Gerald Gratton McGeer delivered his inaugural address as mayor of the City of Vancouver on the second day of 1935. “Mammon was the first order of business,” notes McGeer’s biographer, David Ricardo Williams, who details his subject’s critique of the parasitic relationship of financiers to the body politic.¹ “We meet under conditions that are serious and grave,” McGeer began his address. “Destitution, idleness and perplexing confusion appear upon every hand.” He thundered on: “In the recent election, I assured the electors of this city that I would endeavour to place the wages of men above the wages of money. I assured the electors that the needs of humanity would be placed before the privileges of Money Power.”²

Money Power — in 1935, this idea possessed much political capital in western Canada. It helped McGeer become mayor, brought Social Credit to power in Alberta, and inspired a host of small groups and smaller sects such as the Canadian Fascisti, whose program was not unlike McGeer’s own.³ And as for William Aberhart and others, McGeer’s battle with the bondholders was as much a spiritual crusade as a financial one.⁴ As he explained at his inauguration:

Our duty to city, citizens and taxpayers is no less imperative than is our duty to those who have invested in interest bearing bonds issued in former times of prosperous optimism. In performing your plain duty to all classes and interests, you should recognize that there is no law, rule of practice, doctrine of economy or principle of social justice under
which the rights of one class may be allowed to destroy the wellbeing of any other. There certainly is no duty upon any form of Democratic government to submit a Christian community to impotent bankruptcy in a vain attempt to satisfy the insatiable and unwise exactions of money lenders and money changers.\textsuperscript{5}

In such passages, McGeer’s account of the banking and credit system com mingled with phraseology plumbed from the age-old reservoir of Christian anti-Semitism to produce a right-wing populist critique of “Money Power” as unproductive and parasitical, destructive rather than productive of value. In this way, McGeer’s politics overlapped with fascist ideas gaining currency in Europe, where intellectuals like Henri De Man defended “the people” against the “hypercapitalism” of high finance.\textsuperscript{6} McGeer’s immediate solution to the problem? Highlighting the $28 million the municipality had already paid in debt and sinking fund charges since 1929, he asked the City’s bondholders to agree to a 50 percent reduction in the interest rates on their debt.

This aspect of the McGeer politic is well known, but his second order of business that day — an attack on those on relief — has received less attention from scholars. True, McGeer’s demagogic tendencies in regard to Communist movements are legend.\textsuperscript{7} But at his January inauguration, McGeer said little about Communism and instead cast his critical eye upon the poor, offering the claim that municipal relief spending weakened the community’s health. How did he make his case? Vancouver had spent approximately $4.5 million on unemployment relief since 1929, and the Province and the Dominion had contributed almost $5 million in the same period, according to McGeer. Just as with spending to “satiate” finance capital, monetary resources directed to the poor were akin to matter disappearing into a black hole. “Nothing in the way of work or service has been received from this huge expenditure of public money,” McGeer asserted.\textsuperscript{8} In his calculus, relief spending and debt fund charges belonged to the same general category of unproductive expenditures presently “gnawing into the very soul of our community as a character destroying evil that is re-acting upon our social structure and economic life like a malignant cancerous growth.” Under his leadership, relief spending would be transformed from wasteful to productive: “Those on unemployment relief who can work should be compelled to give fair and adequate service for all sums which they receive.”\textsuperscript{9} Many unemployed were good people, capable of salvation. Regardless, their dependence on civic relief remained entangled with the profits of banks, sharing the blame for Vancouver’s financial crisis.

Nine and a half million dollars in relief spending, and nothing in return! In his rush to condemn those parasitically attached to the civic treasury, McGeer’s passionate rhetoric rang hollow. In exchange for relief, thousands of jobless British Columbians paid with the only currency available to them,
their labour. Workers on civic relief found themselves scattered throughout the Lower Mainland, at golf courses in South Vancouver, on the campus of the University of British Columbia, and at public parks such as Little Mountain, Lynn Valley, and Stanley Park. Some even found themselves looking down over Vancouver from the ski hills to the north. Mostly, unemployed men — residents and transients, married and single — were on the roads and under them, performing thousands of feet of road and sewer construction and maintenance. By any reasonable definition, this was not nothing. Moving from production to consumption, McGeer erred in suggesting that this princely sum had found its way into the pockets of relief recipients. Consider the Relief Department’s redemption accounts for the two weeks preceding McGeer’s inaugural address. During this period, accountants disbursed the sum of $55,804.93, not including wages and salaries of department employees, and rarely a nickel to a single relief recipient. Woodward’s Department Store received the largest amount: $13,582.47, or 24 percent of the total expenditure. Other large department stores and groceries accounted for a further 17 percent of the total: Spencer’s finished in second place with $2,594.55, followed by OK Stores with $2,061.17, B&K Economy with $1,905.02, Willbees with $1,179.52, London Grocery with $1,027.76, and the Hudson’s Bay Company with $587.84. Bakeries also lined up for relief “bread,” with firms like Robertson Bakeries receiving over $500, but their receipts paled in comparison to those of dairies, which milked the city of more than $6,000: the largest recipient, Associated Dairies, collected $3,389.15, and the next three (Crystal Dairy, Turner’s Dairy, and Empress Dairies) added a further $2,577.99, to total more than 10 percent of Relief Department spending. Providing fuel for the impoverished also meant money to burn: the figures for Amey Coal ($417.90), Arrow Coal ($253.65), and Star Coal ($413.15) compared with those for Powell Wood ($97.50) and the Vancouver Woodyard ($48.75) suggest that Vancouver’s poor heated their houses more with coal than with wood. Finally, a host of cafés redeemed thousands of meal tickets valued at twenty cents per man for two meals per day: the Busy Bee earned $144.54, the Log Cabin $108.06, the Oyster Bay $163.35, and the Wonder Lunch $175.97, with the largest cheque going to the White Lunch for $485.10. Scholars of the Great Depression have shied away from entrepreneurial success stories. This is not surprising: to the extent that most Canadian historians are uncomfortable with Marxist interpretations of their history, there remains something unsettling about discussing profits against the backdrop of widespread poverty, as if to do so would mean to adopt against one’s will a dialectical understanding of the two. This is not a sizeable problem, since we do not want for business hagiographies generally. Nonetheless, the reluctance to address profits translates into portraits of an undivided community in which all Canadians shared a common national experience of the economic crisis, in a fashion similar to
rhetoric found in the historiography of the wars. To quote Jean Barman on British Columbia, “While some individuals suffered more than others, the Depression affected everyone. Almost all wages were cut. Even companies that managed to survive relatively intact were forced to retrench, at the least to forego profits.”\textsuperscript{10} While this interpretation may have the ring of common sense given the collapse of Canadian export markets and the oft-mentioned stories of investor suicides, it is a misleading caricature that obscures basic economic processes in effect during the 1930s (and other times of crisis). The crisis of capitalism did not mean its absence or lack; mass poverty did not mean (indeed, has yet ever to mean) an end to profits.

This chapter is organized around aspects of the relief industry pertaining to the basic consumption practices of unattached homeless men. The journey from jungle to city and from itinerant to transient taken by thousands ended in two places: the first was the rooming house, equipped with bed and meal tickets for the week; the second, the mission, also came with tickets for meals and beds, along with an investigation of one’s character by a professional social worker and educational (and entertaining) programming in the form of lectures and sermons. While the former arrangement lacked the explicitly regulatory apparatus of the latter, both types of relief exchange took shape according to the principle of “less eligibility”: tickets served to discipline recipients, in this logic, by removing them from the free market for goods and services, a punishment in itself, and in so doing, providing incentive to find either employment or another, perhaps illicit, source of support. Every ticket used, then, signified what Kracauer called “inconspicuous surface-level expressions,” the actual happening of social relations, in this case a rationalized relationship among people and commodities. When seen dialectically, this enaction of social relations brought together what Foucault terms “governmentality,” in the form of the practices or “dispositif” of moral regulation, and what, borrowing from the Frankfurt School, we call “capitalogic,” in the form of economic regulation (the identitarian objectification of the recipient) and economic exchange (the material substance of exploitation).\textsuperscript{11} The latter extends the analytical reach of the former and remedies some of the worst effects of academic anti-Marxism, both by allowing us to draw analytical connections between the economic and the moral (and political), while affirming the irreducibility of both as understood within a dialectical framework, and by enabling us to see beyond the boundaries of market-based economic life. In our case, Frankfurt writings on rationalization suggest the mutual entanglement of the moral and the economic, and of power and exploitation, in the relief industry through which the most basic of goods were provided. Unlike the mutualist exchanges we observed in the jungle, to provide charity was to do business, meaning that the social relations of production, distribution, and consumption that we try to contain within the category of “the
economy” were used out of necessity in order to provide goods and services to the jobless transient. We can, in short, happily agree with the premises that Parliament and its institutions are juridically autonomous from capital and that modern power effects cannot best be described with an economistic vocabulary — two of the now-ritualized claims of both liberal and Foucauldian anti-Marxism — without having to assert that the Canadian liberal-democratic state exists somewhere in a netherworld beyond capitalist social relations.

In Vancouver’s submission to the provincial government’s Select Committee on Provincial Finances in 1932, City Comptroller A.J. Pilkington and City Clerk (and future mayor) Charles Jones characterized “municipal corporations” as “mere instrumentalities of the state for the more convenient administration of local government.” Mass unemployment meant mass need, a tremendous upsurge in demands on the state to furnish food, shelter, clothing, and other commodities for use by the jobless. To provide these goods in an economical, efficient manner, the City of Vancouver — itself an incorporated body — devised “instrumentalities of the state” in the form of contractual arrangements with privately owned businesses that provided food, shelter, clothing, fuel, transportation, and a host of other goods, as well as, on occasion, moral instruction to unemployed men and women. These economic agreements were products of the free market: neither government nor business had been compelled to participate by the force of law or the threat of violence. However, the unemployed — the third party in the equation — cannot be considered free in their interactions because bed and meal tickets, grocery scrip, and other forms of relief provision bound them to both state and corporation. Thousands of transients who lost their jobs during the 1930s also lost the right to choose where they ate and slept. To recognize this is to recognize that complaints about the “culture of dependency” that the poor are said to inhabit are wholly misdirected: throughout the decade, many government relief policies increased the dependence of the poor on the state. In 1936, in the wake of the Kerr Inquiry into the conditions of municipal relief in Vancouver, City Comptroller W. Wardhaugh made a desperate plea for the preservation of the scrip system for family cases and the bed and meal ticket system for single men, both of which entailed “almost impracticable” regulations that greatly increased the cost of relief administration. Despite this considerable burden, however, the regulatory principle enacted in these administrative forms was worth the effort. Cash relief would be seen “as being in the nature of a pension,” he claimed, eroding the work ethic while also undermining the Relief Department’s ability to regulate poor people’s spending. Instead, the municipality should dictate where transients ate and slept, denying them the right to freely engage with the market however they saw fit.

