

**KITTY MALLOYS AND REBEL GIRLS: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOMAN WORKER IN
VANCOUVER'S EARLY 20TH CENTURY MAINSTREAM AND RADICAL LABOUR
NEWSPAPERS**

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ABSTRACT

Vancouver's early twentieth century mainstream newspapers captured a feminine culture of the young woman worker caught in a moral paradox of naïveté and willing impropriety. Through images and narratives, the tumultuous social and economic changes of the day were rendered "class-based girl problems." By contrast, radical labour newspapers represented women workers as "rebel girls" and valiant helpmates to the working class movement.

This examination of images and narratives prompts consideration of how these class and gender discourses influenced real women workers. In particular, the telephone operators' activism during Vancouver's 1919 sympathetic strike demonstrates how women workers re-created discourses of class and gender in ways that brought greater control and meaning to their lives. While early twentieth century newspapers framed contemporary discourses of class and gender through images and narratives, they were unable to capture the resonance and pertinence of these discourses to the everyday lives of working women.

Keywords: feminine culture; objectification; new and modern woman; working girl problem; white slave; rebel girl; marxist masculinity

For R. Wheeler and E. Underwood

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INTRODUCTION

As early 20th century newspapers took stock of the quick and uncertain social and economic changes taking place in the new century, they exposed how young working women were implicated in the moral dilemmas of material progress and the larger social meanings of vice. Vancouver's early 20th century mainstream newspapers *The Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Daily World* captured in picture and prose images of the young woman worker caught in a modern paradox of blinding naïveté and conscientious impropriety. Having left the moral sanctity of the family hearth in search of waged work, she was portrayed as a victim of the modern excesses of cosmopolitan consumerism.¹ However, her willing submission to it also made her a perpetrator. Her excitement for department store fashions, nickelodeon film romances, and the music and spirits of the dance hall rendered her the proverbial poster child for selfishness, greed, and even lust as these age-old vices were spun as “class-based girl problems.” The consequences of such an “extraordinary weight of characterization” must not be underestimated.² While the potential for public scrutiny and scorn was great, the possibility for intrusion in young women's daily lives of work and leisure by self-proclaimed social reformers, religious organizations, leading city capitalists, and labour organizations was greater.

Recent studies by Christine Stansell, Carolyn Strange, Liz Conor, and Lindsey McMaster have illuminated how images and narratives of the working girl and the white slave were used to convey political, economic, social and moral authority over young women and their working class

¹ This term is borrowed from Liz Conor's *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

² Denise Riley, “Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of ‘Women’ in History,” cited in Carolyn Strange's *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 20. In this study, Strange analyses how the late 19th and early 20th century “Toronto girl problem” in part developed during the debates concerning the moral consequences of the expanding commodity market.

community.³ More importantly, these studies have drawn insightful conclusions that how social identities of young working women unfolded on the historical newsprint were not necessarily reflections of reality, but rather remarkable lenses through which historians might better understand how power over others was constructed, manipulated, and implemented.⁴ Poststructuralists coined the term “linguistic turn” to account for their own “historical analysis of representation as opposed to the pursuit of a discernable, retrievable historical ‘reality.’”⁵ In words other than “linguistic” or “turn,” image analysis enables historians to better understand how individuals, communities, and organizations utilized mediums such as visual images and narratives to articulate their beliefs on how society ought or ought not to be.

In many studies of the visual representations and narratives of the female figure and the feminine gender, theorists are bound to the concept of “objectification.” These studies point to how images reduced the female body and the feminine gender to simplistic, demoralizing, and discriminating characteristics. Feminist theorists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon assert that the concept of objectification accounts for how women have been denied self-expression and self-determination and treated as objects or instruments throughout their lives. For these feminist theorists, “sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism; in each case something that is most oneself and one’s own is what is seen by the theory to have been taken away.”⁶ The repercussions of sexualized images of the female figure have been severe as young women have struggled with public harassment as well as the physical and psychological punishments of forcing themselves into social standards of a perfect female body, mind, and manner. In *Sympathy and Solidarity*,

³ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*. Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*. Lindsey McMaster, *Working Girls in the West: Representations of Wage-Earning Women* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

⁴ Stansell, *City of Women*, 74.

⁵ Kathleen Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn: Historicizing Discourse and Experience,” *Signs* 19 no.2 (Winter 1994), 369.

⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum, “Objectification,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 24 no.4 (Autumn 1995), 263.

Sandra Lee Bartky argues that the objectification of women will persist as long as the capitalist market is able to profit from the politics of women's sexuality. She strongly asserts that "when the women's movement is in a position to go once more on the offensive, it must develop as part of its cultural politics, a new politics of the body, an invention of a new 'styles of the flesh.'" She concludes that "more is required than 'gender bending' or parodies of conventional gendered presentations of self, valuable though these strategies may be."⁷ Her assertion prompts the question, "so what do women do in the meantime?" For this historical context of early 20th century Vancouver, how did young women workers understand the images and narratives that objectified them as unintelligent, gullible, morally weak, and licentious?

This study tackles this question by coupling an analysis of early 20th century representations of the female figure and the feminine gender with an examination of young women's activism during waged work and leisure. Through this process of analysing manifestations of power within visual images and narratives and how young working women actually interpreted these representations of their lives, this study is critical of historiographical tools like objectification. In response to feminist theories that objectification is "definitive of and synonymous with women's lives as gender female," this study agrees with historians who argue that this articulation of sexual difference through the assignment of women to object status and men to subject status has a long history of denying women's ability to negotiate gender identities.⁸ For this particular study, the concept of objectification potentially neglects recognition of the opportunities young women took to negotiate, interpret, and make their own decisions about defiance or compliance to political, economic, and social subjugation demonstrated through visual images and narratives. In *The Postmodern Marx*, Terrell Carver identifies how constructions of sex, gender, class, and race,

⁷ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Sympathy and Solidarity and Other Essays* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 27.

⁸ Nussbaum, "Objectification," 250. Connor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 35.

“despite all the disciplinary apparatuses employed, map poorly onto the varieties of experience that individuals can still manage to generate in living out their lives as human agents.”⁹ In this study, images and narratives from early 20th century mainstream and radical labour newspapers are revealed as failing to prescribe the social and political lives of young women workers within the city of Vancouver. The historical records of young women workers’ activism in waged work and leisure, in particular the telephone operators, reveal how they were subtle non-conformists to the social identities and roles they were cast in by political, business, social, and labour leaders alike.

In this thesis, chapter one examines early 20th century advertisements, articles, narratives, and images of the “new and modern woman” from the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Daily World* and reveals how narratives and images of the young woman worker were manipulated as disturbing indications of social instability. Vices of the modern city were represented as both class and gender-based problems that necessitated intense scrutiny and monitoring of working class neighbourhoods and workplaces. Chapter two illuminates how constructions of the feminine gender were implicated in the early 20th century radical labour movement, in many respects to contest the feminine culture of young woman workers represented in the mainstream press. The Industrial Workers of the World, the BC Federation of Labour, and the Canadian One Big Union developed a feminine culture through their narratives of the rebel girl and the union wife, as well as through their progressive stances on women’s sexuality, in particular prostitution and birth control. This chapter also discusses how the female figure was a powerful metaphor for illuminating virtue in the radical labour movement and for condemning vice in the capitalist class, mainstream press, and conservative trade unionism. Through an analysis of the metaphors of the female figure and the narratives of the rebel girl and union wife, this chapter asserts that this powerful feminine culture does not necessarily imply women’s emancipation because the powers to map out women’s

⁹ Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 212.

participation in the radical labour movement were primarily held by their male counterparts. This chapter recognizes how these radical labour organizations' usage of the female figure and the construction of a feminine culture did not entirely transgress conventional gendered norms of separate spheres and proper places for men and women. The IWW, BCFL, and the Canadian OBU made a radical indictment of capitalism without upsetting society's patriarchal structure of sex and gender inequality.

