicants’ and recipients’ homes, who asked the same set of invasive questions again, stimulating considerable anger and distrust as well as the common
assumption that complaints resulted in a more intensive form of investigation and thus a lower amount of relief. Beyond a new investigation, relief recipients who were fortunate enough to have their case heard in a formal meeting of the Relief and Employment Committee usually left dissatisfied. An excerpt from the 18 May 1931 meeting recorded this process perfectly: “Several persons attended before the Committee with reference to relief of various kinds, including payment of their rents and were dealt with as the circumstances required, either by being told that nothing could be done for them in the way they desired, or by their cases being referred to the Chairman and the Relief Officer.” This charts the typical cycle of those who appeared before the committee: a request for aid, an unsatisfactory response by department officials after a second investigation, an appeal to higher authorities, a meeting with the councillors, and either a denial of what “they desired” or a referral back to the chair and the relief officer, who would then complete the circle by refusing the initial request.

In these ways, Relief Department procedures were generally well insured against the intrusions of outsiders, allowing the relief officer considerable latitude in shaping internal practice. In one of his investigations of the department, auditor W. A. Tucker concluded that Bone relied on a “Board of Strategy” that consisted of a small group of influential aldermen and bureaucrats in charting policies and practices. During the first half of the 1930s, most of the motions pertaining to relief policies ratified by City Council were taken word for word from memoranda written by the relief officer in concert with the chair of the Relief and Employment Committee and a select group of advisors. Not surprisingly, on the majority of occasions, City Council acted as a rubber stamp, deferring to the authority and discretion of the relief officer, upon whom elected officials depended since he was one of few people with complete knowledge of the many internal department policies never discussed in council chambers or the press, much less with relief recipients. In this sense, the basic procedures of a democratically controlled government agency existed in form but not in content. The archetypal hearing with the Relief and Employment Committee served as an empty ritual of authority, and it does not shock to learn that at least one of its meetings turned violent: in November 1932, Alderman W. H. Lembke was assaulted by one client who believed he was the victim of discrimination.

The lack of substantive democratic (let alone direct) control over the management of the Relief Department did not mean, however, that outside forces did not influence municipal relief provision. On the local level, property owners and private charity administrators consistently advocated wholesale cuts in relief rates and the intensified monitoring of recipients. For example, in 1933, the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies offered to administer relief to family cases on behalf of the Relief Department. J. Howard T. Falk, the
organization’s leader, argued that a more intensive form of investigation, although costly, would ultimately lead to lower disbursements to recipients and financial savings for the department.\(^{62}\) In the wake of Ireland’s dismissal for corruption, ratepayers’ groups called for economies in the provision and administration of relief. The Vancouver Central Ratepayers Association argued for the necessity of a “complete change . . . in the methods of administering relief”: in particular, the “more careful scrutiny . . . in the case of applicants.” The association singled out “transient applicants” as a particular problem and recommended that they be deported.\(^{63}\)

Ratepayers’ organizations were particularly critical of the undeserving poor, whether transient or resident. In November 1931, officials from the Kitsilano Ratepayers Association met with Cooper shortly after making dramatic public charges that many resident relief cases “had accumulations of oatmeal, macaroni, potatoes, and tickets for bread and milk.” With a more intensive series of investigations, they argued, the department could uncover these “accumulations” and reduce its expenditures accordingly.\(^ {64}\) This type of charge made sense only within a calculus of pauperism: the jobless were to exhaust all of their resources before they could receive charity from public and private organizations. In such a context, anyone assumed to have anything— even stockpiles of macaroni— was not deserving of relief. In response to the public charges of the Kitsilano Ratepayers, Cooper arranged to interview their source, a man who, when pressed, could produce no evidence in support of his claims: no names of people who hoarded goods and no other witnesses to this mass fraud. The source’s caseworker (the man was without work) reported to Cooper that he “is in a highly strung state, and is perhaps more to be pitied than censured for his obviously ill considered public statements. He wished me to thank you [Cooper] for the visit made, and reiterated his former statement that he did not wish you to think him ‘red’. His last words were, ‘please give me work.’”\(^ {65}\) The falsity of the charges in this instance is of little significance: similar complaints about recipients and their ill-gotten “accumulations” were made in the early 1930s, but few offered actual names, suggesting that rumours about hoarding might have had more to do with fantasies about privileged poor people than with actual stocks of food and other goods.

As ratepayers’ organizations became vocal outlets for charges of corruption and inefficient administration throughout the decade, on occasion they forced the Relief Committee or City Council itself to publicly ask the relief officer to inquire into a specific policy. In such cases, department officials successfully managed these groups, using subterfuge on occasion to undermine their efforts. In the summer of 1932, after another ratepayer outcry about inefficiency and incompetence, W.R. Bone agreed to allow three men from ratepayers’ groups to have access to one hundred files of married unemployed
cases. The three would perform their own investigation (again, an example of complaints about the relief process leading to more investigations for recipients) after which their assessments would be compared to those of the department’s own visitors: Bone ordered that most of the pertinent information be removed from the files, so as not to influence the outsiders as to the amount of relief accorded in each case. The ratepayers’ representatives, each of whom was himself jobless, were nothing short of ruthless, scrutinizing these cases in a brutish fashion and noting every trace of a lifestyle marginally above that of pauper. Those with possessions that could be sold, they argued, should be required to sell them before even being considered eligible for aid: one man who had a hundred chickens, for example, should be forced to “turn them into a liquid asset.” Importantly, the character of the individual in question was irrelevant in making such recommendations: whether deserving or undeserving, recipients were expected to translate any saleable possessions into cash before accepting aid from the municipality.