The resulting contractual relationships entailed a host of similarities in the methods of relief provision used by both private firms such as restaurants...
and rooming houses and private charities like the Emergency Refuge. The specific form of the relief exchange meant that institutions like the Refuge and the Central City Mission ceased acting as charity providers in the traditional sense and became corporations, all the while maintaining a charitable ethos. Their market was that of the basic needs of single transient men, services that also allowed them to organize educational and spiritual programs. Private charities provided consumers with beds and meals, for which they received a flat rate from one or more governmental agencies. There is, seen in this light, little charity in these acts. Moreover, once capitalized, the “instrumentalities” of private relief provision could, as we shall see, extract a surplus from the unemployed. What the Emergency Refuge and the Central City Mission did was identical in many respects to what the Anchor Hotel and the Ferry Café did. Obviously, there were significant differences between private industry and private charities that shaped the relief experience. Missions largely catered to a captive audience of single men assigned specifically to their institution. This would become one of the key complaints of rooming-house operators, who organized to challenge what they saw as state intervention that skewed the market in favor of charities. Also different was the ideological atmosphere found within these spaces, in that hotels did not have the same investigatory apparatus. True, some landlords took the initiative to inform the Relief Department of suspected irregularities regarding their guests, yet the vast majority of hotel managers did not participate in the surveillance process, a fact suggestive of the power of market-based demand in shaping relief provision. While meal tickets were attached to a specific restaurant, bed tickets could be freely exchanged at any establishment that would honour them, save for cases assigned to specific private missions for the purpose of investigation. Single transients could, within this small corner of the world, influence the market for housing, avoiding, if not boycotting, rooming houses they disliked. Alternatively, they could offer the ticket to another person in exchange for something, beg for money, or head to Stanley Park for a night outdoors. This freedom, limited though it was, meant that hotel and rooming house operators had to cater to the tastes of single transients or face empty rooms. Nonetheless, these differences should not blind us to the identity between private charities and the hotels and restaurants that catered to transient men.

Outside the confines of waged employment, the jobless found themselves looking in at the market, wanting freedom to determine their own patterns of consumption. One writer wryly noted that lunch at the Refuge “consisted of four slices of white bread sparingly spread with jam and wrapped in bags bearing the slogan, ‘Get it at Woodward’s,’” the department store owned by one of the Refuge’s financial backers. Such a meal, in this logic, could only embody capitalist rule. The bitter irony was that working-class consumption
in more prosperous times had enabled the growth of Vancouver, the proceeds of which were now denied to them. One radical articulated his anger at the spectacle of relief programs, in which transient workers could be consumers, but not citizens:

They live in Vancouver hotels and rooming-houses, eat in Vancouver restaurants and wear clothes and shoes bought in Vancouver stores. But they could not get relief from the city because they did not belong here; they were floaters, drifters; they had no permanent homes, did not pay any taxes to the city coffers, so the city fathers refused to assess the good taxpayers to feed them. 16

It is true, as this writer observed, that the Relief Department looked to effect economies in the administration process, targeting transients in the process. Nonetheless, the City of Vancouver also pursued policies to enhance its practices of knowledge gathering and discipline that added to the expense of relief. This reminds us that the contractual arrangement at the heart of the system of bed and meal tickets was always a matter of power.

The Role of Cafés in the Relief Industry: Meal Tickets

“In this country we do not die of starvation, we live it,” wrote Dorothy Livesay during her time in Third Period Montreal, hoping to caution Canadians against becoming numb to the horror of untold thousands living day to day with hunger in what we now call a post-scarcity society. The pangs of mass need stimulated in times of peace, not war, and in the presence of sufficient resources, not their absence, can be read not only as evidence of ongoing exploitation but also as a systemic component of the history of Canadian capitalogic, something inevitably lived when access to food is not a basic entitlement because of its commodified form. 17 Nonetheless, in the context under examination, I believe that the jungles largely accomplished this feat, making sustenance more or less immediately accessible to homeless men able to travel outside of Vancouver (and sometimes within its boundaries, as we have seen). By guaranteeing a meal to anyone who arrived to eat it, the homeland of the homeless offered a temporary place of escape, and thus a measure of autonomy, from the entanglements of the enclosed relief market for food. And within the cities, begging served a similar function, in that cash allowed itinerants to periodically live outside of public and private institutional channels of relief provision. As a result, the use of meal tickets, which necessarily entailed enduring the administrative process of becoming a “transient” and receiving food and shelter through a government-administered unfree market,
occurred within a matrix of possibilities, including free market and non-market options, depending on one’s location.

Our point of entry into this portion of the relief industry is Mr. S. Marriomatis, sole owner and proprietor of the Paris Café, who in February 1931 expressed his gratitude to the Relief and Employment Committee “for your issuing of Civic Relief meal tickets” for his restaurant. The decision to place the Paris Café on the list of approved establishments, he reassured them, would produce concrete economic benefits, not just for him personally but for the broader community. The guarantee of a regular clientele — bums in seats, as it were — would enable Marriomatis to schedule regular shifts, as opposed to reduced hours, for his staff and to supplement them “from the unemployed ranks.” Moreover, Marriomatis claimed that the cost-certainty that came with being on the approved list would also allow him to “offer more assistance than formerly in the way of free meals to certain unfortunates claiming that they were unable to obtain assistance from the City.” More work and more charity — both flowed from the contractual guarantee that his establishment would provide meals to single homeless men. To comprehend how exactly serving poor men with meal tickets translated into Marriomatis giving charity to those refused public relief, we must consider three models of the relief exchange embodied in the abstraction of the meal ticket.

In the first model, the value of the meal ticket (an amount determined in advance by the Relief Department) is equal to the price of the food paid by Marriomatis in the marketplace. In this scenario, the unemployed transient receives the full value of his ticket in food, and as a consequence, Marriomatis loses money on each transaction because of his responsibility for the additional expenses of wages for cook and wait staff and of overhead items such as plates, glasses, and cutlery, as well as any charges on property, whether in the form of rent or mortgage payments, and on capital, in the form of interest. Under such conditions, Marriomatis could rightly be considered a philanthropist, taking a loss so that transients could be well nourished and the state’s financial health bettered.

There exist, however, too many letters from restaurant owners (and their lawyers) asking to be granted relief business to believe that every proprietor expected to lose money by catering to the transient homeless. Indeed, that the owner of the Log Cabin Café had been willing to pay “secret commissions” to Relief Officer Ireland in order to corner the market on relief meals indicates, at the very least, the potential for profit-making. More to the point, this type of loss-taking does not accurately characterize the capitalogic at work at the Paris Café, in which serving civic-funded meals was twinned with giving charity to those without state aid. This leads us to the second model, in which the value of the meal ticket covers both the cost of food and a roughly proportional amount of charges for labour, materials, property, and capital
referenced above. The unemployed man, in other words, does not receive the ticket’s full value in food. In this scenario, relief provision is something of a zero-sum exchange for Marriomatis, allowing him to continue to provide meals and cover basic expenditures, but not to accumulate profit. In neither of these models of the exchange would the decision to allocate to Marriomatis a share of relief business provide him with resources in order to “offer more assistance” to those not in receipt of municipal aid.

To be able to divert some of his surplus resources into charitable acts, Marriomatis first needed to generate a surplus by translating a portion of some meal tickets into profit, our third model. We can thus embrace Marriomatis’s pledge to provide charity — he could, after all, simply pocket the profit — while also recognizing that he could personally distribute food to the needy only because he owned a restaurant that profited from providing meals to the homeless. Paying attention to the profits to be made with meal tickets can shed light on the social relationships of mass provision, under which restaurants became instruments of relief: sites where food could be secured, prepared, and served en masse for the thousands of men who ate thousands of meals in the downtown core each and every day. This program could be implemented only because of the relations of private property, wage labour, and discipline that already sustained the service industries. The only substantive difference between relief meals and regular meals was that the relief customer paid with a fixed-rate meal ticket rather than money, a difference that mattered more to the customer than to restaurant owners and their employees.

Implicit in the ticket system was the principle of “less eligibility,” a principle fundamental to the administration of public and private relief programs across Canada, as James Struthers explains in the still-foundational *No Fault of Their Own*. In this context, the disincentive that accompanied the state provision of meals was found in the method for financing the exchange, a process that separated transients from the free market. Through a number of contractual arrangements, the Relief Department organized an unfree market of consumption within which meal tickets circulated by the thousands, all designed to facilitate the purposeful regulation of relief recipients. Given a ticket that allowed them access to a specially approved menu at restaurants rather than cash — which, as a universally accepted abstraction of value, would have allowed them access to a much wider range of goods and services and of relief providers — unattached homeless men would eat in restaurants that were owned by non-Asians and that employed non-Asian wait staff. Over this period, faced with concerted calls for a free market in relief meals from those who owned the restaurants as well as those who ate the food, policy makers arrived at an informal preference for larger restaurants that employed Fordist economies of scale in food production, hoping to prop up the viability of the unfree market in meal tickets.
How did the meal ticket system work? Following policies largely devised by the relief officer in conjunction with the Relief and Employment Committee, W.A. Sheppard, the city’s purchasing agent, issued formal public tenders for relief meals. He vetted applications and chose a specific number of establishments — again, following the guidance, both formal and informal, of the Relief and Employment Committee, especially its then-secret policy preventing Asian-owned establishments from being placed on the approved list. Each café approved by Sheppard was accorded a fixed number of meal tickets per day. Books of meal tickets were printed and distributed to the jobless, who exchanged them for food. Until December 1930, both restaurants and rooming houses received payment in advance; beginning in 1931, they were required to submit the tickets to the Relief Department for auditing before payment.22 Because Ireland had received “commissions,” considerable public scrutiny attended the selection process. In a City Council meeting in early November 1930, Alderman J.J. McRae aired the complaints of several restaurant owners who felt shut out from what a reporter called the “meal ticket business.” “Certain officials direct the ticket holders to certain restaurants,” McRae maintained. “If we allow this sort of thing to continue again, we’re liable to get into very serious trouble.” Taking the opportunity to address matters of costs, Alderman H.J. DeGraves claimed that the Relief Department spent about $2,500 per week on meal tickets, “and it’s time the public knew it.”23

In January 1932, Colonel Cooper defended the system for regulating ticket distribution while also asserting that Relief Department officials had no direct control over the process:

The selection of the cafes, and the number allotted to each, is determined entirely by the Purchasing Agent, who judges the capacity of the restaurant, and also its ability to supply suitable meals. . . . The approval of cafes is a heavy responsibility, and a source of worry to the Purchasing Agent. The experience of the Department is that it is receiving every co-operation from the Purchasing Agent, and that this official is rendering efficient service in this matter.24