However, the final chapter assesses the efficacy of the images and narratives of the female figure and the feminine gender discussed in chapters one and two through an examination of the actual experiences of Vancouver's young women workers. Analysis of these young women workers' activities in work and leisure illuminates how they interpreted, adapted, and re-created these constructions of their sex and gender in ways that brought greater control over and personal meaning to their politically and economically constrained lives. Grounding these images and narratives in a historical context, the Vancouver telephone operators' work, leisure, and labour activism leading up to and including the Vancouver Sympathetic Strike of 1919 are examined. The telephone operators' history of activism is particularly important as it exemplifies young working women's non-compliance to both the images and narratives of "the working girl problem" and the "rebel girl." Throughout the entire study, these visual images and narratives are regarded as invaluable historical records of how power among and between the sexes, genders, and classes was cleverly rationalized by social conformists and courageously and compassionately challenged by lobbyists and social activists. However, the efficacy of their discourses is ultimately questioned for their resonance and even pertinence to the everyday lives of young working women.

VANCOUVER'S "BAD LITTLE GOOD GIRLS": IMAGES FROM THE MAINSTREAM PRESS¹

The 1910s and 1920s were spectacular decades in which budding film-makers, playwrights, photographers, sketch artists, and newspaper journalists competitively scrambled to capture the “new and modern woman” in a provocative image. The suffragist and the maternal feminist wielded less awe than the beautiful and mysteriously confident youth who strutted down the city streets on her way to nickelodeon theatres, dancing halls, and department stores. Of particular fascination were the young women who eagerly participated in these leisure spaces as soon as they were unbound from long hours of waged work. These images both thrilled and frightened as they revealed how young women actually sought social, economic, and sexual independence from matrimony and domesticity. That is, the rising intrusion of young women workers into the city of Vancouver was conveyed as undermining gendered norms of separate public and private spheres for men and women. The ways in which young woman workers denied the feminine domain at the family hearth and the masculine ownership of the city streets, workplaces, and public leisure spaces were thus represented, in various creative mediums, as crucial social markers of contemporary society’s unstable and uncertain transformation into the new and modern era. As the mode of production developed with technology, urbanization, and commodified culture, the young woman worker became the primary site for contesting the severity of these modern changes. An analysis of Vancouver’s mainstream newspapers, the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Daily World*, reveals how young working women’s prolonged absence from the familial role of wife and mother was conceived as a threat to the already weakening vital signs of the Victorian social order. The narratives of the young woman worker soon became an ensign of

¹ “Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

economic, social, and moral poverty for a society which had not quite transcended its Victorian past nor fully submerged itself into the new and modern era.

In many respects this concern for the future was predicated on early 20th century turbulent economic and social growth. In British Columbia, the forest, mining, and fishing industries developed expanding economies of trade, finance, transportation, and, to a lesser degree, manufacture. From this, migrants from eastern Canada, the British Isles, Asia, and Europe swelled the Greater Vancouver population from 29,797 in 1901 to 170,872 in 1921.² These primary resource and population expansions were quickly followed by an urban market with a campaign to profit from mass, commodified culture. American, and to a lesser degree Canadian, radio broadcasts, mass circulation magazines, newspapers, and films integrated the working class into “the margins of consumer capitalism.”³ While purchasing power was low during the inflation of 1919 and 1920, it rose in the early to mid 1920s. Vancouver quickly joined other modern North American cities with its cosmopolitan consumerism of vaudeville houses, movie theatres, baseball fields, and department stores that offered “a ‘democratic’ subversion of Victorian gender, ethnic, and class boundaries.”⁴ It was during these early decades of urban development that a social reform movement advocated “social uplift and purification” from the racially degenerative excesses of the

² James Conley, “Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989), 13.

³ Historian Bryan Palmer discusses the Americanization of mass culture. For example, he contends that most radio stations were owned by powerful newspaper companies that took much of their news reporting from American services like Reuters and Associate Press. Palmer notes similar trends with mass circulation magazines. He also identifies how the Canadian film industry was eclipsed in the 1920s by US productions. See Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of the Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 192-194.

⁴ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History,” *Reviews in American History* 26, no.1 (1998), 177. The term “cosmopolitan consumerism” has been borrowed from Liz Conor’s analysis of the “modern woman” in early 20th century society, Australia in particular. See Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12.

liquor trade and prostitution.⁵ Labour and socialist activism also gained momentum in the latter years of the war and the immediate post-war era with 1919 experiencing nation-wide strikes in sympathy and solidarity for workers striking in Winnipeg. In the *1919 Royal Commission on Industrial Relations* which followed the nation-wide strikes, Vancouver was among the list of cities with unemployment, low wages, employer blacklists, high costs of living, non-recognition of unions and collective bargaining, hazardous work environments, and poor housing districts.⁶ Vancouver's transformation into the 20th century was indeed rapid and turbulent, and it was during these years that the "new and modern woman" made a loud political, economic, and social appearance.

Constructions of the "new and modern woman" as seen through newspaper images, articles, and film advertisements were laden with powerful contradiction. The modern woman was a "racial super mother," an "undersexed man-hater," and a "self-appointed savior of benighted masculinity." She was "anti-maternal" and "anti-domestic," an "oversexed man-eater," a "mannish amazon," a "bicycling amazon," a "fair feminine anarchist," a "self-torturing feminine sophist," and a "symptom and agent of decline."⁷ The common thread throughout these competing definitions of the modern woman, according to theorists Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, was recognition of the modern woman's determination to set her own agenda within an alternative vision of the future. In some aspects the construction of the modern woman represented white, middle-class women who affirmed their virtuous roles in biological and social reproduction with a vision of

⁵ Lindsey McMaster, *Working Girls in the West: Representations of Wage-Earning Women* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 88.

⁶ Linda Kealey, "No Special Protection- No Sympathy: Women's Activism in the Canadian Labour Revolt of 1919," In *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada 1850-1930*, edited by Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (St. John's, NF: LAFUR/CCLH, 1989), 135.

⁷ Françoise Le Jeune, "The American New Woman and her influence on the Daughters of the Empire of British Columbia in the Daily Press (1880-95)," in *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, edited by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (New York: Routledge, 2004), 79. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds. *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de Siècle Feminisms* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 12.

challenging the political system and policy-making as voters and maternal feminists.⁸ The modern woman also represented young, white women who challenged the residing social construction of “separate spheres” for men and women by asserting a public presence in the city as consumers and waged workers.⁹ While some women were enrolling in institutionalized education and gaining professional careers as doctors and lawyers by the 1920s, the vast majority of women held employment in domestic service, manufacturing, communications, clerical, and retail services.¹⁰ Denied subsistent wages, these young women workers nonetheless entered the workplace with the vision of evading abject poverty and enjoying a moment of unfettered social independence from the family hearth.¹¹ As Victorian moral codes, social norms, and practices of separate spheres for men and women stubbornly lingered in the economically and politically turbulent throes of early 20th century consumer capitalism, these contradicting discourses of the new and modern women became an exciting cipher of unpredictability and uncertainty.

Many images of the new and modern woman found in the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Daily World* represented society’s excitement about shedding its formality and donning a newer boldness, assertiveness, and unrestraint. In this 1912 image (Figure 1.1), “Miss Vancouver” is a vibrant, energetic, young woman who freely enjoys the ebb and flow of progress, and she playfully

⁸ Mariana Valverde, “When the Mother of the Race Is Free’: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism,” in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History*, edited by Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 3. It is important to identify how the new and modern woman was racialized white. Mainstream papers largely portrayed women of colour as incapable of becoming modern. The powders and whitening creams, for example, were primarily manufactured for white women (with greater spending power) to achieve the clean, fresh, unblemished, and untainted visage found in youthful vitality. See Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 12.

⁹ Historian Linda Kerber asserts that “the evidence that the women’s sphere is a social construction lies in part in the hard and constant work required to build and repair its boundaries.” See Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75 no.1 (June 1988), 28.

¹⁰ Veronica Strong-Boag, “The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 4 no.4 (1979), 131.

¹¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 30-31.

entices any Vancouver citizen to join her.¹² For historian Susan Besse, the female figure was often utilized as “a symbol of modernity” as well as “a bastion of stability against the destabilizing effects of industrial capitalist development, shielding the family from ‘corrupting’ influences.”¹³ In this image the female figure cultivates modern assertiveness while maintaining feminine qualities of modesty, this being represented in her swimsuit which allows for freer movement without intensifying the public display of her body. This 1926 image from the *Vancouver Sun* (Figure 1.2) displays a similar notion of unrestraint with a young woman baring her toned legs as she sprints across the field in celebration of “Mae First.”¹⁴ With her hair blowing in the wind and her mouth partly open from excited breath, she playfully violates conventional notions of modesty and reserve.¹⁵ These images of exuberant female body movement resemble the well-known images of the confident, vibrant, and beautiful American “Brinkley girl” who laughed with great facial expression as she played tennis, went swimming, and rode bicycles.¹⁶ By displacing the conventions of feminine docility and reservation, these images of unrestrained emotion and movement collectively contributed to the use of the new and modern woman as a site for contesting social change.