One of the ratepayer investigators complained about a phenomenon he found disturbing: relief recipients who claimed knowledge of others who defrauded the system — as had the member of the Kitsilano Ratepayers Association — but who would not provide names when pressed. “Some example should be made with relief recipients making these statements,” he maintained. Gradually, the ratepayers’ inquiry became enveloped in controversy. Another investigator tried to secure files on specific individuals outside of the hundred-case sample, based, he claimed, on information he had uncovered in the course of his enquiries. Department officials responded by raising the possibility that the man sought personal information for unseemly purposes, such as blackmail. Officials also circulated (if they did not start) rumours that two of the ratepayers openly sought permanent jobs in the department. Mayor Taylor even commissioned trusted investigator Robert Mundy to use departmental resources to assemble a confidential report on one of the men.

On consideration of the correspondence, it seems clear that Relief Department officials schemed with ill intent to frustrate the property owner representatives who were investigating the hundred relief cases. Nonetheless, that such an investigation, which gave private citizens access to government-generated personal information and permission to use the same techniques to produce more of the same, took place at all suggests that the greater significance of this type of ritual enactment lay in its display value. Ratepayers’ investigations of the Relief Department looked like democracy in action, even if most property owners were unsatisfied with the results. Other groups, however, found it difficult to obtain a proper hearing, let alone access to confidential information. Throughout the 1930s, a host of left-leaning reform-oriented organizations such as the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the Local Council of Women, the Independent Labour
Party, and later, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation attempted to gain access to information about relief policy as a means to advance the genuine grievances of those they represented. On every occasion, the Relief and Employment Committee rejected their requests. This spoke to the privileges accorded property and mirrored the Kidd Commission’s special access to the records of Premier Tolmie’s provincial government. Vancouver’s leftist groups included ratepayers, of course, but these groups did not articulate the interests of property owners but the needs of those on relief. In the early 1930s, this position served as a de facto disqualification from the right of access.

In these ways, Relief Officers Cooper and Bone managed, for the first half of the 1930s, to keep at arm’s length most outside groups that claimed an interest in reforming relief provision and to concentrate power over department policies and staff in the hands of a small “Board of Strategy.” And this group presided over a gradual yet clearly noticeable expansion in the size of the Relief Department workforce and the scope of its duties in order to cope with the periodic explosions of applicants. In mid-October 1931, after the provincial government had already begun relocating transients from Vancouver to the camps in the interior, Cooper complained that the number of cases handled by the department had risen approximately 400 percent in a few months. On one day alone, 16 October, the staff “made contact” in some form with over 3,900 people. While many companies were laying off workers and some even shutting their doors, the Relief Department’s business was thriving. “This job has grown so large that there will have to be a radical change in the system,” Cooper maintained at a meeting of the Relief Committee in January 1932. As late as 1932, the Relief Department had but seventeen permanent staff members, along with thirteen temporary office positions, during an average month, even though it had not seen an average month in years. By 1934, 160 employees were on the payroll, necessitating the opening of a second office, this one devoted exclusively to single men and located in Hamilton Hall.

Interestingly, one of the consequences of Ireland’s firing and the new management regime was the erosion of women’s positions as the primary investigatory and social work staff; under Ireland, four out of five investigators assigned to resident relief cases, then the largest section in the department, were female. By 1934, women had become a minority in the department as a whole and were now confined largely to office work as stenographers, cashiers, and filing clerks. The handful of women who remained in the investigation section were marginalized in a relatively small and deeply gendered corner of the department: they were assigned to family unemployment cases in which the male head of the family was temporarily absent, as in the case of illness or prison. And unlike the 1920s, when they possessed considerable

The Crucifixion Machine and the Quest for Efficiency 137
doi:10.15215/aupress/9781926836287.01
autonomy, these women now worked under the tutelage of a male supervisor, John Cameron. More generally, women were subject to a policy of “first fired”; statistics for 1934 reveal a number of women “discharged” during periods of retrenchment or upon their marriage. The expansion of the Relief Department occurred along with the masculinization of jobs with a modicum of influence over policy.

The dramatic expansion and training of the mostly new workforce was just one factor increasing the cost of doing business. More employees and longer hours meant increases in fuel and light costs, automobile maintenance charges, and other expenditures. There were also the expenses associated with knowledge-production enterprises. In 1932, the Relief Department budgeted the cost of stationary, printing, and office supplies at $1,750; the actual bill added up to a little more than $9,500. Bone complained frequently of the administrative spending associated with transient men, which by 1932 meant “the rental of a separate building, an extensive staff, and heavy maintenance cost,” including that of the production and monitoring of the bed and meal ticket system. An elaborate set of written procedures had been designed to govern the labour-intensive custody of these tickets, which were assumed to be “an equivalent of cash” for administrative purposes. The tickets themselves were to be kept “in the hands” of the relief officer or his “duly appointed deputy.” The clerks who handled the tickets on a daily basis were obligated each day to maintain records of the disbursement process, to be “duly signed and countersigned” in order to allow for administrative control over their labours. Such measures translated into sizeable administrative costs for Vancouver. Even in death, the transient could haunt the Relief Department, which was financially responsible for indigent burials and related administrative tasks and paperwork.

The costs of doing business encouraged the development of mass-purchasing practices by the Relief Department. In the summer of 1930, Alderman Harry DeGraves sent A.J. Pilkington, city comptroller, a copy of The Purchasing Agent, an American magazine edited by L.F. Boffey and whose function lay in publicizing “the need for business principles in government buying.” Traditionally, Boffey argued, government officials exhibited a general indifference to questions of cost and thus had much to learn from industry, which by definition, attempted to pay the lowest possible price for its materials. Pilkington forwarded the magazine to W.A. Sheppard, the city’s purchasing agent, who responded with a memorandum on the cost savings that could be accrued with the adoption of a centralized system of purchasing. Bulk buying would reduce prices and attract a greater number of suppliers to bid for contracts. Nonetheless, Sheppard also observed a “resistance to standardization” on the part of many civil servants, who instead preferred “individual expression” in the form of department-level control over spending.
response did not satisfy DeGraves, who, in December, joined forces with R.N. Fraser to pass a motion demanding that Sheppard report in detail on procurement practices in the Relief Department.\textsuperscript{82} While the department instituted some bulk-buying practices, officials believed that the savings to be effected in these areas paled compared to the economies that could be achieved through the investigation of relief recipients and the reorganization of the workplace.