In this description produced for public consumption, Cooper shaded the truth considerably, having neglected to mention the considerable guidance provided the purchasing agent by the Relief and Employment Committee in matters such as the informal blacklist that prevented Asian-owned restaurant owners from receiving Relief Department business. When questioned about the matter by City Council in the summer of 1932, Sheppard replied that “whenever the question of giving meal business to Chinese or Japanese restaurants [came up], discussion by the [Relief and Employment] Committee has always been unofficially inferred they be not considered.”25
Indeed, evidence suggests that Asian restaurant owners knew of the policy. In January 1931, Lee Kepment submitted a tender from a group of Chinese-owned restaurants with facilities to serve up to eight thousand meals per day.26 “I feel that in fairness to our community it should be remembered that we are tax payers in the City, that we pay the same license fees as other Restaurants, and that there is no reason for rejecting our tenders on account of any race prejudice that may exist in some restaurants,” Kepment explained. He also noted that while Asians were currently denied business, the majority of café owners presently on the approved list were foreign born.27 Kepment was unsuccessful in his bid, which is not surprising given the uphill battle he faced. Indeed, unaware of the informal racial restrictions governing meal tickets, many white Vancouverites demanded that the Relief Department follow a policy of racial preference. Alfred J. Bland insisted to Alderman Atherton that his committee allot meal tickets only to those restaurants that “employ WHITE cooks and helpers”: “As it is the city sends men to be fed by restaurant owners who strenuously refuse to employ white men, and yet it is the whites who are their source of income — directly or indirectly.”28 One restaurant owner, Mattias Nordin of the Scandia Café, campaigned for business on the basis that he employed only “100% white help.”29 Eventually, in April 1933, the Special Committee struck to deal with the governance of meal tickets motioned that “during such time as the City of Vancouver is in control of relief meal tickets, none of this business be given to Chinese restaurants.”30 The racial blacklist had finally become a matter of public record: the relief industry was clearly not meant for everyone. That a special committee of council had to be struck in order to arrive at an official public policy speaks not only to the significance of food as one of the key sites for racial politics in Vancouver but also to the ongoing involvement of a host of elected and appointed officials in matters of state publicly presented as business done by bureaucrats.31

Nor was the meal ticket system free from the influence of patronage. In November 1933, Mayor L.D. Taylor recommended that the Garbo Café, run by one of his friends, be added to the approved list.32 Some owners wrote to their aldermen in search of help: “faced with bankruptcy,” the Whittier’s owner asked his alderman to “use your influence.”33 In fact, W.A. Sheppard eventually complained to Mayor Taylor that such routine interference had made it “increasingly difficult to satisfy Café owners as to why further consideration cannot be given.” Some of those not added to the list asserted their “moral right” as taxpayers to receive civic business, Sheppard explained, while others “solicit outside influence”: “Lawyers and building managers intercede, personal friends, fraternal societies, and Consuls demand consideration.”34 The owners of the Hembygden, Scandia, and Viking Cafés raised the issue of influence in a collective letter written to City Council to protest the decision to drop them from the approved list. “Any business that we have had in the
past we had to fight for very hard,” they explained, “and any business that was given us we had to fight for very desperately to hold.” While their establishments sat empty, relief recipients waited in line on the street in order to get into one of the approved cafés, many of which had landed contracts through the intercession of others. Of course, transients could be fed by means other than meal tickets issued on private restaurants. On several occasions during this period, the idea of a municipally owned and operated restaurant where transients could be centralized, monitored, and fed en masse received a public airing, including by the relief officer himself in September 1931. The Socialist Party of Canada, for instance, saw a municipal dining hall as an opportunity to provide relief “without profit to private enterprise.” Harry Kydd of Kydd Bros. Hardware believed that municipal soup kitchens could help to limit the illicit traffic in meal tickets. One widow with three children believed that a municipally run restaurant would make for better working conditions for white women than those she experienced in the private sector. Because she could not raise her family on her mothers’ pension alone, Mrs. Bourque “travelled all over the city” in search of work without luck. She eventually registered with the Employment Service of Canada, and officials dispatched her to wash dishes at the Trocadero Café. She stayed but one day and was not hired back — a good thing, in her mind, given working conditions at the Trocadero: “We white people have to put up with it, dirt and filth and inconvenience, one has to work under in such a place.” Others saw in the municipal hall a chance not for work but for profit. T. Fancett offered to personally run a civic dining hall for unemployed men, believing that he could reduce operating expenditures to “close to half the cost of sending them to restaurants.” John L. Lewis, speaking for both himself and his wife, made a similar offer, pledging to “save the City a great amount of money & give most efficient service & satisfaction to everybody.”

Others, however, strongly dissented from any project that would see the municipality (or any other level of government) enter a field dominated by private enterprise. Ian Shaw, a lawyer representing a number of restaurant owners, articulated his clients’ concern with plans for a dining hall, arguing that this would “not in the long run be beneficial to the City as a whole and will certainly work to their prejudice.” One owner had invested over $130,000 in his business and had a monthly payroll of $10,000; to deprive him of relief business could lead to more unemployment. In essence, Shaw argued that it was unfair for these establishments to have to compete with a government-run hall. Although frequently discussed, the idea for a municipal restaurant was never realized, largely because City Council feared the necessary capital costs, which would be borne by Vancouver alone since the provincial and federal governments had declined to assist in this matter. While many agreed that such an establishment would probably allow the city to reduce costs in
the long term, without the requisite starting capital, no such savings could be made. Instead, the City devised policies that sought to reduce costs at the point of consumption.

In February 1931, City Council struck a committee composed of Aldermen Atherton and Bennett, City Comptroller A.J. Pilkington, W.A. Sheppard, the city’s purchasing agent, and the city’s medical health officer, Dr. F.W. McIntosh, to consider revisions to the ticket system. With Atherton, Bennett, and Pilkington among the strongest proponents of economy and efficiency in relief provision, it was something of a foregone conclusion that transient men would be tightening their belts. In their first report, the committee concluded that meals could be provided for much less than fifty cents per day per man, the current value. Instead, they proposed the issuance of tenders at the rate of thirty-five cents per day, hoping to reduce this figure in future.43 Two months later, the committee concluded that tickets valued at thirty cents per day would provide “a reasonable and sufficient menu” for single transients.44 With the assumption of financial responsibility by the Tolmie government in the autumn of 1931, however, provincial administrators pegged the combined value of bed and meal tickets for transients at forty cents; any additional money for these cases would have to come from the municipality. In response, the Relief Department initially chose to divide the amount equally into two twenty-cent tickets.45 In June 1932, the purchasing department called for tenders to provide relief meals at a rate of twenty-two cents per day, seven cents for breakfast and fifteen cents for dinner.46 Over the course of sixteen months, the cash value of meal tickets depreciated 56 percent.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the declining value of meal tickets resulted in meals of inferior quality. In his tender, the manager of Bell’s Café pledged to provide transients with four ounces of meat and six ounces of vegetables with each dinner, portions admittedly smaller than those available for customers who paid with cash.47 In the Wonder Lunch’s bid to provide meals at the twenty-two-cent rate, owner F.F. Kennedy “respectfully” suggested that twenty-five cents per day would provide transients with “a more reasonable breakfast.” “Having been in the business of supplying cheap meals to the working classes for the past twenty-five years,” he wrote, “I feel that 25 cents per day is a minimum requirement and at that figure only leaves a small profit for the caterer.”48 These examples hint at the limits faced by managers in seeking to make relief business profitable.

The sympathies of others lay not with café owners but with the jobless. A writer for the Unemployed Worker lamented the plight of one man who sold his meal ticket to secure currency with which to purchase groceries. Caught by the Relief Department, he was labelled a “grafter” and barred from relief. The reporter argued that the value of the meal ticket when illegally exchanged for cash was greater than its value when used according to regulations: “It is
well known that one can sell a meal ticket at half its supposed value, take the money and buy grub in a store, and have far more to eat than what he can get with meal ticket in any of the slop joints after the mulligan vendor gets his profit which must be large enough for the city council's racketeers to get their ‘cut.’” J.H. Fitzer, an unemployed man, claimed that in one café, “they were unfortunate to have to tolerate dead flies dropping into their food” during mealtimes. Another jobless man wrote to Mayor Taylor to “heartily denounce” the reduction in the amount of food served in restaurants despite the considerable reduction in the wholesale prices for food. “Let the tickets be used anywhere,” he enthused, “and the unemployed be the Judges of a meal.”

Nonetheless, the assumption that restaurant owners lost money and that the unemployed saw their portions shrink each and every time the City reduced the rates prevents us from seeing the dynamic processes at work in the relief industry. Some cafés clearly depended upon meal tickets to stay in business: one man noted that at one meal in the Winnipeg Café, he alone paid cash for his dinner; the rest used tickets. The guarantee of relief business probably aided managers in the bulk purchasing of food and other economies of scale, allowing for cheaper per-meal costs. Yet for this strategy to be effective, owners needed to ensure that relief business was in fact guaranteed: to stay on the approved list, these establishments had to redeem the bulk of issued tickets, meaning that owners depended to some extent on the willingness of transients to return twice a day, day after day, to receive the city’s patronage. Transients willing to discard their meal tickets and search for sustenance elsewhere could seriously diminish the daily cash flow and long-term viability of downtown cafés, and so too could the organization of the jobless. The United Front of Ex-Servicemen, for instance, fought for and won improvements to food provision. In December 1932, it launched complaints against the Winnipeg and Vancouver Cafés for the poor quality of food and against the American Café for the size of portions. The Relief Department agreed to drop the Winnipeg Café from the approved list at year’s end, and the American’s owner made improvements. Other groups targeted specific restaurants with a form of direct action. In December 1933, eighteen members of the Communist-led Single Unemployed Protective Association received jail sentences after eating at the Waldorf Café without money to pay for their meal. Fred Grange, the secretary of the association, maintained that its members had “no alternative than the course they took.” In these ways, the need to provide meals to transients limited the cost-cutting measures available to restaurant owners in serving this clientele.

Faced with these contextual factors, some owners chose to make up for decreasing returns by attempting to increase the efficiency and intensify the exploitation of wait staff labour. We can assume that waitresses at cafés dependent upon meal tickets had lower take-home incomes than those at
other establishments because of the presumed lack of tips from those on relief. Many also experienced an intensification of the work process. Singling out the National Café on West Pender, one Communist noted the physically harmful effects of this escalation: “Those whose job it is to clear the tables have actually to run with their arms full of dishes. It can be plainly seen that there is some slave driver behind some partition spying on them through some peep hole, who continually hold[s] the threat of instant dismissal with all it means over their heads.” And others hinted at different forms of exploitation. In a letter to the *Vancouver Sun* in the context of a debate over the possible ban on the hiring of white women by Chinese restaurant owners, “Brother” suggested that “nine times out of ten, a white woman would rather work for a Chinaman as a waitress than for some of the other café owners, who curse them, strike them and demand special privileges of them if given a chance to work.” The latter fate befell his sister, he lamented. In such a context, waitresses conducted organizing drives that led to a series of strikes, including a 1933 job action at the Blue Goose Café and a larger campaign affecting the Deutschland, Melrose, Only Fish, and Trocadero restaurants in 1936. Thus, the effects of changing civic policies regarding meal tickets on social relations in restaurants extended well beyond the relief recipient.