¹² “Get In and Boost,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 1 May 1912.

¹³ Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914-1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁴ “Mae First,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1926.

¹⁵ Birgitte Søland, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 44.

¹⁶ For an examination of the life and works of the creator of the “Brinkley girl,” see Trina Robbins, “The Day of the Girl: Nell Brinkley and the New Woman,” in *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, edited by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (New York: Routledge, 2004), 179-83. The “Gibson girl” was another popular image of the new and modern woman. See Martha Patterson, “‘Survival of the Best Fitted’: Selling the American New Woman as Gibson Girl, 1895-1910,” *ATQ* 9, no. 2 (June 1995), 73.



Figure 1.1- "Get In and Boost," *Vancouver Daily World*, 1 May 1912.



Figure 1.2- "Mae First," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 May 1926.

In many newspaper articles, film advertisements, and narratives from the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *Daily World*, the image of the new and modern woman represented women's social and moral downfall from evading monogamous relationships with men. Popular plots revealed the young and modern woman's valiant, but nonetheless irrational, efforts at challenging conventions of sensible courtship and marriage with her own whimsical aspirations of romance. In this 1926 film advertisement (Figure 1.3), "Sandy" does not want to be chained to the monogamous, matrimonial

ring.¹⁷ This advertisement identifies an inevitable fate or doom for young women who jump from “the matrimonial voyage.” The publication of “The Eternal Flapper” in the *Vancouver Sun* recites a similar ending. This narrative begins with a beautiful, young Gloria descending into deep sleep amongst “the downy pillows,” “the rich scent of rose,” and “the atmosphere of intimate girlishness.” Her boyfriend Jack’s professions moments earlier sketched her ensuing dreams,

Hang it all Gloria, why don’t you stop *playing* with me this way? To modern girls love is just a game. I wish I lived in the Stone Age or during the Roman Empire or something. In those days you’d have taken this [relationship] more seriously!¹⁸

From this, her dream begins with a “great, bushy-haired, muscular man” named Gotho slinging her over his shoulder while “other bushy-haired, brawny men” exchange “fearful guttural noises.” Gloria soon realizes that she should not have smiled at Gotho once or twice after he returned from a hunt. She wanted Dirl, the young warrior “whom she *did* love and whose mate she wanted to become.” After all, she did not want to be “a very unhappy little cave girl.” Gloria’s dream shifts to the next setting in the Roman Empire, and the story is “to be continued.” In his analysis of commercial fiction, historian Chris Willis identifies how narratives such as “The Eternal Flapper” were creatively used as polemics “in a light-hearted way.”¹⁹ That is, these images and narratives of the new and modern woman forewarned that women’s transgressions of monogamous relationships with men threatened moral and social conformity.

¹⁷ “Sandy,” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1926. It is noteworthy that in the right corner of this film advertisement the Strand theatre announces the winners of a “bathing beauty contest.” This theatre promotion of women’s sexuality in both film and beauty contests not only testifies to society’s fixation on feminine sexuality, but also to the profitability of feminine sexuality in the entertainment industry.

¹⁸ Don Warren, “The Eternal Flapper,” *Vancouver Sun*, 27 April 1929.

¹⁹ Chris Willis, “Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption,” in *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de Siècle Feminisms*, Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds. (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2001), 54.



Figure 1.3 - "Sandy," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 April 1926.

The new and modern woman was not always conveyed as an innocent, naïve, young woman who was enticed and then corrupted by hetero-social city life; she was also a temptress. In a 1925 narrative from the *Vancouver Sun*, a young man named Johnny strays from his simplistic but honest upbringing, and wanders into the clutches of Lyda and her “vari-colored vagaries of speak-easies, night-clubs, jazz-joints, roadhouses, and low-caste, high-proof cabarets.” Johnny has a sweetheart named Ida; he has known her since Sunday school. She works in a candy store to help support her family, and is thus described as “an all-around nice, rather pretty, typical girl of her circumstances and times.” In stark contrast, Lyda knows Johnny from his recent partaking in the night life, and she is described as “a high-stepper,” “a high-class tramp,” “a nighthawk,” “a red-hot mamma,” and “a dresser.” When Johnny is arrested for stealing money from his workplace to

support his nightly gambling and drinking ventures, Ida, dressed in “a ready-made frock,” and Lyda, “bejeweled in a beaded-bodiced decollete [sic] gown,” visit him in jail. The “poor, pitiful, faithful, unsuspecting Ida” decides that she does not want to share her life with a man who has betrayed her, while Lyda coolly, with a touch of nonchalant, declares,

I'll say this much. I'm mighty sorry for you. You wasn't [sic] a bad kid. I didn't know you stole the dough, but it was none o' my grief where you got it. I was up-an'-up with you. I can't tear my way in that cell an' scream that they should send me up with you because you kicked in for a ride an' a dance an' a shot every so often, can I?²⁰

Ida and Lyda share a working class background, but are differently valued according to how closely they adhere to prevailing social norms of Christian, domestic virtue. Thus Ida is “sane, wholesome, modest, stainless, and sinless” because of her Christian faith, emotional simplicity, family loyalty, and natural beauty. Lyda is a “rushing, gold-toothed, rouged, cigarette-breathed, jazz hound” because she is fashionably dressed and rambunctiously energized for hetero-social entertainments involving liquor, gambling, and dancing. This narrative is indicative of the early 20th century “war on vice” in which social reformers sought differentiation of the “light and dark” or the “good and evil” within the working class community. In her analysis of representations of waged women workers in western Canada, Lindsey McMaster asserts that these contrasting images of good and evil became “an allegorical way of reading social conditions that pressed certain social members into set symbolic moulds.”²¹ In many newspaper images, articles, and narratives, young women of the working class community were cast as vamps or “coy creatures who men could enjoy but not

²⁰ Jack Lait, “In for the Night,” *Vancouver Sun*, 2 May 1925.

²¹ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 88.

trust.”²² Young women workers represented the perpetration of immorality into the family, the working class community, and the city at large.

Using a language of prostitution, Vancouver’s mainstream newspapers constructed a “working girl problem” that became a gender and class-based explanation for the city’s unsettling growth and change.²³ Narratives popularized a discourse of young women workers prostituting or giving up the sanctity and feminine respectability of the wife and mother roles for uncertain opportunities of social, economic, and sexual independence. The moral, social, and sexual deviancies of women workers constituted the narratives of the working girl problem. In the *Vancouver Sun*, a 1919 narrative of “Kitty Malloy” exemplifies the construction of Vancouver’s working girl problem (Figure 1.4). There can be little mistaking that this pet name “Kitty” was a sexual pejorative. In “The Semantic Derogation of Woman,” Muriel Schulz states that “if the derogation of terms denoting women marks out an area of our culture found contemptible by men, the terms they use as endearments should tell us who or what they esteem.”²⁴ Schulz identifies how names like Kitty ambiguously suggest adorable playfulness and sexual promiscuity. When behaving in a playful and adorable manner, young women might be called “Kitty.” However, “Kitty” might also associate a sexually assertive woman with “slattern,” “prostitute,” or “mistress of sexual mischief.”²⁵ In this narrative, Kitty Malloy is described as “pretty,” “vivacious,” “happy,” “good, sweet, and true,” and even “a puritanic [sic] sort of maiden.”²⁶ She has a rosy blush resembling “a beautiful infant glow,” and her eyes reveal “a light of sanctity.” Her feminine delicacy and innocence

²² Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 56.

²³ This concept of “the girl problem” has been borrowed from Carolyn Strange’s analysis of “the Toronto girl problem.” In her study, she particularly examines how the court system dealt with “this problem” of young women. See Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

²⁴ Muriel R. Schulz, “The Semantic Derogation of Woman,” in *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*, edited by Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley (Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers, 1975), 67.