Under Cooper and Bone, work in the Relief Department was divided into sections based on the type of cases handled: married unemployment, family unemployment, women’s unemployment, single women’s unemployment, single men’s unemployment, and single sick.\textsuperscript{83} Each section was subdivided further, complicating administrative matters immensely. In August 1933, for instance, City Council passed a motion that created six subcategories within the general field of “single unemployed women.”\textsuperscript{84} Given that the overwhelming majority of employees were recent hires, the specialization inherent in the division of casework labour functionally limited the knowledge of the new relief workers that was required to perform their tasks. Distinct from these case-based divisions in the department were the pension, medical, and investigation sections, within which lay a host of tasks associated with the processing of applicants already grouped within the former categories. Most central to the question of administration, the staff of the investigation section was responsible for all relief cases save for those where special circumstances, such as mental illness, necessitated the use of specially trained visitors.\textsuperscript{85} It was the largest section, numbering thirty-four employees in 1934 — more than the entire staff complement in 1932. The largest subgroup comprised those labelled “routine visitors,” responsible for questioning applicants as to the particulars of their situation. There were also “investigators,” visitors assigned to troublesome cases such as those where fraud was suspected, and “file readers,” who monitored the progress of each case file. Someone from this section was usually assigned to “warn” department employees assigned to work relief gangs, such as the landscaping projects connected with the municipal golf course.\textsuperscript{86}

Cooper’s most significant administrative change to the work process lay in the separation of the tasks of investigating applicants from those of issuing grants, or in more abstract terms, the division of evidence production and evaluation.\textsuperscript{87} Visitors were to meet with applicants and other relevant parties face to face and record clearly the facts of the case according to criteria established by a small coterie of management. They did not, however, make the final determination as to eligibility. In fact, their own opinions about the best ways to assess genuine need and to relieve it were extraneous to the process, save in the form of bias, which departmental procedures had been designed in advance to identify and remedy. Instead, the petitioner’s fate was
calculated by a separate group of clerks under the direction of the heads of each case-based section. Generally, this section of the staff was shielded from direct contact with recipients. Instead, they relied on formulae set out by municipal and provincial governments, taking the information provided by visitors on standardized forms — information already purified of much of its subjective dimension — and translating it into commodities for the recipient to consume. Here I feel compelled to note that, yet again, the recipient could be asked to endure an additional round of investigation if a clerk decided that the visitor’s initial report contained inadequate or inaccurate information. This division of labour made real the abstraction at the heart of relief policies: the calculation of the form and amount of relief had been wholly severed from the applicant’s articulation of need. An assessment of the Relief Department by provincial officials singled out this separation of the tasks of investigation and calculation as of particular value to the effectiveness of the administrative machinery.88

Finally, the latest in business machines helped to advance the rationalization process.89 In August 1930, Cooper introduced a control card system and a new method of indexing relief cases that allowed employees to speed up the production of information vital to administration. Staff could, for instance, calculate the number of recipients who would be declared ineligible for municipal aid based on different cut-off dates for residency qualifications. The control card system also facilitated deportations by allowing officials to sort out which applicants had not resided in Canada for five years before their initial application.90 Progress was slow, to be sure. In December 1930, W. Wardhaugh, one of the key bureaucrats in the comptroller’s office, reported that the reorganization of the Relief Department would be finished only “whenever the present unemployment crisis is over.”91 Yet there is evidence as to the effectiveness of this process. Helliwell, Maclachlan & Co. — the firm tasked with the investigation of George Ireland’s corruption — conducted a series of audits over several years upon the request of City Council. Over a two-week period in October 1931, the accountants found “very considerable improvement” in the area of investigative record keeping. Also improved were the records governing disbursement, which the auditors believed were kept “up-to-date.” Additional procedures had been adopted to improve the accounting and allow for accurate monthly audits. The firm offered a few suggestions as to the reorganization of staff duties in order to “cover work not being done or being done by the wrong people.”92 While Cooper had, to a large extent, lost the war against the transient, giving up territory in the jungles and ultimately having to call for provincial intervention to save his department financially, he did manage to centralize considerable authority in the position of relief officer and to begin the reorganization of work processes. The fruits of these labours would pay dividends in the future.
“Special Instructions to Visitors”:
The Codification of Abstraction

Fifteen minutes for lunch, three minutes to go to the toilet, the Taylor-ized speed-up everywhere, reachunder, adjustwasher, screwdown bolt, shove in cotterpin, reachunder, adjustwasher, screwdown bolt, reachunderadjustscrewdownreachunderadjust, until every ounce of life was sucked off into production and at night the workmen went home gray shaking husks.

*John Dos Passos, The Big Money, 1936*

Despite the various intergovernmental attempts to segregate single male transients in camps and to remove from the municipality the financial burden of caring for transients who remained in Vancouver, the Relief Department remained the administrative focal point for the processing of applicants. In short, regardless of where they were located, transients managed to drain the resources of the city-state and became something of a periodically absent cause for the burgeoning of administrative projects launched by both public and private sectors of the relief industry. We must also recognize that state-building projects related to relief for single homeless men affected thousands of poor people classified as residents, although usually not in the same fashion. Commencing in the summer of 1932, W.R. Bone, the new relief officer, initiated a new rationalization campaign in the context of the transient crisis that had its greatest effect on Vancouver residents, especially married couples, whose lives would be carved up into new bits of abstract knowledge functional within the Relief Department’s pauper calculus. In a smaller way, the rationalization process also transformed the working lives of Relief Department employees, who found parallels between their work with relief recipients and the surveillance of their everyday work habits. Under the former newspaperman and his deputies, each step in the administrative and distributive process was isolated and reconstructed in order to facilitate the mass provision of relief in an atmosphere of frightened efficiency. The text that embodied this rationalization was entitled “Special Instructions to Visitors.”