In fact, many conflicts concerning meal tickets focused upon the tickets themselves — that is, on the form of relief rather than its amount. Many transients, it seems, experienced the system as a source of pain. John Ahern used the opinion pages of the *Vancouver Sun* to question the necessity to “compel a man to eat at some place, when he would rather eat at another.” Assessing the harmful effects of the program, he singled out the distances transients travelled to eat at the restaurant to which they had been assigned: “In the case of young men the exercise may be beneficial, but with the old and elderly, whose underpinning is wobbly and whose peregrinations have to be assisted by a stick, or two sticks, or crutches, it is — to use no harsher term — a hardship.” In making this complaint, Ahern was not alone. In November 1930, almost fifty residents of the Anchor Hotel on Columbia Street signed a petition for Alderman Atherton. In the 1930s, establishments like the Anchor — a cheap downtown hotel catering to older single or separated men whose past had seen long stretches of unskilled manual work — swelled with men who were legally classified as single transient men but who lived outside of the relief camp system. “We are all old and infirm,” the forty-six petitioners explained, hoping that Atherton would intervene on their behalf and secure them a guarantee of meal tickets for the Ferry Café, as other restaurants were too far away for them to walk. Some sought other kinds of consumptive flexibility. J.S. wrote to the *Sun* to propose that transients be allowed to purchase tobacco with meal tickets. His rationale took into account climatic conditions: the rain made it impossible for him to scavenge discarded butts from the sidewalks.
and streets. “The Carnegie library cannot hold us all, nor half of us, and the pool rooms simply won’t have us, for which no one could justly blame them, and it is under such circumstances that the weather takes a hand and puts an end to our sidewalk salvage operations,” he explained, maintaining that a change in policy “would be hailed in much the same spirit as would a raise in wages.” In many cases, transients sought change to the forms of relief provision in order to secure a greater measure of autonomy in making purchases.

For others still, tickets embodied the state’s power to coercively dictate aspects of the lives of the unemployed, such as where they ate and slept. Communists consistently attacked the ticket system for such reasons, and they were not alone. The Vancouver Direct Relief Association (VDRA), formed after the destruction of the jungles, issued a series of demands in December 1931 that echoed those of Communist organizations. The VDRA called for bed and meal tickets that could be redeemed at any establishment and opposed any act of “coercion” to force the unemployed into private shelters. It also asked that hotels, rooming houses, and other establishments that housed transients be compelled to follow civic health and fire laws. That month, the VDRA secured a meeting with the Relief and Employment Committee, sending Percy Bengough and Colin McDonald — secretary and president of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, respectively, and the city’s most prominent union figures — to request that meal tickets be redeemable at all restaurants. Turning down the unionists, the committee argued that such a policy “leads to abuse of the system.” In January 1932, at a public meeting attended by three hundred people, the VDRA extended its demands, calling for a public inquiry into “the administration of Relief Funds to Charitable and Religious institutions.” Unlike the investigations instigated by ratepayers’ organizations in the name of the rights of property, the VDRA moved to have their inquiry conducted by those groups that it believed represented the poor: delegates from the VDRA, the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the All-Canadian Congress of Labour, the Independent Labour Party, the National Unemployed Workers’ Association, and the Rooming House and Café Owners Association were to be allowed the same type of access to civic records that had been granted associations of property owners. Based on extant records, this endeavour appears to have been the first example in Vancouver of a programmatic united front on relief policies for both transients and residents to include every group on the left — “Stalinists,” “social fascists,” and “labour bureaucrats,” to use their own terms for each other — and even an association of property owners. But while ratepayers’ organizations had been granted access to the private records of those on relief, Cooper refused the VDRA’s request without explanation: it is unknown whether he objected in principle to these groups having the same access to confidential government records as ratepayers’ groups or he feared what they would unearth and make public.
Throughout his tenure as relief officer, Cooper repeatedly rejected outright the idea that unemployed men should receive cash, instead arguing that the maximum social benefit could be secured through economies of scale. Cafés required a “reasonable number” of meal tickets in order to make the business worthwhile, he believed, and from an administrative perspective, it was cheaper for the department to have tickets printed with the names of cafés rather than to print blank tickets and stamp the names of restaurants on each one as they were redeemed. To allow transient men to choose where they ate would, Cooper argued, “increase the administration costs.”\(^{64}\)

W.A. Sheppard already felt overburdened by the work of the approval process. In December 1931, he complained of having on his desk approximately forty applications for the meal ticket business: “To give every restaurant business would demoralize the Relief Department and add considerably to the administration and checking of tickets.”\(^{65}\) This position prevailed after Cooper’s departure. In September 1932, a special committee consisting of four aldermen and W.A. Sheppard concluded that “it would be advisable to limit this business to the larger cafés who by reason of the volume of their business and the larger attendant buying power were able to furnish the most satisfactory meals.”\(^{66}\)

The Relief Department under W.R. Bone attempted to effect more economies of scale: eventually, only larger restaurants judged able to produce substantial numbers of transient meals would retain the City’s business. In September 1932, officials removed eight restaurants from the approved list, leaving twenty-one establishments. At that time, approximately three thousand men received meal tickets at a weekly value of $1.75, or twenty-five cents per day. Cafes that fed a hundred relief cases per week thus took in about $750 per month.\(^{67}\) Officials argued that only the larger establishments could implement economies of scale and provide meals of sufficient quality.\(^{68}\) Later that month, the City refused the applications of three more cafés on the grounds that the list was already too large to be carefully monitored. City bureaucrats also warned restaurant owners who accepted “foreign” tickets — those designated for use in other cafés — that these would no longer be redeemed.\(^{69}\) The Relief Department issued a circular to restaurants on the approved list, reminding each “of your contract and its penalties in this regard.”\(^{70}\) The owner of the Luxury Café felt the force of this policy when he attempted to redeem tickets upon which he stamped the name of his restaurant over the names of establishments printed on them by the Relief Department.\(^{71}\) This decision affected relief customers as well. One man claimed that he had been cut off and made to reapply for relief when he refused to accept tickets for the Newport Café, which was too far from his hotel to walk.\(^{72}\) Two transients accused of misusing meal tickets at the Palace and King’s Cafés saw their relief suspended for one day “as a penalty.”\(^{73}\)
The concerns of Cooper and Bone surrounding the cost of administering the meal ticket system help us to comprehend conflicts over the financial dimension of the regulatory measures woven into relief provision. Providing relief in cash rather than tickets would have been more cost-efficient for the City: the elaborate accounting practices; the ticket printing, distribution, and redemption procedures; and the ongoing monitoring of cafés would have been rendered obsolete. Nor would civic officials have had to engage with methods to effect economies of scale: each restaurant would live or die, financially speaking, according to its ability to put bums in seats. Just as important, though, with cash in their pockets — even in such small amounts — transients would have had the choice to spend it on meals or on other commodities. Thus, while cost-efficiency techniques yielded wholesale reductions to the amount spent on meals for transients, the disciplinary framework of relief provision meant increased costs for the city and less freedom for the poor. In this instance, officials devised policies to maximize the delivery of relief services for a minimum per meal cost, but only if these methods allowed for departmental regulation of recipients.

None of this is to suggest that a surplus was generated each time a relief recipient sat down to eat a meal. The Paris Café’s story was one of success, but other establishments were not as fortunate. Moreover, the types of social relations through which meals were produced meant that the rate of profit could be contested through working-class organization, as with the organizing campaigns of Vancouver waitresses. Nonetheless, just as with cash transactions, with each meal ticket lay the possibility of profit. In a January 1932 memorandum, Cooper opposed calls to switch to a blank ticket system that would give transient men the right to choose which restaurant to patronize. “Such a method,” he explained, would lead to the flourishing of “new cafés” looking to secure a share of relief business, helping to perpetuate the system: “It would naturally be in the interests of these café owners to do as much business as possible, and it would not be to their advantage to see the number of relief clients diminish. In other words, there would be an encouragement to a tendency towards making relief an industry.”

According to Cooper’s pre-Keynesian logic, there was no relief industry because there was no free market: state regulation of economic activity, in other words, meant the absence of capitalist forms of exchange. From our contemporary standpoint, accustomed as we are to (disappearing) Keynesian forms of government intervention, Cooper appears Cassandra-like: the relief industry had already arrived.

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The Push for “Fair Competition”: Bed Tickets

A November 1930 report filed by a city investigator detailed to the Hotel Stanley offers a tragic portrait of unemployed men without prospects, slowly sinking into new depths of impoverishment. The top floor of the Stanley housed a conglomeration of Swedish and Finnish loggers, most of whom had been without work for six months or more and were in debt to the landlord in the range of $60 to $75. “Most of them started long ago to sell their clothes at ridiculously low prices,” the investigator observed. “Money for food is hard to obtain now. Some men have been going without food for two days or more. They are in an hopeless condition and expect to be turned out on the street any day.” The landlord claimed that without paying customers, “it is absolutely impossible for him to carry on like this any longer” and pledged his willingness to house the men at a weekly rate of two dollars if only the Relief Department would agree to pay. Three years later, Donald Campbell, a Health Department inspector, estimated that although half of the licensed rooming houses were under new ownership, conditions had not improved: “I found many place[s] filthy, poor plumbing, water pressure too low, toilets not flushed, sleeping in basements, over crowding, place infested with bed bugs & other vermin, mattresses on beds not fit for a dog to sleep on.”

This anecdotal evidence helps us to understand some of the appeal of the jungles; the rough conditions in these self-fashioned communities do not seem greatly inferior to life at the Hotel Stanley and other establishments. However, archival records offer what initially appears to be a paradox: while more documentation exists about the inadequate if not slovenly conditions in rooming houses than about terrible food and service in restaurants, the sources also make clear that the issue of shelter, and not food, proved more fertile ground for the creation of cross-class alliances among owners, transients, and radical political groups. While both café owners and transient eaters called for the value of meal tickets to be raised, they rarely did so jointly as part of a concerted campaign. The struggle over shelter in the early years of the 1930s, however, led to the emergence of a common political program. This difference can be traced to the different economic relationships engendered by the relief policies of both municipal and provincial governments.

While many administrative aspects of the bed ticket system existed within the same bureaucratic network as those of meal tickets, we can detect several key differences. First, bed tickets came in two kinds: a general ticket, which allowed those in possession to spend a night at any hotel or rooming house that would accept them, and a mission ticket, which directed the transient to a specific mission such as the Central City Mission or the Emergency Refuge, where they would be both fed and housed. Unlike meal tickets, then, which substituted the judgment of Relief Department authorities for that
of the recipient, general bed tickets ensured transients a relative measure of autonomy in the marketplace and thus a greater ability to influence the economic fortunes of individual establishments. Second, meal tickets were largely the preserve of transient single men, although a small percentage of resident single women also received them. Family relief cases, however, whether resident or transient, received food in the form of groceries and, later, scrip. Consequently, restaurant owners and grocery merchants interacted with different sections of the Relief Department and articulated very different economic interests, and I have found no evidence indicating that these two groups sought to collectively press their demands during this period. In contrast, the question of shelter prompted several organizations to launch concerted lobbying campaigns, such as the attempt to win shelter allowances by the Vancouver Real Estate Exchange, a professional body dedicated to increasing both the value and the power of property rights. More to the point, many hotels provided shelter to transients of all kinds: single men, single women, and families. The instruments of relief were different — bed tickets or rent allowances — but the proprietors the same, thus facilitating a collective campaign. These differences in the forms of food and shelter provision meant that the latter provided a context more conducive to alliances between transients and hotel managers.

As with meal tickets, bed tickets declined in market value in the early thirties. By April 1931, their worth had been reduced to twenty-five cents per night from fifty cents in the fall of 1929. In October of that year, Cooper initiated a further reduction to twenty cents per night in order to allot twenty cents per day for food under the municipality’s agreement with the Province. In response to complaints from the British Columbia Hotels Association, Cooper maintained that the Relief Department was “only acting as an agent for the Government,” which, he explained, capped relief to single transients at forty cents per day. Yet this was misleading, as Cooper well knew: the province capped its own contribution at forty cents, but the municipality could increase the value of bed and meal tickets according to the will of City Council. While the council did, on occasion, vote to commit additional spending for resident relief cases, it repeatedly refused to do so in the case of transients. In less than two years, the value of meal tickets declined 60 percent.