²⁵ Schulz, “The Semantic Derogation of Woman,” 67.

²⁶ “Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

are further infantilized when the narrative declares that, “one hesitates to associate Kitty with a kiss, lest it should soil the soul of her.” This narrative of Kitty Malloy quickly abandons its gentle and endearing nature as it reveals how this young woman worker manipulates and corrupts these feminine qualities of delicacy, respectability, and modesty. Vancouver’s own Kitty Malloy does not underestimate her feminine charms and “world of cute little tricks,” as this narrative reveals, because “like most 1920 beauties, Kitty knows it.”²⁷ Kitty represents young working women who know how to manipulate feminine delicacy, naïveté, and innocence to get what they want which is, according to this mainstream newspaper, personal gratification. As “the director of the situation” Kitty Malloy “pull[s] the string and her ape-men do their dance.” Worse, this “haughty little person [was] everywhere.”²⁸ Young working women who fit the profile of Kitty Malloy were not only lingering in cabarets and nickelodeon theatres, but they were also invading “our own best café or dining room.”²⁹ An important theme throughout this narrative of Vancouver’s girl problem was a sense that feminine “essence” was being lost, discarded, or rendered artificial.³⁰ This narrative made feminine ambiguity a working-class infiltration of “their” public leisure spaces.

²⁷ “Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

²⁸ “Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

²⁹ “Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

³⁰ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 55.



Figure 1.4- "Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

According to the Kitty Malloy narrative, young working women's manipulation of the feminine gender extended from public leisure spaces to the workplace. This narrative elaborates on Kitty Malloy's workplace seduction of a young man:

We saw Kitty yesterday behind a showcase in a well-appointed store. A boyish figure entered and spoke to Kitty. She smiled her subtle smile. Her baby stare seared into his impressionable nature. His gaze followed Kitty's bending form to the tray within the case-- but it never reached the tray; it was arrested by an accidental display of Kitty's person. For Kitty's draw string was as loose as her bosom was bewitching. Kitty noted his embarrassment, and flushed her baby blush.³¹

As this young woman worker exposes a sexualized part of her body in order to trap a young man's attention, she also carefully cloaks herself in a conventional feminine gender which dictates she

³¹ "Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

must always be childlike in innocence, kindness, and vulnerability. This “ostentatious exhibit of Kitty’s charm” is deemed deliberate because “Kitty knows the practical psychology of attracting men’s attentions.” The young woman worker in this narrative uses playful mockery of the feminine gender to gain both power and pleasure from a social encounter with a young man.³² Historian Carolyn Strange identifies how early 20th century “surveyors of the social evil” believed that working class women often bartered their sexuality for personal want or gain. According to Strange, a narrative of “the occasional prostitute” was borne from social reformers’ observations of working girls’ “easy way with men, their taste for finery, and their growing preference for work that left their evenings and weekends free.”³³ This Vancouver narrative resembles the occasional prostitute narrative in that Kitty Malloy wants sexual excitement, a sale at the cash register, or perhaps a laugh over a young man’s awkwardness. In any case, this Vancouver narrative of Kitty Malloy conveyed voluntary prostitution of feminine sexuality.

In addition, the narratives of the working girl problem conveyed disruption of the sanctity of “the family.” In a 1919 film advertisement for *Common Clay* (Figure 1.5), an angry and disheveled father has waited until very late at night for his daughter to return home. Wearing his daytime clothes, he has stayed awake in order to tell her that she cannot live in his home and continue with her nightly ventures into the city. The young woman’s mother braces her for the conviction that she belongs in the gutter. This young woman’s disrespect of her father’s contempt of the city night life was damaging to the family-- the “common clay.” The advertisement declares this film a “thriller of city life” which recites the classic tale of “woman as the victim,” and it promises to “awaken in the breast of the spectator that pity which is ‘the Kingdom of Heaven within us fighting the brute power

³² The concept of gaining power and pleasure through evasion of social conventions of sex and gender has been borrowed from Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 45.

³³ Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*,” 90-1.

of the world.”³⁴ In the film advertisement, a man asks, “Why the livery, Girlie? We use to know you as the cute little kid at Bender’s.” Cast from her family, the young woman in this narrative becomes a domestic servant. She looks saddened that she now wears the symbolic garb of a domestic servant whose self-definition has been prohibited. In her analysis of late 19th and early 20th century New York, Kathy Peiss asserts that, “dress was a particularly potent way to display and play with notions of respectability, allure, independence, and status and to assert a distinctive identity and presence.” Peiss also states that, “putting on style seems to fly in the face of the daily round of toil and family obligation.”³⁵ The uniform of domestic service deprived young women of this opportunity. Overall, the film advertisement reveals a young woman worker narrative of punishment for pushing the boundaries of social independence and disrupting the sanctity of paternal control over the family.

³⁴ “The Common Clay,” *Vancouver Province*, 26 July 1919.

³⁵ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century* (New York. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 60; 63.

DOMINION

A 14 WEEKS PRESENTATION
FANNIE WARD
"COMMON CLAY"
 THE MAJOR SPECIAL FEATURE IN SEVEN WEEKS
 AT THE REPUBLIC THEATRE, 1001 BROADWAY



"My girl can't go that way and
 the law—I'm through with
 you—let you go to where you
 belong—the gutter!"

"Common Clay"

A Thriller of City Life—
 With a Woman as the Victim

It awakens in the breast of the spectator that pity which Dr. Gilbert Murray says "is the Kingdom
 of Heaven within us fighting the brute power of the world."

A 14 WEEKS PRESENTATION
FANNIE WARD
"COMMON CLAY"
 THE MAJOR SPECIAL FEATURE IN SEVEN WEEKS
 AT THE REPUBLIC THEATRE, 1001 BROADWAY



The Story of
 A Lovely Woman
 Who Stooped
 To Folly

"Why the story, girls? We need to know
 you as the Cate Little Fild does at Bender's!"

Entire Week Commencing
Monday, July 28

Figure 1.5- "Common Clay," Vancouver Province, 26 July 1919.

So far the common themes throughout the images and narratives of the working girl problem have been social, moral, and sexual corruption. These themes were closely related to early 20th century white slave narratives in which young women fall into prostitution while on their way to work or while looking for work.³⁶ Lindsey McMaster argues that both the working girl and white slave narratives were concerned with how the city streets compromised the role of young, white, working women as future mothers and cultural carriers of the white race.³⁷ With concerns of “imperiled whiteness,” white slave narratives went further to racialize prostitution as an Asian problem.³⁸ McMaster identifies how Asian men were often cast as pimps in white slave narratives, vilifying Asian immigration and settlement. In many white slave narratives, a young, white woman was misled, deceived, even abducted by an Asian pimp.³⁹ While this victim was often rescued by “compassionate philanthropists,” she could not be truly redeemed because she had lost her virginity and purity.⁴⁰ The lesson of white slave narratives were often two-fold—that even the innocent victims of sexual downfall were punished in the end and that working women were vulnerable to sexual corruption or violence. White slave narratives were also imbued with social science rhetoric of sexual delinquency and feeble-mindedness in women of the “promiscuous lower orders.”⁴¹ These themes of the white slave narratives were somewhat infused within the Vancouver narrative of Kitty Malloy when a young woman falls from grace as a result of an illegitimate birth. This young mother is described as a sweet woman who,

³⁶ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 90.

³⁷ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 147.

³⁸ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 14.

³⁹ McMaster argues that “the ‘foreign’ nature of the procurer is used in order to distance the criminal from the ‘true’ members of the community, who can then direct their outrage toward the alien ‘other.’” For examples of how white slave narratives elicited anti-Asian sentiment, see McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 94-5. While this study is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to identify how many working girl narratives of white women working in mixed-race workplaces also fuelled racial discrimination of Asian men. See McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 145-167.

⁴⁰ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 90.