We owe to the philosophic mode of presentation one of the most misunderstood aspects of Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the argument that (to put it baldly) Enlightenment thinking was born at the mythic origins of prehistory and the conceptual logic that led to, and was embodied in, both Hitler and Hollywood. That such a narrative holds little appeal as history is understandable. The processes of abstraction and objectification key to this type of rationalization project of course existed

*The Crucifixion Machine and the Quest for Efficiency*  141

doi:10.15215/aupress/9781926836287.01
well before the 1930s, having long become an indispensable element in any mode of rule:

Like the material tool which, as a thing, is held fast as that thing in different situations and thereby separates the world, as something chaotic, multiple, and disparate, from that which is known, single, and identical, so the concept is the idea-tool which fits into things at the very point from which one can take hold of them. Thought thus becomes illusory whenever it seeks to deny its function of separating, distancing, and objectifying. 95

At the same time, there is no denying that the real strength of the Frankfurt account lies in its emphasis on the profoundly economic character of the processes through which rationalization was generalized in the three decades between one world war and the next. As an incredibly efficient mode of wealth generation, Fordist forms of mass production and consumption fuelled the expansion of the Depression-era mixed social economy and the later welfare state. Indeed, without the long-term boom associated with Fordism in North America, most regulatory projects would have remained fantasies of power, unrealizable without the nurturing soil of surpluses churned out in assembly-line fashion. Just as important, the “idea-tools” of scientific management and corporate welfarism proved of value, with the circulatory flows of these already rationalized and easily abstractable bits of power-knowledge-profit rippling through already existing fields of administration and regulation, remoulding every context and creating a few new ones seemingly out of thin air. While the eighteenth century may have witnessed the “‘governmentalization’ of the state,” in Foucault’s words, the twentieth century was replete with the Fordization of governmentality, the commodification and rationalization of some of the key processes of rule, both private and public. 96 It is the history of this unstable process of change to which the “Special Instructions to Visitors” document belongs.

W.R. Bone assumed the position of relief officer in June 1932. Years later, auditor W.A. Tucker would conclude that the “dominating and decisive factor” in Bone’s hiring was Colonel Cooper’s recommendation; the Relief and Employment Committee did not seriously consider other applicants and failed even to conduct a basic assessment of Bone’s credentials for the position, which Tucker judged to be insufficient according to the employment standards established by the Brittain-Bengough-Winter report on municipal administration in 1929. 97 With the benefit of hindsight, Tucker argues that Bone’s hiring polarized the department; more experienced senior staff members were subsequently passed over, if not demoted, and replaced by those more amenable to Bone’s rationalization scheme, a process that fostered
considerable dissension in the ranks. Yet Bone’s personal crisis extended beyond the walls of the Relief Department: like many homeless men, he found himself caught up in circumstances beyond his control. Not only had Premier Tolmie’s work camps failed to halt the flow of transients across British Columbia, but municipalities throughout the province felt increasingly burdened by the periodic arrival of masses of demonstrators and their Communist organizers, who fled the relief camps and returned to the cities in search of a better deal. Transients thus continued to pose a substantial administrative problem for civic officials, despite the millions of dollars already spent on relief programs province wide.

Faced with this conjuncture of mass need, radical political campaigns, increasing financial constraints, and employee disenchantment, Bone opted to consolidate and extend the Taylorist processes of rationalization initiated in Cooper’s reign, hoping to achieve efficiencies of administration and economies of scale by changing the ways in which his staff laboured to feed, clothe, and house the thousands of applicants who fit into an expanding number of relief categories. In so doing, Bone orchestrated changes to the investigatory process that had a much greater effect on the lives of family relief cases, whether resident or transient, than on the archetypal single homeless man. When itinerants turned to the state for assistance in this period, the end result could be forty cents’ worth of bed and meal tickets, mission tickets worth about the same value, a spot in a provincial labour camp earning room and board and $7.50 per month, or nothing at all. Because of Vancouver’s centrality in the administrative process governing single transient men and its financial responsibility for administrative costs, its officials sought to use the missions and labour camps as a kind of carceral archipelago of subcontracted work-discipline, relying on both provincial and private relief institutions to assume the costs of and responsibility for weeding out the undeserving transient. This allowed officials to employ a minimal number of visitors for transients — as of January 1932, the Relief Department had only three investigators for the more than five thousand single transients then in receipt of temporary relief — and instead dedicate the bulk of the investigatory apparatus to family cases of all kinds, who received relief in the form of groceries, vouchers, and milk and bread tickets during the first half of the 1930s. Under the new system, married unemployment cases were visited on average once every three months, save for those flagged as particularly troublesome.

That summer, as the key component of his rationalization campaign, Bone and his senior staff assembled a new system of forms to be used by visitors in producing now-standardized case files, the information in which would then be translated by clerks into a specific type and dollar value of relief. This campaign brought to an end the haphazard, improvisational character of the investigatory process, devised on the spot to deal with the
thousands of applicants who periodically flooded administrative channels, while also fixing a set of criteria with which employee efficiency standards would be measured. In Taylorist fashion, the new relief forms were accompanied by a written manual that explained each step in the process: “Special Instructions to Visitors,” authored by Robert B. C. Mundy under Bone’s direction. A confidential memorandum to be returned if the employee left the department, “Special Instructions” combined all previous circulars regarding official procedures, weeding out the dross of obsolete regulations and reworking step by step each of the sixty sections that made up the visiting process to produce an omnibus codification of department procedures. When officials sent around updated instructions, visitors were required to initial each circular.