Despite falling prices, however, Vancouver never wanted for entrepreneurs seeking a share of its shelter business. In December 1932, the owner of The Litimer on East Hastings Street lobbied the Relief Department to designate his entire building as a relief hotel, since relief recipients already occupied fourteen out of twenty suites. One man believed that he could effect economies of scale in shelter, proposing to house two hundred men, two per room, at a rate of $1.20 per week per man, or $480.00 per week, slightly less than the rate of twenty cents per day. George Poke’s scheme showed more ambition:
with a budget of $13,000 to $15,000, Vancouver could build its own shelter for five to six hundred men, who would be charged eighty cents per week. Before them lay an “appertunity for higher moral and spiritual ideals,” Poke argued. All the situation required was the “right leadership who have a heart for betterment of humanity,” as well as Poke’s managerial talents. In a similar vein, E. Odlum, president of the Mercantile Mortgage Company, offered to loan one of his firm’s unused buildings to the City at no charge. A former laundry, the property could house between thirty and fifty; the Relief Department would need to provide mattresses, blankets, stoves, and bathroom facilities. “The cost would be trifling,” Odlum asserted, “compared with renting a lot of rooms and more real comfort could be had at less cost to the city.” His offer was not without strings: in return, he expected to have his property taxes waived. One group authored a petition against Odlum’s scheme, which died in the conceptual stage. As with relief meals, relief beds were seen as valuable commodities that provided the opportunity for grand humanitarian endeavours or for simple accumulation.

Following the destruction of the jungles, many in business with the City came to criticize the economics of policies that allowed the Relief Department to discipline transients and keep them under surveillance. These entrepreneurs argued that the use of private charities to house, feed, and monitor the jobless undermined one of the key pillars of the capitalist marketplace: the level playing field. In December 1931, the Rooming House and Café Owners Association began a campaign against the policies governing bed and meal tickets with a meeting with City Council’s Finance Committee. The association estimated that its members paid $200,000 in rents and taxes, and $10,000 in license fees, not to mention employing over 1,200 people, and could thus claim an entitlement to civic business. The most substantial objection lay in what these entrepreneurs saw as the preferential treatment accorded charitable establishments such as the Emergency Refuge and the Central City Mission. Relief Officers Cooper and Bone consistently used private charities to extend the regulatory reach of the department in regard to transients. Such a policy “constitutes unfair competition,” argued the association, because these charities had been exempted from the customary licences and taxes paid by businesses. What’s more, private charities also received operating grants from government bodies. Taken together, these policies subsidized the cost of doing business, thus giving lie to the idea of a level playing field. Added to this were measures that guaranteed the mission customers: transients thought to be work-shy or radicals — usually some combination of both — were denied the choice that came with bed tickets and were obligated instead to receive aid at a private mission, where they would be investigated. Such actions, in denying transients choice, also deprived rooming-house owners of their clientele, undermining the free market.”

“The essence of business is fair
competition,” they reminded Vancouver’s politicians, maintaining that the single transient man “should be allowed to get the best value at any licensed Café or Rooming House which he may choose.” While pledging his willingness to meet with the organization, Atherton scoffed at the argument about the privileges accorded to private charities, which had “no foundation in fact.” With this response, Atherton was not denying that missions were not guaranteed clients — a widely accepted fact — but rather that this did not represent an unjustifiable violation of the free market.

In March 1933, this group of entrepreneurs, gathered together under the name of the Lodging and Restaurant Keepers’ Association, put forth a new program, hoping to win for resident families a dramatic increase in shelter allowances from a maximum of five dollars per month to ten dollars for husband and wife plus one dollar for each child to a maximum of fifteen dollars. Despite claiming to represent restaurant owners, the association focused its efforts on the question of shelter, demanding both a sizeable increase in municipal spending and the guarantee of a free market by ending the special arrangements with private charities. That April, the association again attacked missions, which they believed to be “operated for profit, bonused by the Government & exempt from licenses & taxes. We demand that these places be given no more privileges than Rooming House operators.” H.B. Hungerford, secretary of the association, sharply criticized the Salvation Army as well as the Young Men’s Christian Association and its counterpart for women. “These so called charitable institutions are operated under the guise of religion,” he wrote, “& not only get a better scale for their shelter but are also allowed to be on the streets,” holding “Pot Days” to solicit funds with permission from the city. Hungerford also savaged flophouses like the Central City Mission and the Emergency Refuge as both “a public menace” and “unfit for human habitation.” The treatment accorded these institutions by governments added up to “unfair competition.” Finally, Hungerford ridiculed the council’s plan to encourage the destitute to seek odd jobs in order to secure money for the rent as “quite improbable”: “the Government has all ready confirmed the idea in the minds of the majority of these men that complete maintenance is gratuitously given to destitutes.” The council’s refusal to pay a standard shelter allowance for married and family unemployment cases led the association in June 1933 to threaten to evict all tenants in these relief categories who did not have a minimum allowance of ten dollars per month.

From the outset, Colonel Cooper had no sympathy for the rooming-house owners. He even had the temerity to argue that in finally issuing bed tickets to the residents of the jungles, his department had in reality given “more clients . . . to rooming house keepers.” It was in the interest of owners, he argued, “to maintain a large clientele,” implying that their arguments in support of increased shelter allowances could be disqualified by the quest
Several times, Cooper observed what he believed to be a pattern: some recently arrived transients “of a certain northern European nationality” requested from the department bed tickets for specific hotels. “It was obvious,” he concluded, “that these men had some inducement to come to Vancouver and proceed to these boarding houses.” Instead, Cooper detailed them to the Refuge, and their numbers decreased, in one case by 90 percent, he claimed. He emphasized that it was “essential” that business owners who encouraged the unemployed to come to Vancouver “not profit as a result.”

Other city officials rejected the argument about free competition, maintaining that organizations like the Central City Mission did not compete with rooming houses because the former accepted those turned away by the latter. The City’s chief sanitary inspector enthused about the Mission and the Refuge. “The best of food is provided and the sleeping, living and recreation facilities are good,” he wrote, “and occupants of these places are very well cared for.” He wrote off complaints as “fancied grievances.”

Bettina Bradbury, David Bright, John Manley, and others have explored Communist attempts to attract the jobless by organizing around immediate economic demands. These kinds of demands dovetailed with an increasingly jaundiced view of relief accommodations and camps. The Working Class Ex-Servicemen’s League was particularly vocal in consistently demanding that no former soldiers “be sent to camps of any kind, Refuges or Missions.”

Those who served in the military “made it possible that our civilization might endure.” Consequently, the country owed them “more than a bed in Refuge or Mission,” especially since their business would be welcomed by rooming-house operators. Interestingly, the Unemployed Worker contains little criticism of specific hotels. Although one April 1932 issue warned the jobless to avoid staying at the Clayton Rooms and the Margarete Rooms because the managers were members of the special police force that helped to suppress unemployed demonstrations, this type of commentary was rare.

Compared to the regular complaints issued about meals, bed tickets received little criticism in the radical press, probably because the majority of transient single men could choose where to sleep. True, this type of relief still allowed city officials to track their movements, nor would all hotels accept tickets, which were inferior to cash in several respects. Yet Communists clearly recognized the value in being able, within limits, to choose one’s residence and directed the bulk of their criticisms of shelter policies at private charities like the Emergency Refuge and the Central City Mission. One radical suggested that the $4,500 worth of unused meal and bed tickets issued for the Refuge symbolized the number of unemployed men who preferred the streets. “The policy of sending workers (many of whom have lived in the city for years) to the Refuge,” he argued, “is deliberately intended to force them into Prison Camps to work for their board, or get them off relief entirely.” It is to these two private institutions that we now turn.
Private Missions: Unintentional Surpluses and Unwanted Competition

To read even a single issue of the Unemployed Worker is to understand that many itinerant men considered private missions something akin to the bottom of the barrel. Communists hated the downtown missions. While they held out a measure of hope that a better arrangement could be won from governments, which were at least theoretically subject to the will of the people, private missions would never be redeemed. “By holding a crust of bread in front of the starving workers the missions force the unemployed to listen to their propaganda and prevent them from attending unemployed meetings,” argued one radical. “Their last pennies are extracted for lousy beds. Thus does capitalism in the name of religion exploit the workers.” Another Communist condemned “the clergy, social vultures of the vilest and most despicable type,” for the “poisonous ideological influence” that sought to “educate the militancy out of” workers. Many clergymen were also accused of being hopelessly corrupt: “seeing the picking of the ‘mission’ graft,” these mission leaders “want to get their hooks into the pork barrel a la Rev. Ireland.” Communists thus interpreted the missions in terms of the ideological (“poisoning” the mind) and the material (“extracting” a surplus). This section explores the relationship between private missions and the Relief Department, and between the missions and other charitable organizations in Vancouver. It also details the critique that Communists and others issued of mission policies, whether of the “poisoning” or “extracting” variety.

During his tenure as relief officer, Colonel Cooper relied heavily on private missions because they furthered the regulatory designs of the Relief Department regarding the investigation and control of transient workers and were cost-effective in doing so, thus helping to relieve some of the workload of administering relief to thousands of people, resident and transient, in Vancouver. Indeed, the creation of a workable, separate relief system for unattached transient men that, because of its distinct administrative and provisional forms, could be financed by other levels of government would never have come to fruition without the missions, which ended up, through no fault of their own, the front-line sites of transient regulation within the city limits. Without the ability to send designated applicants to a privately owned and administered enclosed location where their character could be critically assessed — sorting out the resolutely lazy, degenerate, disgruntled, and discontented from those with a genuine entitlement to state aid — the Relief Department would have had to acquire, plan, and staff facilities of their own to effect such a division among a seemingly endless population of applicants. This would have involved dramatic expenditures to cover the associated labour costs, if not capital costs, as well as the interest on the money, which would have had to be secured through a new bank loan. The limited evidence
on Vancouver’s missions suggests that this quasi-privatization of aspects of relief provision to transients — welcomed by the leading ideologues of the Vancouver Welfare Federation, the local variant of the Community Chest — changed the day-to-day practices of mission life in ways that undermined, rather than facilitated, the Christian ethos of many institutions.

The founders of the Central City Mission explicitly designed it to be a Christian organization, dedicated to providing an evangelical atmosphere for down-and-outs in search of salvation. The Emergency Refuge and the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets lacked this religious spirit: run by former military officers and the city’s leading industrialists, these institutions offered a more disciplinarian ambiance. The different character of mission programming, however, should not obscure the fundamental transformation of the economic structures of these institutions during the early 1930s. The specific contractual relationships set out by the City of Vancouver remade the missions — already corporations under the tenets of the Societies Act — into service-sector enterprises in competition with restaurant owners and rooming-house operators for the right to provide food and shelter to homeless transient men. Because these organizations now housed social relations that, in the private sector, owed their very substance to the drive to accumulate surpluses, they ceased operating as humanitarian endeavours in the accepted sense. Instead, these groups received money from the various levels of government, to be translated into commodities and dispensed to the jobless and homeless. While remaining charitable in ethos — religious and educational sermons and strict character evaluations continued to be in force — private institutions no longer gave of their own resources. They remained “charities,” but the name no longer required of them acts of giving.