⁴¹ McMaster, *Working Girls in the West*, 91-2.

in many cases a stranger to the city, has heard Kitty Malloy's interesting recitations of her round of untainted pleasure. [Her] lonely heart cries out for recognition and finds love's last expression in a friend of Kitty Malloy's.⁴²

In this narrative, a young woman makes herself sexually available to a man completely antithetical to wholesome domesticity-- "a friend of Kitty Malloy's." Kitty is portrayed as misleading men into believing that all women want sexual attention. From this, "a less fortunate sister settles Kitty's bill" as this once pure and virginal woman is now "a little unmarried mother crying in a hospital" with a "cooing, kicking babe beneath her." This unwed mother resembles a prostitute who could never really be redeemed of her sexual and moral transgressions. Together, the narratives of the working girl problem and the white slave represented young women workers as uncontrollable, ambiguous, and exhibitionist in ways that implicated them in moral deviancy, sexual impropriety, and social downfall.

Accordingly, this study of how mainstream newspapers constructed narratives of the working girl problem prompts a discussion of why these narratives of working class women's sexuality were constructed in the first place. Drawing from Michel Foucault's study of 19th and 20th century discourses of sexuality, this study suggests that Vancouver's mainstream narratives of the working girl problem were fuelled by a middle class need to control, even limit working class women's infiltration of masculine domains of the city, namely the streets and the workplace. As part of a larger discourse of the "hysteria" of women's bodies which unfolded by the late 19th century, the narratives of the working girl problem allowed the feminine body to be "analysed, qualified, and disqualified as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality."⁴³ Through the narratives of the working girl problem, Vancouver's mainstream newspapers spared little detail on the sexuality of young working women,

⁴² "Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

⁴³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 105; 194.

In Kitty's shapely arms there is an artist's inspiration. Her throat and chest defy craft reproduction. Her clean, little limbs are works of glory. Graceful in her movements her presence is dynamic. Kitty is a masterpiece of empyreal achievement.⁴⁴

Even at the workplace,

She wears no waist except the veriest [sic] sheer- it's cooler, Kitty says. Kitty's silk clad calves have a most peculiar practice of braving criticism. Kitty's camisole is the line of demarkation [sic] between legal and personal privileges. Kitty is personified in scores of demure maidens in this city by the sea. They infest every area where beings congregate. Kitty's wiles are shorn of intent by a defensive dignity. They are torches that light the flames in the flexible minds of youth.⁴⁵

Liz Conor argues that these representations of the workplace "Office, Factory, or Business Girl" enforced a status of women as sexual "objects in the exchange economy" in ways that "contained their incursion into this most masculine of domains."⁴⁶ In a similar vein, Foucault asserts that "an entire administrative and technical machinery" of surveillance and disciplinary apparatuses such as hospitals, boarding houses, corporate-sponsored activities, and employment agencies aimed at mapping out and containing working women's identity within the masculine domains of city life—the city streets and the workplace.⁴⁷ In this case of the Vancouver narratives, young working women were depicted as having a brazen sexuality requiring middle class discipline and control.

Keeping in mind the discussion of why narratives of working women's sexuality were constructed, the Vancouver narratives of the working girl problem appear representative of what Foucault describes as "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure." Using this concept, the middle class derived pleasure from "exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, [and] brings to light" feminine sexuality.⁴⁸ The *Vancouver Sun*, for example, offered

⁴⁴ "Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

⁴⁵ "Our Kitty Malloys: The Bad Little Good Girls," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

⁴⁶ Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, 70.

⁴⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 126. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 164.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, 45.

an excerpt from the film *Adele* in which Kitty Gordon and her friend are threatened by an intruder's dangerously sexual advances,

"I WARNED HER THAT HE WAS COMING, but she stayed behind, and NOW"- HE THREW THE KEY out the window. "Now I got you both," he mocked. WITH ALL HER STRENGTH ADELE FORCED THE MAN BACK inch by inch until she managed to fling him across the bed. See this powerful moment in "Adele," KITTY GORDON'S LATEST PICTURE.⁴⁹

The Wildcat of Paris (Figure 1.6) has a similar plot in which three shady-eyed men creep into the loft of a woman who appears naked underneath her bed quilt. According to the film advertisement, she "fights and beats them all."⁵⁰ Readers are not only intrigued as to what this young woman did to have three shady characters target her, but also how this little spitfire holds her own against three men, especially with her late night nakedness and the setting her own private bedroom. In both of these narratives, young women's lack of rational decision-making powers cast them into dangerously sexual encounters. Ultimately, these film advertisements targeted a public fascinated with bringing to light the tensions between "good and evil" and "moral and immoral." The mass consumption of mainstream newspapers' film advertisements, images, and narratives revealed popular anticipation of the experience, or for Foucaultians- the pleasure of uncovering feminine sexuality.

⁴⁹ "Adele," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1919.

⁵⁰ "The Wildcat of Paris," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 June 1919.



Figure 1.6- "The Wildcat of Paris," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 June 1919.

By and large, the Vancouver narratives of the working girl problem represented mainstream uneasiness with the social and economic advances of urbanization and consumer capitalism taking place in the new century. Determined to set their own agenda of social, economic and sexual independence, young working class women challenged the prevailing doctrine of separate spheres for men and women by postponing marriage and motherhood, entering the workplace as waged workers, and seeking hetero-social entertainment that the rising consumer market had to offer. Narratives of the working girl problem were constructed and often entangled with white slave narratives, provoking excitement and fear that the moral wall dividing the good girls, who cautiously confronted the city domains by day, from the bad girls, who strutted the street

corners by night, was crumbling. While not all of the narratives of the working girl problem suggested young women became “occasional prostitutes,” they all shared a conviction that feminine gender’s essence of respectability, reserve, restraint, and docility was being discarded or lost. While the larger discourse of the new and modern woman suggested that women regardless of class were challenging social norms of the feminine gender and the doctrine of public and private domains for men and women, it was young working women who were judged as makers of social and moral instability.

“THE ONLY AND THOROUGHbred LADY IS THE REBEL GIRL”: IMAGES FROM THE RADICAL LABOUR PRESS¹

In the same years that Vancouver’s mainstream newspapers constructed narratives of the working girl problem, radical labour organizations such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the BC Federation of Labour (BCFL), and, to a lesser extent, the Canadian One Big Union (OBU) constructed their own images and narratives of rebel girls and union wives who partnered with rebel working men in the indictment of the capitalist class system. While much of the historiography on the early 20th century radical labour movement identifies the predominance of working men with Marxist, virile, raw, and rugged masculinity, this chapter illuminates how conceptions of the female figure and the feminine gender were also implicated in the emerging radical labour movement.² That is, the IWW, BCFL, and the Canadian OBU embodied a complex feminine culture through their narratives of the rebel girl and the union wife, as well as through their progressive stances on women’s sexuality, in particular prostitution and birth control. The female figure also became a powerful metaphor for illuminating virtue in the radical labour movement and for condemning vice in the capitalist class, mainstream press, and conservative trade unionism. Through an analysis of the metaphors of the female figure and the narratives of the rebel girl and union wife, this chapter asserts that this powerful feminine culture should not imply women’s emancipation because the powers to map out women’s participation in the radical labour movement were primarily held by their male counterparts. Also, this chapter asserts that the radical labour organizations’ usage of the female figure and the construction of a feminine culture did not entirely transgress conventional gendered norms of separate spheres and proper places for men

¹ This phrase was taken from Wobbly songwriter Joe Hill’s “The Rebel Girl.” See Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed. *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Toronto: Ambassador Books, 1964), 127.

² The Marxist masculinity concept has been borrowed from Todd McCallum, “‘A Modern Weapon for Modern Man’: Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924,” MA thesis, Simon Fraser University (1995).

and women. The IWW, BCFL, and the Canadian OBU made a radical indictment of capitalism without upsetting society's patriarchal structure of sex and gender inequality.

To begin, the feminine culture of these radical labour organizations developed within a context of struggle between labour, state, and capital, as well as struggle within the Canadian labour movement itself. As the fishing, mining, and logging industries expanded, so too did the construction and development of infrastructure, manufacture, and service industries. The rapid growth of the economy produced "tremendous social dislocation" as workers struggled to find fair wages and safe working conditions.³ In 1903 the number of strikes had almost tripled the number in previous years, and the number of workers and industries involved had also greatly increased. Capitalist enterprise did not submit to labour demands without a fight. In 1905, for example, approximately twenty-six employers' associations were established in BC to combat labour activism.⁴ The provincial government was steadfast in its commitment to capitalist investment and development, thus delaying legislative protection of workers.⁵

As the labour movement grew in size and strength, it became complicated with internal strife. Founded in the 1880s, Canada's Trade and Labour Congress (TLC) set out to coordinate the organizing activities of unions. In its initial years, the TLC was all-inclusive with members from the Knights of Labor assemblies, Canadian unions, and American-based international unions.⁶ By the 1890s, the TLC was coming under pressure from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to adopt its policies of exclusive craft unionism and to expel all unions which were dual to those already in the AFL and which had headquarters and members in the United States. By 1902, the TLC submitted to these demands. Accepting the employer class's ownership and control of the

³ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 14.