“Special Instructions” captured the process woven throughout Bone’s new management regime. Each day, the routing clerk detailed the cases to be completed by each visitor. In producing the case file, visitors had to write in ink; documents that were written in pencil or were otherwise illegible “will be rejected.” Bone also warned staff not to place files in a position where they could be read by applicants. Each step in creating and completing a new file was to be performed in the same manner by each employee, and they were to repeat these tasks day after day: clerks would ideally receive completed files with the exact same kinds of information regardless of which visitor had produced them. Yet Mundy also voiced the fear that the administrative need for the investigation process to take a standardized form could result in a certain amount of inefficiency in the visitors’ assessments: because their work was routine, it could be done without much thought, resulting in a case file that lacked the special attention to detail necessary for the investigatory process to work adequately. “The danger of a printed form of report is that visitors may become ‘steriotype’ [sic] in the method of handling it,” he fretted. A “word of warning” was thus appropriate: “If you apply yourself intensively to the work, being guided by these instructions, it is felt that you will eliminate to a large extent those who are not entitled to relief, and expose those who have laid themselves liable to prosecution.” The dangers of worker inattention, in this logic, lay not in needs that went unmet but in expenditures unnecessarily made. Mundy emphatically returned to this idea on several occasions: “Deal fairly but FIRMLY with clients, remembering that it is the duty of the Department to assist the destitute in the matter of shelter and sustenance only where and when it is necessary. In rendering your report think constructively for the client, but economically for the Department.”

This type of assessment was intertwined with the use of “pauperism” as a concept to govern entitlement: according to a 1932 provincial regulation implemented by the City of Vancouver, relief applicants were obligated to swear to the following:
I [name] of [residence] in the City of Vancouver, Province of British Columbia, do solemnly declare that my reason of application for registration under the scheme of the Provincial Government of British Columbia for the registration of unemployed, is, that I am destitute, being without the necessities of life, and that neither I nor any of my dependents have any financial resources whatsoever.106

A penniless and propertyless pauper — this was the new model relief recipient, enshrined in policy and made viable through administration. “The onus of showing the need for assistance,” Cooper explained at the end of his tenure, “has been consistently placed upon the Applicant, thus encouraging him to continue to seek employment.”107 In rationalizing the work process, Bone and Mundy planned based on the assumption that the relationship between department and recipient was likely to be adversarial if not antagonistic and thus required a staff practised in the arts of deception.108 “Special Instructions” instructed visitors how to search for knowledge about potential resources in family relief cases, which translated into smaller dollar values in groceries or scrip for thousands of families. According to this pauper calculus, anything the recipient did to acquire goods or cash meant an automatic reduction in civic relief resources, already widely considered inadequate. In the struggle simply to access municipal relief and maintain it, recipients were encouraged to appear as paupers, without any resources whatsoever. It is not that the system did not implicitly encourage self-help measures or other creative strategies, but rather that it also encouraged applicants to keep quiet about them. In this way, assumptions about the necessity of deception permeated both sides of the relief relationship.

In this light, “Special Instructions” offered tips as to how to extract information. Section 3, “Boats or Cars,” listed the information the department expected visitors to extract: the make and model of the car and its sale value; the amount of payments for gas, insurance, license fees, and other overhead costs, and who made these payments; and the uses the client made of the car. Mundy also instructed visitors to take readings of the speedometer on each visit. “Generally speaking,” he explained, “a relief case running a car is not destitute,” and great care had to be taken in order to prevent exploitation. Visitors were to record a similar amount of detail for clients who owned real estate, who purchased household commodities via instalment plans, who maintained gardens or a small amount of livestock, and who had other alternate avenues of support. This type of information was not accorded any moral value in the investigatory process — there was no connection between these facts and social work service, for instance — but rather an economic value, used in the calculation of the amount of relief to which family cases were entitled.
Obviously, some issues were more delicate than others and required special techniques on the part of the visitor. Section 1, entitled “Social State,” was most important of all, referring to the character of relations between a man and a woman—and only a single man and a single woman—who lived together. To be classified as a married couple, clients needed a marriage certificate. When applicants could not produce one, visitors collected information as to the particulars of the ceremony and the woman’s maiden name and then made inquiries, which could involve transatlantic communications. Visitors generated a greater amount of paperwork for unmarried clients who lived together. Here, the Relief Department sought information as to the length of the “union,” the “exact parentage” of any children, and the existence of legal reasons preventing the couple from marrying. “The subject is to be approached delicately but definitely,” Mundy noted, adding a recommendation that it be “dealt with towards the end of your visit for obvious reasons.” The department’s unofficial position stressed the maintenance of family units, even those without proper legal or religious sanction, rather than the dissolution of partnerships.

Along with caution, visitors had recourse to the arts of deceit. “Getting information re bank accounts is an art,” Mundy explained, given that the department had no legal right to demand access to an applicant’s bank records. Nor could relief be denied if the applicant refused, although some on City Council tried to reverse this policy. Nor would banks allow relief officials access to private bank accounts without written permission from the applicant. With these obstacles, securing banking information was an art indeed. In “Special Instructions,” Mundy suggested that visitors initially “intimate that such information can be got at quite readily.” They were not to lie, as that would violate the rules. Rather, through indirect subterfuge, clients could be encouraged to believe that officials had the legal right of inquiry, making the paperwork appear to be a procedural formality. Mundy also recommended leaving the question of bank accounts to the end of the interview; one can only imagine how brutal the last fifteen minutes of the visit was for all involved. Visitors were warned not to “come out with the direct question,” as the applicant would likely respond in the negative. Instead, Mundy advised that visitors first study the account of earnings over the past six years and then ask the client “what has been done with the money”: “If he appears to have been infrugal [sic] with his money chide him in a kindly way, enquiring if he has nothing to show out of his earnings. Has he never tried to save? Put him on the defensive and he may let out the very information you want to slip out.” Failing that, visitors were to ask the applicant to sign “a blanket order on all chartered banks in Canada,” again inferring that this information could be easily accessed. Trickery would also be useful in determining the applicant’s stores of food, clothing, and fuel. Again, the
Relief Department had no legal right to search a residence. Mundy suggested, “A nicely put request will get you to the basement, larder and closet.” If this failed, one could compliment the applicant on the interior of their home, hoping they would open up cupboards and doors, thus revealing their existing stores of food. Here, too, we see the pauper calculus: Mundy noted that the applicant might not be in “necessitous circumstances” if supplies of food and fuel could be found. The search could also reveal the presence of boarders, the income from whom could also invalidate their claim of need.