To begin to remedy this blind spot concerning the continuing processes of accumulation, we commence our investigation with the Emergency Refuge, the private charity created as an expression of the philanthropic spirit of W.C. Woodward, the son of Charles, the owner of Woodward’s Department Store, a Vancouver institution. In November 1930, W.C. launched a shelter for single transient men, who, in light of the street battles of the previous winter, had come to be considered a substantial threat to social order. Having solicited his friends to capitalize the endeavour, Woodward and his Refuge served at its peak fourteen hundred meals per day and provided beds for seven hundred. Since the Refuge extended the reach of the civic relief system with its own investigators and record-keeping services, Relief Officer Cooper arranged a cheap rate with the Refuge: $1.75 per man per week with each person to be given two meals per day. This cheap price meant that the Refuge had to keep per unit costs low in order to sustain operations, and officials more than achieved this aim. James Thomson, a Tory patronage appointment to the provincial liquor board, related the Refuge’s success to Premier Simon Fraser.
Tolmie: “On this agreement with the City, they ran for two months, and at the end of the period they found they had made $2,000.00 — or $1,000.00 per month. This money is in a fund, in case the operation should again be needed. This will give you some idea what thorough organization and efficiency will do.” In providing meals and beds to several thousand men over the course of two months, the Refuge accumulated value equivalent to 1,142.8 man-weeks of relief. I do not mean to suggest that Woodward and his colleagues set out to make money by providing relief to transients but rather that they simply couldn’t help themselves: in organizing the Refuge according to the business principles that struck them as common sense, they created the conditions in which surpluses were made through the thousands of relief exchanges that took place each and every day.

Vancouver was home to almost twenty private charitable institutions devoted to itinerant unemployed men, half of them exclusively religious in orientation. Unfortunately, archival documentation is non-existent for most of these organizations, and such records as do survive indicate that most had little effect on relief provision because of their small scale. One April 1930 report explains that most missions quickly used up their small allocation of beds and referred the bulk of single transients who requested aid to the Relief Department instead. While these institutions contributed to the relief effort, their limited resources meant that any substantial increase in the number of jobless applicants had to be shouldered by the Relief Department. A few locations, however, did service substantial numbers. As of August 1930, the Central City Mission and the Salvation Army each housed approximately 200 men per night. In November 1930, the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets run by the Canadian Legion served food to an average 180 men. By March 1931, Legion officials estimated that they had served 500 ex-servicemen daily since November for a total of 60,000 meals. The destruction of the jungles in September 1931 forced the Relief Department to reverse its March policy that had removed transient men from the relief rolls and once again open its doors to single men. By the third week in September, the department had issued bed and meal tickets to 2,500 single male transients, although the Tolmie government promised to reimburse the city for the cost. Faced with the necessity of once again administering to thousands of transients, Cooper toyed with the idea of abolishing the ticket system and instead devising “some central system” for feeding and housing transients, but this did not come to fruition. Instead, he opted to rely on the missions, especially the Central City Mission and the Emergency Refuge; each transient case dispatched to the missions was valued at forty cents per day for food and shelter, the same as was accorded to restaurants and rooming houses.

From the standpoint of civic administration, the missions had advantages beyond the purely pecuniary. Logging companies provided the bulk
of funding for the Scandinavian Mission, an offshoot of the United Church, which fed on average two hundred men per night in the winter of 1930–31. The Scandinavian Mission conducted evening classes “for the study of English and good citizenship” for its members, mostly Swedes and Finns. “We believe,” one lumber company official wrote, “that this has had a very important bearing in offsetting the spirit of Communism which has been spreading quite seriously among the unemployed.”

Cooper’s favourite, the Emergency Refuge, supplied 4,578 beds and 19,130 meals in September 1931, and 5,370 beds and 22,972 meals in October 1931, mostly to men made homeless after the clearance of the jungles. The relief officer used the Refuge “as a means of testing these men.” His logic was simple: those suspected of shirking would no doubt prefer work to a stay at the Refuge. In this way, the Refuge, with its investigatory procedures, had been of “assistance in reducing the cost to the taxpayer.”

Cooper also looked to the Refuge to discipline those who fell through the cracks of the relief camp system. The Tolmie government had pledged to create camps for those itinerants who entered British Columbia after the registration scheme closed in the summer of 1931, but this promise went unfulfilled due to the financial crisis that followed quickly on the opening of the camps, as detailed in the next chapter. Cooper proposed to put this group to work, housing them in the Refuge until the Tolmie government lived up to its pledge and arguing that, with a plan of work and strict supervision by Refuge employees, “there would be little inducement for the unemployed of other Provinces to flock to Vancouver.”

Yet the Refuge also reduced the cost of relief because many transients simply refused to use bed and meal tickets issued there. One correspondent for the Unemployed Worker named “Shorty” observed that upon entering the Refuge, an official collected his book of weekly bed and meal tickets and issued him a separate ticket to be punched each day. “Many workers who get that ticket eat there only once,” claimed Shorty, and yet the Refuge could redeem the entire book of tickets: “it seems obvious that the grafter that runs the place is doing fairly well.”

The available evidence allows us to confirm Shorty’s description of the process, if not the accusations of graft: in January 1932, Refuge organizers sent the Relief Department cheques totalling $4,587.80, representing beds and meals allotted by the City to transient men but not redeemed. This figure represented almost 11,500 man-days of relief since the destruction of the jungles in September. In the first two weeks of August 1932, 4,315 bed tickets were issued on the Refuge but only 2,140, just under 50 percent, were redeemed. Given a choice between a mission and the street, hundreds of unemployed men hit the pavement.

Relief Department officials thus intended their use of private charities like the Refuge to reduce relief costs and protect against what they saw as the exploitation of municipal resources by transients. At the same time, these
explicitly stated goals meant that some transients were less likely to avail themselves of government aid precisely because they took offence at the suggestion that their character could be improved through a short stint under such punitive circumstances. Allotted tickets for the Mission, one unemployed man, F.H. Richardson, complained to A.E. Tutte, the head of the single men’s section. Tutte, however, refused his request for tickets for rooming houses on the grounds of moral improvement: according to Richardson, Tutte told him that “there w[ere] worse things than the do[se] of lice I would get at the Mission. That the men who were given their preference of eating places [were] probably full of venereal or some other contag[i]ous disease.”

This type of reasoning — that the government should use the opportunity provided by poverty in order to intervene and improve the moral health of transients — occasionally led to violations of the law. In February 1932, the Working-Class Ex-Servicemen’s League joined forces with the Anti-Vaccination and Medical Freedom League to combat the policy of compulsory vaccination at the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets. “Advantage has been taken of the plight of many ex-servicemen who are forced, through unemployment, to live in Government billets,” these groups proclaimed. “These men have been confronted with the alternative GET VACCINATED OR GET OUT and, consequently, a number of them are without food or shelter,” having been turfed from the Billets despite the fact that they had registered as “conscientious objectors” under the law governing inoculation. In correspondence with Ada Muir of the Anti-Vaccination League, H.E. Young, the provincial health officer, rejected this charge outright; no provincial relief agency required the unemployed to be vaccinated. Muir responded with proof in the form of the Billets’ regulations: on 9 February, Major J.G. Fordham, in charge of the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets, had posted the new rule requiring all to be vaccinated. Over the next two days, a number of those refusing the compulsory program were removed from the Billets. When they took their case to the Relief Department, they were told to return and consent to inoculation if they wanted government relief. “Thus you will see,” Muir pointed out, “that these men were forced into starvation while violating no law.”

The Billets also had a compulsory bathing policy that rankled many. In the Unemployed Worker, a writer who signed as “A Canadian” condemned the Billets for the poor quality of service, including bad food in small portions, often with only one slice of bread per sitting. This “Canadian” also criticized the policy regarding baths:

The bath is a little two by four place. Compelled to bath here, the men are herded in large numbers like cattle. If you do not go you are hauled up in front of the All-Highest for censure or probably expulsion. Class-conscious workers are almost afraid to express their opinions.
on account of the place being a regular nest of stool-pigeons who are always ready to run to the office with any information that they think will get them in good. . . . If that is a sample of the democracy we fought for, it is time, and past time, that we had a change.128

“Of what value is the conscientious objectors law on our Statue Books?” asked Ada Muir, if the administrators of private charities could use government money to fund coercive programs that violated statutory law.129 The reliance of the poor on charity entailed the removal of many of the basic rights and protections afforded citizens. Indeed, in some cases, private charities also served as substandard alternatives to municipal aid: many transients with military backgrounds were automatically denied bed and meal tickets and were detailed automatically to the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets. Less than a week before Remembrance Day, a writer calling himself “Veteran” wrote to the Vancouver Sun to speak out against the “public shame and injustice” embodied in the Billets. Many returned soldiers, he argued, already “suffer the effect of nervous exhaustion due in great measure to their war service, now aggravated by under nutrition. They are literally walking the streets of Vancouver starving.” That the Legion should feel it necessary to begin a soup kitchen, he argued, was “a public shame and injustice” because it meant that former soldiers were denied civic relief and treated as second-class citizens. “Apparentely,” “Veteran” wrote, “Kipling’s words are still very true: ‘It’s Tommy this and Tommy that, and Tommy get behind; but ’tis Tommy to the front, Sir, when there’s trouble in the wind.’”130 In these respects, to be detailed to the missions was to be separated from the rest of the transients on relief and subjected to a host of coercive forms of regulation. For this reason, a number of groups such as the New Era League and the Socialist Party of Canada opposed private charities because they were removed from any type of democratic control; these groups argued that governments should assume sole responsibility for the provision of relief.131

The Unemployed Worker published numerous complaints about the quality of food and shelter at private missions. One reporter recounted the rotten fish, stale bread, and lack of blankets on offer at the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets.132 Stuck with tickets for the Refuge, an unemployed man named “Red” complained that “Belly Robber Millar is serving rotten fish again.”133 One group of jobless men claimed that the Refuge “constitute[s] a menace to the health of the workers of the whole City. Over one hundred men are sleeping on the floor and benches at this joint.” They suggested that civic officials inspect the Refuge at midnight in order to see its real conditions.134 During one of Cooper’s visits to the Refuge, a handful of residents criticized the food and staged a walkout.135 One Communist claimed that “Holy Willy,” the “Jesus Jazzer” at the Refuge, forced some workers to sleep on the floor even though
some of the beds remained empty. When R.J. Lecky, the official responsible for administration at the Refuge, asked for volunteers to decorate the place for Christmas, one worker retorted that “decorating the tables with something to eat would be more in order.”

Communists called for the Emergency Refuge to be abandoned altogether, but the request “caused some indignation among the Aldermen, most of whom agreed that such places should be encouraged,” according to one radical. They also complained about the connections between private charities and the Relief Department, with the former helping the latter enforce policies regarding the relief camps. One veteran protested the decision to force dozens of Billets residents to choose between forced labour and starvation: “There was no alternative for them; they either went to the camps or were thrown out on the streets to go where they liked, so they nearly all chose the lesser evil by going out.”