⁴ Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour Boag Foundation, 1967), 41-2.

⁵ McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 7.

⁶ David J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 38.

workplace, the AFL and TLC were content with selling skilled work for high wages and organizing strikes that would increase their power of influence in the labour market.⁷ Unions representing unskilled and de-skilled immigrants and women were excluded.⁸ As a result of the AFL and TLC's exclusionary measures, thousands of rank and file men and women turned to new and radical union movements for support and solidarity. By the mid to late 1910s, labour leaders of the TLC were divided on the issue of craft unionism. At the 1918 TLC convention, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council requested a referendum vote on the question of organizing the Canadian labour movement by industry instead of craft. The council was defeated. Many western Canadian labour leaders left the 1918 convention discouraged but resolute that industrial unions should have the support of a national labour movement.

At a March 1919 conference in Calgary, western Canadian labour leaders collectively decided that their unions should secede from the TLC and re-organize as an all-inclusive labour movement. Largely composed of Socialist Party members, the Calgary conference concluded that the formation of the One Big Union (OBU) as an all-inclusive union movement would complement, not compromise, parliamentary socialism. As the Socialist Party worked within the political system to gain the power for supplanting production for profit with production for use system, the OBU would support the rank and file through general strike tactics.⁹ Organizers of the One Big Union wanted "to create a class union movement to defend them while the capitalist system still existed, to hasten the eventual triumph of the revolution, and to help build the post-revolutionary society."¹⁰ In Calgary, these labour leaders established a central committee and four provincial committees to organize a referendum in unions across Canada on the questions of secession from the TLC and

⁷ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 256.

⁸ Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990), 15.

⁹ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 82. Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada, 2nd ed.* (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2004), 51.

¹⁰ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 83.

the formation of the OBU. BC Federation of Labour (BCFL) leaders held instrumental roles. Founded in 1910, the BCFL originally aimed to consolidate organized labour and to improve the effectiveness of lobbying power within the TLC. By the late 1910s however, many BCFL leaders endorsed secession from the TLC and development of a One Big Union movement. Using the *British Columbia Federationist*, the most widely read labour newspaper in Canada, these OBU advocates rounded up substantial support from rank and file men and women.¹¹ By the summer of 1919, for example, three out of four Vancouver trade unionists supported the formation of a One Big Union.¹² Feeling confident, the central committee declared that 4th June would be the OBU founding meeting. When the day arrived, tens of thousands of workers nation-wide were on strike in sympathy and solidarity with the workers of the Winnipeg General Strike. While the emerging OBU did not initiate the Winnipeg General Strike or the nation-wide sympathy strikes, both the OBU and these strikes were “manifestations of a single pattern of militancy.”¹³ This pattern of radicalism had an early start in British Columbia, in part because of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Guided by anarcho-syndicalist principles, IWW members or Wobblies advocated that workers regardless of race and sex must unite under one massive union. Founded in Chicago in 1905, the IWW asserted that workers from all industries and crafts must fight the employer class using direct action tactics of free speech fights, boycotts, and general strikes.¹⁴ For the Wobblies, direct action gave the workers the power to be active agents in the indictment of capitalism without

¹¹ The *British Columbia Federationist* was a joint work of the BC Federation of Labour and the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. Ian Angus identifies how ownership of the *BC Federationist* during 1919 and 1920 was rather confusing because the BCFL had actually dissolved itself and had urged its members to join the One Big Union. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council split into pro-OBU and anti-OBU factions, each claiming the name “Trades and Labour Council.” The pro-OBU group maintained control of the newspaper, but their claims to ownership were shaky by 1921 because the OBU was “a spent force.” See Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 106-7.

¹² McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 160.

¹³ McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 166.

¹⁴ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 35.

mediation from political parties or the state.¹⁵ The workplace was the base of capitalist exploitation and the IWW asserted that this was the place from which a radical labour movement should rise. General strikes not only slowed production to a standstill and incapacitated the capitalist employers' power to profit, but it also demonstrated that the working class was capable of asserting control over the means of production.¹⁶ With its newspapers circulating in at least ten different languages, the IWW organized rank and file men from remote regions and dangerous resource industries of British Columbia. In the summer of 1912, for example, railway construction along the Fraser River Canyon near Yale was halted by a Wobbly strike. Shutting down the construction of primary transportation, the Wobblies directly refused exploitation by their employers.¹⁷ IWW locals gained support for these general strikes through free speech fights held in urban centres. Wobblies in Spokane, Missoula, San Diego, Aberdeen, and Vancouver risked jail sentences for defiance of city ordinances which prohibited soap boxing on public streets. The determination of the IWW was exemplified by a 1912 free speech fight in Vancouver in which megaphone-toting soap box militants rented boats off Stanley Park in order to speak to the crowds.¹⁸ In his cultural analysis of the IWW, Salvatore Salerno states that it was ultimately "through its art forms that the IWW was able to transcend the literalism which constrained the language of formal ideology, thereby bringing new symbols and meanings to political activity."¹⁹ In contrast to the mainstream press which employed professional artists to create its images, the Wobbly newspapers received its images, illustrations, poems, and lyrics from rank and filers who wanted to give clarity and courage to other

¹⁵ Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 27.

¹⁶ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 21.

¹⁷ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 41.

¹⁸ Mark Leier, "Solidarity on Occasion: The Vancouver Free Speech Fight of 1909 and 1912," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989), 49.

¹⁹ Salvatore Salerno, *Red November Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 39.

exploited men and women who struggled in free speech fights, general strikes, and hobo jungles.²⁰ Their creative works were often anonymously submitted-- testifying to the constant threat of arrest as well as to the Wobbly sentiment that words, images, and symbols of oppression and struggle belonged to the working people. Overall, the Wobbly vision and strategies of one union for all working men and women were steadfast inspirations to the radical labour movement in Canada.²¹

Many historians assert that a masculine culture of radical proletarian manhood was deeply embedded within the visions and strategies of the radical labour movement through organizations like the One Big Union, the BC Federation of Labour, and the Industrial Workers of the World. Historian Steven Maynard reveals how early 20th century transformations in industrial capitalism, in particular the political and economic processes of de-skilling, sparked a working class “crisis of masculinity” from which a radical proletarian manhood rose.²² For Maynard, de-skilled labour was an ideological category imposed upon certain types of work by virtue of the sex, race, and class-based powers of the workers who performed it.²³ That is to say that skilled labour was an exclusive construction from which white, male, unionized workers were granted greater social and economic powers than non-unionized, multi-racial, industrial working men and women. The radical proletarian manhood became part of what historian Bryan Palmer understands as “a masculine project” from which de-skilled, industrial men drew strength and solidarity in their struggles with capitalist and state oppression.²⁴ Historian Todd McCallum specifically identifies in the Canadian OBU a “subtle, even unconscious, advocacy of a new masculine politics” through which both skilled and de-skilled men asserted uncompromising control within the workplace, the family household, and the working

²⁰ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume IV*, 155.

²¹ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto: Butterworth & Co, 1983), 168. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 116.

²² Steven Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989), 160-1.

²³ Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men,” 162.