“Visitors must be ever on the alert for information leading to evidence of obtaining any kind of relief by false representation,” Mundy cautioned. Most procedures outlined in “Special Instructions” made sense only if one assumed a priori that the applicant would be prone to fabrication. Consider section 7, “Dependents”: “Enquire carefully into the number of dependents,” Mundy lectured, “bearing in mind that experience has taught us that there have been many cases of fraud in this respect. Children have been produced, belonging to others, to cover false statements made by the applicants.” He also explained that for the purposes of relief, the department assumed the complete financial dependence of children — that the entirety of a child’s earnings would go to the household budget. “What the dependents actually pay into their parents is negligible compared with actual earnings,” he stressed. “It is the latter that the Department is interested in” (emphasis in original). Mundy wove a familial politics throughout the “Special Instructions.” All applicants were interrogated about support from relatives; in cases where relatives did not provide assistance, the applicant had to provide reasons for this failure. The Relief Department rigorously applied the standards of the Parent’s Maintenance Act, which obliged the young to supplement the income of their elders where possible. In the department’s eyes, some children, far from being suffering helpless waifs, actively chose to deny their parents money, if in fact those were their real parents.

Attempts by clients to manipulate the system took place in every aspect of relief provision, Mundy warned. A lengthy section of the document addressed the possibility of landlord-tenant collusion — the department did not cover rent except in cases where tenants were threatened with eviction, giving rise to staged evictions — and recommended the “utmost caution.” Also included in the manual was a detailed explanation of the regulations governing deportation: the Immigration Act was required reading in the Relief Department. Domicile could be proven through a record of work, the documented birth of children in the city, or the purchase or rental of a home. However, visitors were also told to ask for a passport and, if applicable, naturalization papers. The department employed three separate forms for deportation proceedings, depending on whether the applicant was to be returned to Great Britain, the United States, or elsewhere. Visitors were
also to be on the lookout for signs of immorality. Empty bottles and glasses could be evidence of excessive alcohol consumption, if not bootlegging. Were the living conditions “sanitary and fit for the needs of the family”? Was the “demeanour” of the applicant appropriate, or did it justify “suspicion as to moral conditions”? Did applicants demonstrate that they were “industrious and eager for work,” or did they appear “lazy and content to ‘let George do it’”? These questions sought to produce functional knowledge in order to allow staff to attempt to correct the future behaviour of recipients: none of the extant evidence suggests that these moral assessments were brought to bear in clerical calculations of the form and amount of relief accorded to family cases. Instead, such information figured in questions of eligibility, suggesting a certain fragmentation in the Relief Department’s roles in moral and economic types of regulation.

“Special Instructions” also stressed the necessity of devoting continual care to each case file in order for the facts therein to be of value to relief clerks. Section 14 provided guidelines for establishing the all-important “signals” for each file. Signals could be attached for a host of reasons. Some noted an administrative change of little significance. If two single people on relief married each other, the visitor “signalled” the combination of their files into one joint application, for instance. Others, however, signified important changes such as a reduction or cessation of relief. Signals could also be used by clerks and section heads in cases where existing resources prompted suspicions of a secret source of income, such as clients with furniture in storage or in “great excess of requirements,” or those with an “undue surplus of food or fuel”: thus warned, visitors were to conduct a follow-up visit. Most signals concerned character flaws and possible duplicity on the part of the recipient and thus served as an order for the visitor to investigate further: those who lived in an “irregular social state,” those without proper naturalization papers (a mandatory signal “in all cases of foreign speaking applicants”), those suspected of bootlegging or fraudulently obtaining relief, even those in possession of a liquor permit — all could receive a bureaucratic notation for special attention. In total, there were eighteen circumstances in which signals could be attached, as well as the blanket category “for any reason not enumerated above.” Signals often led to “Supplemental Reports,” explained in section 30. Visitors filled out these reports in eleven possible circumstances, in addition to the catch-all “if otherwise necessary.” Again, officials desired a clear understanding of the existence of assets such as real estate, stocks, bonds, cars, boats, and even airplanes. Clients who did or could receive help from relatives meant additional paperwork, as did those with an “irregular” marital status and those suspected of involvement in bootlegging or other immoral acts.

Finally, visitors were tasked with corroborating all statements concerning previous employment and earnings, as well as other economic information,
requiring considerable time on the phone and the occasional follow-up trip. File readers were tasked with ensuring that the new information produced by visitors aligned with that found in previous reports; any discrepancies were signalled, necessitating yet another round of visiting.\textsuperscript{110} In short, visitors produced a significant amount of paperwork for each family relief case they processed. Yet their role was that of information gatherer, and it ended there; others were to assess the form and amount of relief given. In instructing visitors and other investigators, Bone’s officialdom placed considerable emphasis on suppressing unnecessary opinions. “There has been a growing practice with certain staff members, in making entries in records, to comment on clients in a personal manner,” Bone observed in a separate memorandum. “A straightforward statement of any incident is essential, but supplementary remarks of a derogatory nature are uncalled for.”\textsuperscript{111} “Do not indulge in recommendations in your reports,” Mundy lectured. “Report facts as you find them, so that the other sections may be guided as to requirements.”\textsuperscript{112}

The abstraction process thus began with the work of visitors, who met face to face with unemployed men and women, and sifted through their personal stories in order to generate on standard forms facts that were meaningful within the pauper calculus that governed municipal relief provision. It continued in the work of clerks, charged with calculating the type and value of relief to be exchanged for these facts. Clerks ascertained the differences between two married unemployment cases by employing factors such as previous earnings, the possibility of help from relatives, and existing stores of fuel, food, and clothing. At the end of the process, the individuality of each case file became numerical, given a cash value so that it could then be turned into groceries, scrip, and milk and bread tickets. Through these acts of abstraction, visitors and clerks translated the particularities of the family life histories of tens of thousands of relief recipients into extra rations of milk, vegetables, and meat.