In April 1932, the Refuge had instituted a work test, requiring two days of work per week in return for “slopjoint meals and flop.” Shortly thereafter, about a hundred residents launched a strike against the work test. One week later, a worker who refused to clean up the garbage in the alley behind the Refuge discovered he was to be denied meals in the future.

In January 1933, sixty workers living at the Emergency Refuge called for its abolition, and the right to eat and sleep where they chose.

Perhaps the best indication of discontent came in a July 1932 letter to Mayor L.D. Taylor: despite having called Vancouver home for forty-one years, F. Good asked Taylor if he could arrange for him to be sent to a relief camp, which he imagined to be preferable to being “an inmate at the Refuge.”

Critics of the mission system often highlighted what they saw as the possibilities for graft and other forms of corruption. One radical wryly noted, “Someone’s palm must be greased, for the dumps that give the smallest quantity and rotteneast quality get the most of the City Relief trade.”

In October 1932, R.J. Lecky informed Relief Officer Bone of a change in the policies of the Refuge: his organization would no longer return the money allotted it for beds and meals that went unredeemed by single transients. Instead, the business leaders who funded the Refuge had decided to use these funds “to finance our clothing department.” One can only imagine the reaction of relief officials had an overcompensated relief recipient done the same. Many radicals saw little difference between this type of charitable operation and second-hand clothing stores run for profit. “If a destitute person goes into the above-mentioned place to get a pair of worn shoes or a piece of clothing he will find himself in just a common second-hand store, because anything he wants costs money,” explained R.R.W. “The City Mission makes hundreds of dollars yearly from these donations. And there is no open information how much of that income might ‘slip’ into the pockets of people directly connected with that holy roller business under the name of Christian charity.”

W.R. Bone
sent one of his investigators to the clothing store run by First United Church. “No person I saw during about half an hour’s stay got anything for which they did not pay something,” the employee reported, assessing prices there as the same as could be found in a typical second-hand store. A correspondent for the Unemployed Worker reported that Reverend Roddan gave him an undershirt and an overcoat as well as a pair of socks. Roddan then declared their value to be worth $1.25, and asked the man to work for ten hours as payment; the correspondent refused the clothing because of what he saw as scab wages.

It is nonetheless important to emphasize that the provision of relief through an unequal exchange did not necessarily involve corrupt or otherwise dubious practices. Indeed, for some private charities, the possibility of generating income was woven into the basic services they provided. No other institution symbolized this identity of private charity with private enterprise more than the Central City Mission. The Mission was officially run by Central City Mission (CCM) Limited, a joint-stock corporation whose shares were owned by many of Vancouver’s leading entrepreneurs such as grocery magnate and one-time mayor W.H. Malkin. In 1930, CCM Ltd. became a member of the Vancouver Welfare Federation under the direction of J. Howard T. Falk: as a result, the Mission lost the ability to organize its own public campaign for funds and other types of support. Each year, the federation made its annual appeal in the name of all affiliated charities and divided the proceeds as its board of directors saw fit. The Mission provided two types of beds and meals: those purchased by the transient and those designated as “free,” for which the Mission received payment from a government or private agency. In 1931, CCM Ltd. received grants of $2,000 from the City, $2,500 from the Province, and $2,513.23 from the Vancouver Welfare Federation, as well as private donations of $173,565. During the course of the year, CCM Ltd. provided 13,986 free beds, 35,826 free meals, 13,540 free refreshments, and 18,250 baths to those living in the jungles. The total cost of this endeavour was $8,091.19, which meant a loss of $904.38. By examining the relationship between the Central City Mission and the Vancouver Welfare Federation (VWF), and by following the trail of money and tickets, we can learn much as to the economic transformation of private missions through civic policies on relief provision to transients.

As a member of the federation, the Central City Mission keenly felt the influence of the modernizing (and centralizing) campaign led by Falk. F. Ivor Jackson, a long-time bureaucrat with the federation, remembered Falk for his innovative ideas: “Mr. Falk brought with him a philosophy of administration and financing of social welfare and to him, the planned development of the service was equal, if not of greater importance, than orderly financing.” At the VWF’s first annual meeting, much was made of the adoption of “business methods” of administration such as the proper professional accounting of funds and procedures to ensure “that the expenditures shall bring an
adequate return in services rendered.”\textsuperscript{151} The VWF’s bylaws emphasized the goal of “promoting efficiency and economy of administration in the charities and benevolences of the city as a whole.”\textsuperscript{152} One 1931 pamphlet, \textit{If You Were Face to Face}, sought to legitimize the federation’s work by referencing its modern “business methods”:

The Welfare Federation represents to the citizens of Vancouver the best method of dealing with the problem of organized charity, assuring, as it does, adequate support for organizations without resort to uneconomical methods, relief to the public, to a great degree, from constant calls for aid; and, generally, placing the organized charity work of the city on a sound and business-like basis.\textsuperscript{153}

In practical terms, this meant the elimination of what were classified as duplicate services in regard to fundraising and welfare provision. This reorganization of private charity, it was believed, would have positive effects on those desiring to contribute because it would remove the element of compulsion. Charity would be truly genuine because it would be freely given:

Conscience alone can be the guide to giving. There is not one of us who would not, any day in the year, forego an expenditure on some personal pleasure or luxury if he were brought face to face with distress, and had to choose between the alternatives of making the sacrifice to relieve the distress of indulging himself in the purchase of the luxury or pleasure.\textsuperscript{154}

With these ideas, the federation sought to place private charities, including missions for transient men, on a professional and “scientific” footing.

One of Falk’s key innovations was the creation of a meal and bed ticket system that paralleled that of the Relief Department. The federation intended its ticket system to be used by businesses and other community groups desirous of giving aid but wary of the possible consequences of putting cash in the hands of the poor.\textsuperscript{155} Begging led to moral blight because of the absence of controls over the spending of money, the VWF argued. To give money meant freedom for the beggar once the exchange was completed: only tickets would allow for some measure of discipline to be exerted over the jobless. In this endeavour, the federation found much public support. Solicitor Hamilton Read, for example, agreed with the principle of denying homeless men the ability to choose that came with cash. “Not a day goes by without many applications being made to many business men by men asking for money ‘for a meal, not had a bite since yesterday’ & so forth,” he recounted. Giving money meant that Read could not ensure that those who received it spent the cash on necessities
alone. As a solution, he asked to purchase ten dollars worth of meal tickets from the Relief Department, which he could then distribute instead of cash. “I would then feel that no question could arise as to men being fed.”

Echoing Read’s logic, the federation’s 1931 pamphlet, *Sure! I’ll Share*, proclaimed, “The Panhandler and House-to-House Beggar Must Go.” Private acts of charity, it explained, actually worsened the condition of the poor: “Panhandlers last winter were making as much as seven dollars a day and spending it on alcohol whilst the children of decent Vancouver people were near starvation.” Through their support of the business plan of the federation, “citizens” could help “to stop this travesty of charity,” although it was not clear how the provision of tickets rather than cash to transients would prevent children from starving. The ticket system would also encourage initiative, they believed: transients would receive tickets that could be exchanged for three days of meals and shelter, after which they would be denied any further support from the federation and its member agencies. This would eliminate “professional begging” and “safeguard” those who purchased tickets to give to those in need. While “conscience alone” was to guide the conduct of citizens, the unemployed would be governed by a system of bed and meal tickets that removed them from the free market for goods and services for three days, only to then force them back into the labour market. What would happen to transients after this period — how they would support themselves in a context of mass unemployment — was not explained in any of the federation’s literature.

In addition to its ticket system, the federation sought to rationalize charity through the centralization of its provision in the hands of professionals. Proper record-keeping procedures would be employed, duplication would be eliminated, and funding would be under the purview of a small contingent of experts. This process, however, brought the officials of the VWF into conflict not just with transients but also with its member institutions. The Central City Mission accepted the federation’s proposal and agreed to honour its tickets along with those of the municipality and the province, but some directors of the Mission were initially wary of this agreement. One emphasized that the primary goal of the Central City Mission was “to take care of men who wanted to get into a Christian atmosphere.” The VWF ticket system, however, meant that they would have to accept transients who disdained their religious mission. “It was never intended that the Mission should be a clearing house for the unemployed,” he lamented. The erosion of the founding purpose of CCM Ltd. had begun. In June 1931, the Welfare Federation again approached the Mission with a new plan. It sought to reserve 195 beds in the Mission each night for one year for a sum of $10,500, or just under fifteen cents per bed per night, which was less than 60 percent of the value of civic bed tickets. The CCM’s directors were not impressed with this offer because it would reduce...
them to a service provider under the control of the VWF. Instead, they proposed that they would reserve 195 beds to be given to those in possession of tickets, whether municipal or private, to be valued at the rate of 22.5 cents per night.\textsuperscript{162} As of December 1931, CCM Ltd. was running at full capacity, feeding and housing clients on municipal relief as well as those referred by the Vancouver Welfare Federation.\textsuperscript{163}

In 1932, the federation cut its administrative grant to CCM Ltd. from just over $2,500 to $1,000. Moreover, the money came with strings attached: it had to be spent on a social worker, who required the “concurrence” of the VWF to be hired.\textsuperscript{164} Mission directors also agreed to provide beds and meals for those in receipt of VWF tickets, up to a total value of $4,000. This policy was thought to “eliminate as far as possible the opportunity for trafficking.”\textsuperscript{165} One of the key responsibilities of T.C. Colwell, the appointed Mission social worker, was to encourage frequent users of VWF tickets to “become self supporting or at least no longer dependent upon private charity.” Those flagged as repeat offenders were to be denied meals and beds unless Colwell gave his approval.\textsuperscript{166}

By April 1932, the VWF had distributed 1,274 ticket books, largely to firms in the downtown area. However, J. Howard T. Falk soon came to believe that the lax administration methods employed by the Mission vitiated the policy intent behind the VWF’s ticket system. Falk observed that Mission officials notified homeless men as to which businesses possessed federation tickets: transients flocked to a firm until it ceased to issue tickets, and then moved to the next company.\textsuperscript{167} These repeated requests “imposed” upon those businesses willing to purchase tickets. Falk also cited evidence that at least eleven homeless men had used tickets for a period ranging from one to four months, thus violating the federation’s three-day policy.\textsuperscript{168} This, to Falk, signified the serious need for the Mission’s social worker, T.C. Colwell, to take action. Accepting Falk’s assessment of the situation, the VWF’s executive committee passed a motion complaining that “the Central City Mission has made no appreciable effort to cooperate with the Vancouver Welfare Federation in the matter of the use of this ticket system and its main purpose, that of the elimination of pan-handlers, but, rather, have [sic] allowed it to become a nuisance to business firms.”\textsuperscript{169} Falk warned Colwell that his inefficient methods of administration encouraged pauperism. Men seeking to avoid labour camps and those kicked out of the Refuge because they would not participate in work relief programs at substandard wages resorted to the Central City Mission. The Mission’s failure to perform adequate investigations of these men weakened municipal relief programs, Falk charged.\textsuperscript{170}

The Mission’s board of directors did not take such criticism lightly. President W.E. Pinchin maintained that the VWF’s charges were “unfair,” and he asserted the Mission’s “autonomy.” Manager George Watson highlighted the
The Racket in Tickets and the Traffic in Lives

The contradictions within the VWF ticket policy, purportedly designed to prevent panhandling. The strict regulation that barred transients from receiving aid after three days forced them to return to begging on the street, thus intensifying the problem the ticket system had been created to prevent. Watson also stressed the practical limits upon the investigation process: with approximately two hundred men seeking aid on a daily basis, it was impossible for one social worker to adequately monitor the lot. They also complained that the VWF had not honoured its obligations to the Mission, having reneged on pledges of payment on at least one occasion.