²⁴ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of the Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, 2nd ed* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 193.

class community at large.²⁵ McCallum elaborates on this reconstitution of male power using a concept of “Marxist masculinity” to define how the OBU understood that working men shared “a commonality of class experience” that united them regardless of race or ethnicity in a common goal of revolutionary eradication of class exploitation. McCallum recognizes how the narratives of the rebel girl and union wife were celebrated by radical labour organizations like the OBU, but only in the context of their support of the radical man.²⁶ The IWW, BC Federation of Labour, and One Big Union’s underlying assumption that they would eradicate sexual and racial oppression by first toppling the class system reveals how their socialist interpretation of capitalism was coupled with a patriarchal interpretation of the politics of sex and race. In his analysis of the Wobblies in the United States and Australia, Francis Shor describes a “virile syndicalism” which challenged “the state-sponsored machismo of militarism and patriotism” with its “own message of virility, strength, and unconquerable optimism.” Shor recognizes how, “in this process the IWW downplayed the critical role that women performed in sustaining any social movement and, in particular, in promoting the communal interests so necessary to the IWW’s success as a social movement.”²⁷ Collectively, these historians offer invaluable insight to how the OBU, BCFL, and IWW developed a masculine culture of radical proletarian manhood that would challenge the boss and the state and reclaim the workplace for the workers.²⁸

In particular, Francis Shor’s concept of “oppositional masculinism” accounts for how radical labour organizations created images of “traditional manhood,” namely stamina, strength, and fearlessness, under siege by capitalist and state authorities.²⁹ In this 1917 image from the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.1) the radical man, with a firm and chiseled physique that complements

²⁵ McCallum, “A Modern Weapon for Modern Man,” 120.

²⁶ McCallum, “A Modern Weapon for Modern Man,” 120.

²⁷ Francis Shor, “‘Virile Syndicalism’ in Comparative Perspective: A Gender Analysis of the IWW in the United States and Australia,” *International Labor and Working Class History* no.56 (Fall 1999), 74.

²⁸ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 2nd ed., 193.

²⁹ Shor, “Virile Syndicalism,” 70.

his confrontational and fearless spirit, battles the whole salivating gorilla of an industrial system.³⁰ Even though he has been grabbed by the jugular, the radical man's determination prohibits his victimization. In this July 1919 *British Columbia Federationist* image that was published shortly after state repression of the Winnipeg general strike and the nation-wide sympathy strikes (Figure 2.2), united labour packs one big union punch for Prime Minister Borden and his company of capitalists.³¹ In the boxing ring this radical man fights honourably by wearing his gloves and relying solely on his raw energy to save Justice from the clutches of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) that in the previous month had not only raided labour halls and homes of labour leaders, but also arrested nearly 200 "immigrant anarchists and revolutionaries."³² Prime Minister Borden fights dirty by abandoning his boxing gloves and taking up his club of "unjust methods for suppression of labor unions." Despite Borden's tactics, the radical man is unwavering and resilient to pain and suffering. The cheering crowd of men, women, and children, for whom he is fighting for, are reassuring him that this match can be won.³³

³⁰ *Industrial Worker*, 26 May 1917.

³¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1919.

³² Palmer, *Working-Class Experience* 2nd ed., 194-204.

³³ In the days following this image's publication, the federal government passed Section 98 of the Criminal Code outlawing organizations which sought government and economic change by force. Memberships in radical labour organizations like the Industrial Workers of the World were penalized with up to twenty year jail sentences; even those who attended meetings and distributed literature were charged. Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad, *History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present, Vol. II* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd, 1998), 221.



Figure 2.1- *Industrial Worker*, 26 May 1917

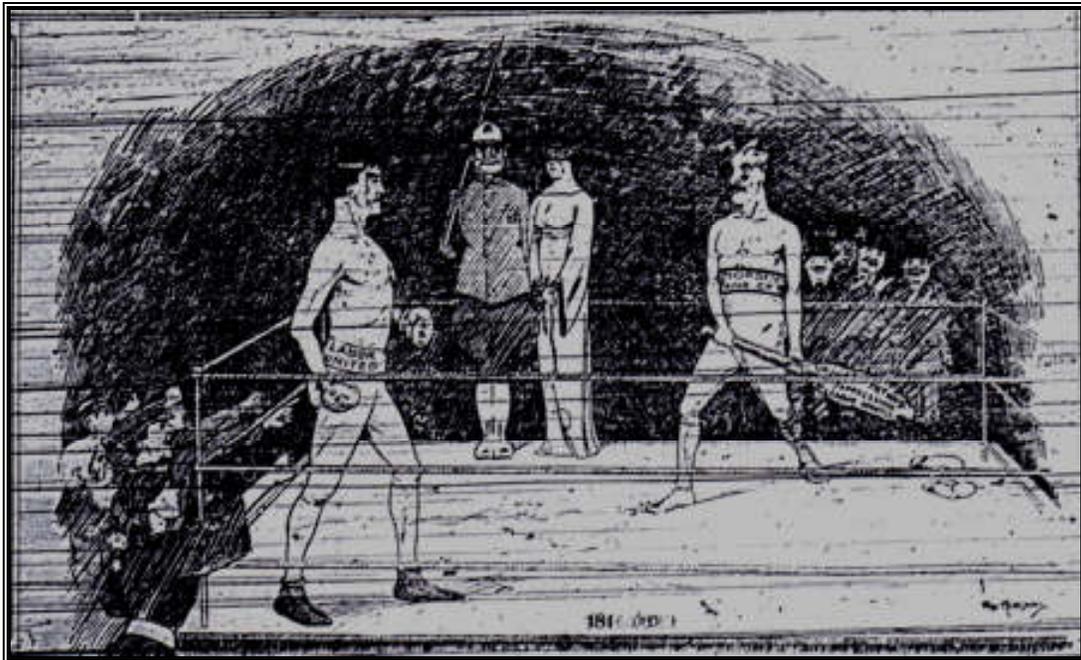


Figure 2.2- *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1919.

“Radical manhood” not only confronted the capitalist system and state repression, but also attacked strike breakers, scabs, craft unionists, and company unionists. In portraying conflict and combat with their enemies, the OBU, IWW, and BCFL utilized constructions of the masculine gender to signify class difference as well as social and political discord within the working class.³⁴ Wobbly newspapers often attacked the capitalist class, strikebreakers, and scabs by denouncing their masculinity as offensive and violent towards women. A 1909 article from the *Industrial Worker* argued that “true respect for women [was] mostly confined to the working class,” and that “it [was] the workingmen who [were] chivalrous and the loafers [employers] who [were] curs.”³⁵ In this article, conventional norms of respectability were associated with the culture of radical manhood, while the masculinity of the capitalist class was associated with vulgarity and indecency. Male strike breakers were often portrayed as violent, brutish men who preyed upon young, innocent women strikers. A 1924 narrative describes how,

... Uniformed and plainclothes thugs beat the girls with their heavy fists and make grandiose gestures to intimidate the sympathizers. One little picket is knocked unconscious by a policeman... The bosses keep the throats of these hirelings well moistened with booze. They strut bleary-eyed after their “game.”³⁶

This narrative starkly contrasts to narratives of the mainstream newspapers which likened the aggressive masculinity of a strike breaker to that of a heroic combat soldier. By disrupting unions, dismantling strikes with intimidation and harassment, filling in strikers’ job positions, and infiltrating the workplace as labour spies, strike breakers were marked with physical prowess and courage.³⁷ But in this particular narrative, the Wobblies marked strike breakers with a masculine gender identity that was ruthless and cowardly. Scabs were similarly gendered. In this 1910 image from

³⁴ Todd McCallum, “‘Not a Sex Question’? The One Big Union and the Politics of Radical Manhood,” *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998), 25.

³⁵ “The Women Workers of the World,” *Industrial Worker*, 29 July 1909.

³⁶ “Rebel Girls Help the Fight for Solidarity,” *Industrial Pioneer*, May 1924.

³⁷ Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking & Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 6, 12, 34.

the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.3), the beady little eyes of a scab are scouring the streets for work.³⁸ In their condemnation of scabbing, the IWW identified the “professional scab” who was highly skilled and well paid by an actual strike breaking agency, the “amateur scab” who represented “bums, riff raff, slum dwellers, and college students,” and the “union scab” who did not go on strike in support of workers who shared the same employer.³⁹ In this image the scab is a “bum, loafer, wife beater, boozer, or humble degenerate.” He is repulsive to these children who identify him as a working class traitor. Collectively these narratives and images constructed gender identities of the employer, strike breaker, and scab that elevated the radical man and his indictment of the political, economic, and social status quo.



Figure 2.3- “The Lowest of the Low,” *Industrial Worker*, 4 June 1910.