The provision of written instructions to workers was one of the key instructional practices of scientific management.\textsuperscript{113} In this case, Mundy’s omnibus collection of regulations represented the first significant result of Relief Officer Bone’s drive to rationalize each step in the relief provision process. The system of signals and supplemental reports allowed for both tracking recipients and punishing them for a host of economic and moral offences. Equally important, it created, for section heads and others, units of the labour process that could be isolated and measured, and techniques to do so. In every successful application for municipal relief, poor families had their lives translated into textual fragments and assigned a certain monetary value. The visitors and clerks who facilitated this exchange also suffered from the abstractions they created, which were also designed to be functional in the internal field of work-discipline.
We have seen that Cooper devoted much energy to the reorganization of labour relations in hopes of providing economical and efficient administration. Assigned to the Relief Department in May 1930 as part of the investigation into Ireland’s misconduct, auditor W.A. Tucker met Cooper shortly after the latter’s appointment. Cooper quizzed Tucker on the character of the staff. When he replied that those who remained after the scandal were good workers, Cooper strongly voiced his disagreement and informed Tucker that he “already had them under observation.” Moreover, to ensure the efficiency of his network of spies, Cooper had “a second line of ‘operatives’ observing the first line of operatives.” Of course, surveillance was nothing new to the Relief Department, having been used against radicals who attempted to organize work relief gangs in the winter of 1929. In the past, however, the managerial gaze had been focused on the recipients of relief; under Cooper, it was also trained inward on the staff. As a further measure, Cooper made a public show of firings, letting go many of Ireland’s employees after his appointment as relief officer and conducting periodic purges of the remaining ranks in the quest to instill discipline. A.J. Maccabe, the department’s senior clerk, was terminated on the grounds that he hid from Cooper administrative errors made by the staff. Maccabe’s termination generated such controversy that it was the subject of a hearing before City Council. “He carried a sense of resentment over things that don’t matter,” Cooper claimed. “I couldn’t efficiently operate that department with him.” Eventually, after a show trial dominated by Cooper, both the Relief Committee and City Council voted to authorize Cooper’s actions; Maccabe was given a job in another department.

This network of informant-based knowledge expanded over the two years of Cooper’s tenure as relief officer; Bone, upon his assumption of the position, reorganized the network as a management tool in his battle to rationalize the department, unveiling an authoritarian managerial ethos that expressed itself in stark dichotomies. “The present Relief Department problem,” Tucker lamented in one of his reports, “has apparently resolved itself into a matter of being for the Relief Officer or against him. . . . It almost appears that it is no longer considered the right thing to dare to express an opinion that is not in agreement with the higher officials.” In terms of personnel, Bone’s most significant change was the promotion of Robert Bailey, who took over from Robert Mundy as head of the married unemployment section in early 1933, although his unofficial duties made him the de facto gang boss on the paper trail. When he was hired as a visitor by the department in 1930, Bailey possessed considerable experience in the field of investigations, having worked in that capacity for the Canadian Pacific Railway and for the office of Alberta’s Attorney-General. His most important task as Bone’s deputy was the administration of what Alderman L.D. McDonald called the “Crucifixion Machine,” the disciplinary apparatus targeted at the staff. As Cooper
had done before him, Bailey ran a collection of “operatives” who spied upon
the activities of the staff. At the request of W.R. Bone, Mayor L.D. Taylor,
and several aldermen, Bailey created a file system detailing the efficiency
ratings of employees as well as information concerning their off-duty hours,
such as whether they drank alcohol. These files were kept in Bone’s safe.
In 1935, during the Kerr Inquiry, Bailey was questioned about the network of
operatives and scoffed at the idea that anything was amiss. “If there [are] any
stool pigeons in that Department they are only so called by crooks and shyster
lawyers.” Whatever name one chooses, their role was that of spy: they were
assigned to secretly report on the activities of staff members. This, accord-
ing to Tucker, fostered among workers a climate of “unrest, uneasiness, and
uncertainty as to their future.”

The effects of this management style were exacerbated by employment
conditions. Most visitors had been hired as “special office help” rather than
“permanent staff,” meaning they could be fired without recourse to the pro-
tections afforded unionized staff in the Civic Employees Federation. This,
needless to say, made it difficult to resist changes to the work process. In
August 1932, the investigation department itself was reorganized; visitors
would no longer have the ability to make decisions about which cases to
investigate. Instead, their daily workload would be plotted by one of Bailey’s
trusted staff members. This, it was believed, would “considerably increase
the efficiency of the Investigation Dept.” One later report on departmental
efficiency calculated that the average visitor in the married unemployment
section administered an average of four and a half cases per day, a number
judged to be insufficient by Bailey and Bone. To increase productivity, they
designed a series of punishments: dozens of employees were demoted, sus-
pended, fired, and subjected to a host of petty humiliations. In one month
alone, Bailey suspended two visitors for ten days and two more for five days,
both without pay. At one point, he organized classes for those staff members
accused of inefficiency, which they were compelled to attend without pay
until they could demonstrate to him their fitness for the job. One worker was
suspended when he refused to attend the school without pay. The school was
terminated only when an auditor could find no legal authority to deny workers
wages for their hours of attendance. One visitor, G.B. Smith, complained
that he and his colleagues “were being driven at too rapid a pace to fulfill their
proper functions.” Smith, of course, was suspended and given one month to
improve his efficiency or he would be asked to resign. Smith refused, telling
a co-worker that “he was not entering into any competition.” Somehow, this
remark made its way to the ears of an operative, and Smith was suspended
once again.