The conflict between the federation and the Mission reminds us that whatever the intent of charity providers regarding discipline, these aims could be frustrated by shoddy administrative practices. The federation's drive to rationalize relief provision in private missions was thus only partially complete. This conflict also hints at the economic dimension of private charity: Mission directors felt that they could not satisfy the federation's program because of their own reliance on tickets to keep their organization afloat. According to one inquiry, the Central City Mission was “faced with an operating loss” if they could not fill 80 percent of the beds on a monthly basis. Each transient the Mission serviced, whether on municipal or private tickets, meant revenue. As a private corporation, CCM Ltd. had little choice but to violate the federation's policies in order to maintain a steady flow of income and stave off bankruptcy, thus allowing their Christian mission to continue.

The Central City Mission had a considerable monthly overhead. Its financial statement for April 1932 indicated monthly salaries of $175 for Watson; $175 for T.C. Colwell, the Mission's social worker; and $190.17 for office staff. The organization also had a mortgage of $35,000, which required minimum monthly payments of $200. In addition, the Mission was subject to the normal fluctuations of the transient market due to Relief Department policies. Each summer, when transients were cut from the relief rolls, the CCM usually had a full house, supported by federation tickets and by requiring payment from transients. In the winter, however, when a greater number of transients could collect bed tickets redeemable at hotels throughout the downtown core, CCM had beds to spare. The fortunes of its religious and educational programming also rose and fell with the rules governing relief provision. In the summer of 1931, the Mission gave free meal tickets to all who attended its gospel meetings. Eventually, because of the “need for stringent economy,” this policy was terminated, at which point the average attendance at gospel meetings dropped from eighty to twenty.

The Mission's capital costs alone obliged it to seek clients. Taking one reporter on a tour, George Watson characterized the Mission as “not quite ‘Hotel Vancouver’ perhaps . . . but we do the best we can to keep things nice, altho’ you can't force cleanliness on folks!” Trying to keep them clean, however, propelled the Mission into
debt. In August 1931, just as Vancouver’s urban jungles housed what would be their largest population, J.W. McIntosh, the city’s medical health officer, and Joseph Hynes, a city inspector, surveyed conditions at the Mission and recommended the cleaning of all mattresses and bedding as well as the installation of a better ventilation system and fumigation facilities. The bill for this work was estimated at between $1,200 and $1,300. In February 1932, facing a financial crisis, CCM Ltd. asked the City of Vancouver to assume financial responsibility for the cost of the fumigator.

In his appeal to civic officials, George Watson explained that the value of the Central City Mission lay in its ability to “instill cheer and brightness” in the lives of unemployed men. Their gospel meetings averaged between 200 and 250 participants and were effective in “improving the morals of the men.” “There seems to be a new era of sunshine and gladness springing up,” Watson enthused. He also observed that the Mission helped the Relief Department enact its policies. With a wide open door, the Mission would minister aid to almost anyone. Thus, according to Watson, the City could deny relief to transient men whom it considered unfit in the knowledge that they would receive some measure of aid from the Mission. This portrait, offered by City Council for public consumption, was inaccurate in that the Mission had on occasion denied relief to those without tickets or money. “If the Mission had money to enable it to operate wholly without charge, it would no doubt be glad to do so,” explained President Pinchin, “but, in order to get in enough money to keep the doors open and carry on its work, the Mission is obliged to make a small charge for meals and beds.” Watson also claimed that the Mission was deserving of support because the group had committed to “help the city in its efforts to send men to camp, by refusing assistance to men whom we know have refused to go to camps when requested to do so by the City Relief Officer.” Indeed, later in the decade, Chief Constable John Cameron wrote to thank George Watson “for his assistance, in a quiet way, in connection with the ‘Red’ situation in the City.” Taken together, this information suggests that the Mission often acted in concert with the Relief Department not only by extending private aid, in some cases, to those denied public relief but also by denying the same aid to specific individuals in order to strengthen policies regarding work relief programs.

In Watson’s characterization of the Mission’s financial straits, he noted that his organization honoured bed and meal tickets from the Vancouver Welfare Federation at full value. Thus, Watson explained, the Mission could not generate funds through this activity because of the low rate paid by the VWF: “we cannot consider them as revenue bearing.” In addition, the value of municipal tickets declined from $1.75 to $1.40 per week, making these less likely to produce revenue for CCM Ltd. Finally, Watson assured city officials that “the shareholders are receiving nothing in the way of dividends and
it is not thought that any dividends will be earned for some considerable time."\textsuperscript{185} Alderman R.N. Fraser and Dr. J.W. McIntosh, the city’s medical health officer, recommended that the Finance Committee endorse the grant to \textsc{ccm Ltd.} to cover the cost of the fumigator, noting that the group “gives services to certain classes in the community, which it would be difficult to replace without the expenditure of a considerable sum of money on the part of the City.”\textsuperscript{186}

The fumigator issue opened wounds within \textsc{ccm Ltd.’s} board of directors. P.G. Drost launched a blistering attack on its policies, accusing his fellow directors of relinquishing the organization’s true goal of Christian mission work, which had “taken second place to making money.”\textsuperscript{187} In one sense, Drost’s assessment was accurate: the policies of the Relief Department and the Vancouver Welfare Federation meant, in practice, that Mission workers were periodically required to turn away destitute transients who sought out the Mission for its Christian programs in order to feed and house those with tickets. Drost took his case to City Council, warning them that they “should not now use the money of over-burdened tax-payers to construct a sterilizing plant in the premises of a joint stock company.” By budgeting money for “construction work in the premises of an incorporated company,” the City would set “a dangerous precedent,” Drost argued, as rooming houses “in competition” with the Mission would no doubt ask for similar kinds of support.\textsuperscript{188} Drost’s argument had a precedent; the council had earlier refused the request of the Canadian Legion for a donation of $100 to allow the Legion to fix the plumbing in the Ex-Servicemen’s Billets for precisely this reason.\textsuperscript{189} Precedent, however, took second place to the fact that the Central City Mission saved the Relief Department money: the City of Vancouver paid for \textsc{ccm Ltd.’s} new fumigator.

This act was the beginning of a pattern of government intervention in favour of the Mission and of public controversy about such actions. In November 1933, the Mission was charged under a civic bylaw for operating a rooming house without a licence, although the charge was withdrawn after W.E. Pinchin, president of \textsc{ccm Ltd.}, pleaded with city officials.\textsuperscript{190} The financial arrangements that sustained the Central City Mission continued to come under fire at the decade’s end. Alex Fordyce, a representative of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, inquired into the circumstances at the newly renamed Abbott House as part of his city-wide investigation of charitable institutions. By cross-checking the books of Abbott House with those of the City, Fordyce discovered that the former had used a portion of its municipal grant to pay its municipal property taxes. This was, in Fordyce’s opinion, a “very unethical way of conducting their business.”\textsuperscript{191}
The overwhelming majority of what must have been millions of charitable acts by individuals throughout the Great Depression decade are destined to remain beyond the view of the historian. There is, however, extant evidence pointing to private schemes organized along fraternal lines by religious groups, racial and ethnic organizations, and others to care for their own independent of the state. Unions, for instance, often chose to redistribute work among their members, reducing their weekly hours rather than allowing layoffs and weakening the local. In 1931, the International Typographic Union (ITU) in Vancouver distributed $1919 in cash and 2,486 days of work, valued at $21,052.09, to their members, while the Pressmen, a smaller union, distributed 386 days of work, worth $2,953, and $1,720.25 in cash.192 Such generosity did not always benefit the recipient; the Relief Department refused members of the ITU municipal relief on the basis that the union ran its own program.193 Nonetheless, the generosity of these two unions is quite remarkable: over $27,000 worth of relief measures distributed over the course of a single year.

What makes this more remarkable is the fact that this amount far surpassed the contributions of Vancouver’s private charities like the Central City Mission. While the unions received nothing monetary in return for their acts — although the ITU used its program to lobby for the City’s printing contract — governments accorded charities substantial financial support. The resources that mission managers bestowed upon the poor, in other words, were paid for largely by the state. In administering aid through the missions, these philanthropists did not give of their personal wealth, as did the printers and pressmen, although this is not to suggest that they did not donate money to worthy causes. In the overwhelming majority of relief transactions in the period under study, private missions took the money of governments to provide meals and beds to transients. So too did entrepreneurs like café owners and rooming-house operators. The difference between these two groups thus became primarily ideological: assured of a clientele, charities co-operated with civic officials in investigating homeless men, while entrepreneurs, having to compete for their business, did not. The relief industry thus blurred the divisions between public and private, and between charity and industry.

The activities of privately owned service providers were organized around a system of unequal exchange. They took the money given to them by governments and in return gave beds and meals to transients. This did not always mean surpluses — the extraction of value by receiving more from the government to provide goods than the value of the goods they provided — although in some cases it certainly did. In all cases, however, the exchange was unequal in character. Homeless transients did not freely give their consent to this type of social relationship, and civic officials never asked for it. Economically, the inequality of exchange already existed in the capitalist social relations through which governments chose to administer aid to homeless
men. Without this inequality, neither businesses nor charities could afford to be cost-effective. In 1931, the same year that the ITU and Pressmen provided over $27,000 in relief to their members, the Central City Mission Ltd. received just over $7,000 from the municipal and provincial governments, the Vancouver Welfare Federation, and private donations. In return, it provided beds, meals, and baths to homeless transients, finishing the year approximately $900 in the red. In short, through the unequal exchange of relief, CCM Ltd. made enough to cover the costs of food and other related items, to pay the salaries of its employees, and to cover most its mortgage payments that year. Because of the Mission’s status as a property-owning corporation, its board of directors exhibited grave concerns over the bottom line. If they did not, their dream of a Christian mission for down-and-out men would sink too far into debt to be redeemed. Hundreds of businesses across North America could not withstand the financial pressures of the economic crisis. Central City Mission Ltd. would not be one of them.

Also notable about this process is the extent to which the relief industry resembled the workings of the wider Fordist social formation then emerging. “As in production so in distribution, combination and consolidations are the rule,” suggested Socialist Party writer John Sidaway in 1930, noting that “department and chain stores have banished the corner grocer.” So too did economies of scale shape the provision of relief. City officials opted to exclude a number of smaller cafés and give their business to larger restaurants, arguing that only large firms with substantial purchasing power would provide an adequate diet. Fordist principles were also present in the Relief Department’s use of private charities to further its reach into the lives of an increasing number of jobless transients. Groups like the Vancouver Welfare Federation oversaw the rationalization of the provision process in the private sphere, mirroring the Relief Department’s own internal reorganization. The only element of Fordism absent from the relief industry — that of the $7.00 day — was that which homeless transients would have appreciated the most.