The network of informants served what Bone and the “Board of Strategy”
saw as the interests of efficiency, although the disenchantment it provoked

The Crucifixion Machine and the Quest for Efficiency

doi:10.15215/aupress/9781926836287.01
may well have decreased productivity. No doubt, the fact that Bailey assigned one worker to be responsible for opening the staff’s incoming mail seemed an offensively paternal practice. Another clerk, who wanted letters of reference from Bone, informed him of the jokes some employees had told about the physical assault by a client of Alderman Lembke during a November 1932 Relief and Employment Committee meeting. These so-called operatives were also tasked with spying on workers outside of the departmental offices. Upon hearing that a few staff members frequented the Abbotsford and Inverary beer parlours in the afternoon, Bailey dispatched one of his minions, who reported via telephone on the presence of a visitor; the culprit was suspended for one month, despite having an efficiency record that ranged from 98.9 to 100 percent. The informer spent a considerable amount of time in beer halls and alleyways, talking to bootleggers in order to secure dirt about employees. He was even granted a weekly allowance to cover his liquid expenses. Bailey’s operatives also ventured out into the wider community in a hunt for corruption. For instance, several visited the Anchor Hotel and attempted to exchange meal tickets for beer. Others went to department stores in an attempt to get cigarettes and other banned items in return for grocery scrip.

Paul McD. Kerr, who headed the 1935 municipal enquiry into relief practices that became known by his name, disparaged “such ‘dime-novel’ practices,” all the while absolving Bone of any responsibility for the actions of Bailey, who was seen as something of a rogue operative. Yet the extant records reveal a relief officer who, through Bailey and other section heads, intentionally used the operatives to create an atmosphere of frightened efficiency. The reports of W. A. Tucker clearly document a pattern of discrimination: the favourites of Bone, Bailey, and those on the “Board of Strategy” rarely suffered disciplinary measures for their inefficiency, mistakes, or alcohol consumption during working hours, while others felt the full brunt of the “Crucifixion Machine.” John Cameron, for example, the head of the family unemployment section, was said to frequent the office while intoxicated, using “violent and obscene language,” but he was exempted from punishment. One worker said of himself that he “was not enough of a stool pigeon to succeed” in the department. Those who advocated better treatment of the unemployed also seem to have suffered. Miss A. McGeer, for instance, was unofficially demoted, “relegated to dishing out clothes.”

Bone’s investment in operatives paid dividends when, in late 1933, it enabled him to move against employees contemplating joining the Civic Employees Federation. Mayor Taylor and several aldermen had made it known that they did not want the union to take root in the department, prompting
Bailey to send two operatives to its first meeting. Several days later, Bone fired his first shot across the bow of any would-be unionists. While maintaining that they had the legal right to unionize, Bone stressed that joining the Civic Employees Federation “would have no effect upon their status in the Department.” They could join the union, but labour relations would remain as they were: the union would have no voice in disciplinary matters.

Over the next two months, Bone personally interviewed each staff member who attended union meetings, making it clear that he had received written reports conveying their every word; many subsequently retracted their support for the union. One staff member testified before Paul McD. Kerr that Bone “didn’t say so in exact words, but he intimated that he did not think we had been loyal to him in going down there, and he made it very plain that those who did join the association would not meet with his favour.” The “Crucifixion Machine” had been turned loose on the union. One worker was fired for telling others that Bone had given his approval to post an advertisement for the next union meeting, which, from the available information, appears to have been true. Another was cautioned against participating in meetings of an unnamed political organization on the grounds that “it was placing the Department in an invidious situation.” Bone recorded that the worker “apparently resented” this warning as an infringement on her freedom of association. He subsequently asked the section heads to investigate the political activities of all staff members.

Departmental morale was not the only problem uncovered by Tucker in the course of his audits. He also documented a host of patronage hires and suspect contracts with large milk- and bread-producing concerns that cost the City of Vancouver thousands of dollars. On the other end of the scale, some recipients had free rein to break the rules, receiving special treatment because they were protected by influential politicians. Yet among these departmental problems, the question of labour relations in the Relief Department stands out as particularly significant: those charged with producing the information necessary to reasonably determine that relief clients subscribed to the work ethic found their own dedication to the job questioned, the suspicious stance with which they were to treat their clients now applied to them.

One visitor issued an elegant plea to W.R. Bone, asking him to rein in Bailey for the good of the department:

I am asking you to consider whether it is desirable in the interests of real efficiency that the employee who has worked with zeal and loyalty, as none can deny I have, should have his reputation placed at the mercy of this machine. Its effect is disastrous to those it humiliates — and however good your staff may be it is bound to humiliate someone at every turn of its wheel.
While the power relationship that differentiated investigator and investigated was ever present, in one sense they were bound together by a shared identity.

In March 1931, Colonel Cooper wrote a memorandum to express his exasperation with the “number of delegations visiting the Relief Office with requests tantamount to a blanket order” for aid. “It appears to have been forgotten that it is not the function of any Government to provide employment,” he observed. His department would only consider “each case upon its individual merits.”144 Similarly, in response to a June 1932 request from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners that standard rates be given to all recipients, the Relief and Employment Committee maintained that “relief must be given on the basis of the actual need of each case and that no flat scale of money payment per day can be adopted.”145 Such generalizations were convenient in the face of organized demonstrators and unruly crowds, but that did not make them accurate. In many of their daily actions, relief officers dealt in masses. People with needs were translated into categories and allotted a standardized amount of goods and services. The particulars of one’s situation — how one became jobless and poor — left little impression upon the metastasizing relief system. Nor did the individual expression of need translate directly into the satisfaction of those needs. Much of the expansion of the municipal state — measured in dollar figures, bodies employed, and cases processed — can be traced to the introduction of the ideals of scientific management and to the resolute determination of relief officers and politicians alike to discipline the unemployed and possibly even to make them work for their relief. All of this could happen because of the overwhelming force of mass need as it emerged in the early 1930s. This state edifice of economic and moral discipline was built on the backs of single transient men.