The “Scab Restaurant” sign reads, “Wanted, First Class Scabs. Bums, Loafers, Wife Beaters, Boozers, and Humbly Degenerates Wanted.” It is signed, “Mr. Employer of Everywhere.” The girl says, “O’Brue [illegible], see that man.” The boy says, “Don’t look at him Katie, he is a scab.”

³⁸ “The Lowest of the Low,” *Industrial Worker*, 4 June 1910.

³⁹ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 14.

The OBU, IWW, and BCFL also utilized gender inversions in the narratives and images of their enemies. Historian Todd McCallum identifies how the OBU implicated femininity in the derisions and humiliation of men who supported the capitalist system by refashioning existing stereotypes of “the effete male snob” and “the male weakling” as “the male scab.” In this 1919 image from the OBU’s *Strike Bulletin* (Figure 2.4), lanky and docile men respond to the dictations of their employer with sycophant fawns of, “it’s nice of you” and “lovely.”⁴⁰ Wearing ill-fitting and patched clothes, these workers agree that submission to exploited labour was “much better than striking.” Standing before their boss, many of these men have removed their hats as a sign of duty and respect. Lacking sharp or chiseled features, one man rests on a hip to one side with his arms folded behind his waist, bearing the words “no strike union.” Equally striking in this image is the tiny woman who evokes feminine qualities of backwardness, feebleness, simplicity, and spinster-like hopelessness. Her exacting fit into this group of men signifies how they share her gendered qualities. However, as McCallum argues, the OBU was not suggesting that scabs were behaving or acting as women.⁴¹ Instead, constructions and inversions of the masculine and feminine genders meant to separate or segregate labour radicals from conservative unionists. Like the IWW, the OBU clarified who the real, rugged, and virile contenders against capitalism were; other men were insipid, disillusioned, corrupt, and meagre. Collectively, the newspaper narratives and images of the IWW, Canadian OBU, and the BCFL represent how gender constructions and inversions were clever mechanisms to signify working class discord, corruption, confusion, ambiguity, and weakness. Having said this, both the masculine and feminine genders were heavily implicated in the radical labour movement.

⁴⁰ “The Employer’s Union,” *Strike Bulletin*, 12 June 1919. This image was created by the political artist Art Young (1866 to 1913). He not only worked for the *Masses*, *Liberator*, and *New Masses*, but also Wobbly publications of *New Solidarity* and *Industrial Worker*. Although he was not a Wobbly, Young was very supportive of the radical labour movement. His influence was broad as proven in his work’s Canadian presence. See Richard Fitzgerald, *Art and Politics: Cartoonists of the Masses and Liberator* (London: Greenwood Press, 1973), 20.

⁴¹ McCallum, “Not a Sex Question,” 41-3.



Figure 2.4- *Strike Bulletin*, 12 June 1919.

In particular, the radical labour movement's usage of the female figure as a metaphor for social struggle and change was part of a symbolic trope that had a long and varied history. Despite the ascendancy of the iconography of the male figure during the transition from 19th century democratic-plebian revolutions to 20th century proletarian-socialist movements, historian Eric Hobsbawm asserts that there was a continuous usage of the female figure as a muse, symbol, and allegory of virtue.⁴² In many ways the IWW and BC Federation of Labour's representations of the female figure as truth, justice, integrity, prudence, and diligence resemble the Popular Revolt's representations of Marianne during the 1848 French Republic.⁴³ In this 1909 image from the

⁴² Eric Hobsbawm, "Man and Woman: Images on the Left," In *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 98.

⁴³ In his discussion of how the French Republic regarded itself as a fulfillment of the principles of the French Revolution, Maurice Agulhon identifies how representations of Marianne had a long and tumultuous history that coincided with France's social and political transformations. As for the origins of France's personification as "a female myth," Agulhon states that, "Once one has undertaken an investigation into origins, there is no knowing where one will stop." For this study, the comparison is made between the radical labour movement of the early 20th century and Marianne of the 1848 French Republic. See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 5-6; 11.

Industrial Worker (Figure 2.5), the IWW stars of “education, organization, and emancipation” are guiding lights for this goddess-like figure gliding across the terrain.⁴⁴ This three star formation was part of the Wobbly logo, and it represented the commitment to disseminating knowledge of industrial unionism through literature and free speech fights, to organizing workers into syndicates which used general strikes, work stoppages, slow-downs, and sabotage to attack the capitalist system, and to emancipating working people through an industrial democracy wherein the means of production belonged to the working people.⁴⁵ With these stars lighting her way, the female figure in this image embodies relentless will and integrity to carry the people’s flag stained scarlet from the martyred workers of the world. Similar to the Popular Revolt’s Marianne, the Wobblies’ youthful female figure either stood her ground with conviction or vigorously approached the conflict before her.⁴⁶ In this 1920 image for example (Figure 2.6), the female figure towers over the American Federation of Labor fakir, the boss, the politician, and the policeman.⁴⁷ With a stern determination she, that is the Wobblies’ One Big Union, charges through the capitalist fortress and rescues those imprisoned within it. A 1919 image from the *British Columbia Federationist* (Figure 2.7) reveals a goddess holding in one hand a flag of “liberty, equality, fraternity.”⁴⁸ With her other hand she directs a worker towards the horizon where sunbeams beat away the storm clouds of the capitalist system. Nearby the “capitalist league of nations” falls into the land sliding ends of its reign, soon to follow are its “war, conscription, poverty.” In this 1919 image from the Wobblies’ *One Big Union Monthly* (Figure 2.8), her presence means that the first of May, the international workers’ day of reflection

⁴⁴ “The Red Flag,” *Industrial Worker*, 29 April 1909.

⁴⁵ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume IV*, 21. Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 27.

⁴⁶ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 88.

⁴⁷ “Coming to the Rescue,” *One Big Union Monthly*, April 1920. This Wobbly publication should not be confused with the Canadian One Big Union’s publication titled *One Big Union Bulletin*.

⁴⁸ “The Dawn of Labor’s Day,” *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 August 1919.

and celebration, has arrived.⁴⁹ With arms raised high and a cloth loosely draped over her, she represents a crucifixion of the working class. However, her head is not tilted downwards in despair. Instead, radical labour's Marianne gazes upwards with powerful confidence. As with the Marianne of the Popular Revolt, the exposed breasts (along with the broken shackles) of the Wobblies' own Marianne symbolize unrestrained vitality.⁵⁰ In this image the union label shines so vibrantly as to cast her shadow of revolution over the capitalist terrain. This capitalist could only look on in fright.



Figure 2.5- "The Red Flag," *Industrial Worker*, 29 April 1909.

⁴⁹ "Great Events Throw Their Shadow Before Them," *One Big Union Monthly*, May 1919.

⁵⁰ Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, 88.



Figure 2.6- "Coming to the Rescue," *One Big Union Monthly*, April 1920.



Figure 2.7- "The Dawn of Labor's Day," *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 August 1919.



Figure 2.8- "Great Events Throw their Shadow before Them," *One Big Union Monthly*, May 1919.

Through virtuous metaphors of a female figure, the Industrial Workers of the World and the BC Federation of Labour brought integrity, truth, and social justice to their organizations. Their representations of hope, light, and uplift in the face of despair, darkness, and downfall were similar to those used by the early 20th century reform movement's "war on vice" discussed in the previous chapter. As the reform movement represented the female figure in images of "light and dark" or "good and evil" to convey their authority on "social uplift and purification," these radical labour movements developed a similar allegorical way of interpreting social conditions and conveying their authority on the direction of social change. As with the reform movement, radical labour organizations pressed the female figure into symbolic moulds of both virtue and vice.⁵¹ In particular, the reform movement and the radical labour movement utilized the female figure as a

⁵¹ Lindsey McMaster, *Working Girls in the West: Representations of Wage-Earning Women* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 88.

way of exposing the delicacy and vulnerability of their virtuous principles. For example, this 1920 image titled “The Fatal Embrace” (Figure 2.9) delivers an urgent message that justice and liberty have mortality. Capitalism is exposed as an ogre with enormous jowls and ravenous teeth who aggressively squeezes the fragile body of Liberty.⁵² The capitalist ogre appears rapacious in nature as Justice has been abused and discarded, and Liberty is about to be consumed. Unable to resist his clutch, Liberty curls her head into her own victimized body. Such images of violence against women translated into sadness and despair over the vulnerability of fundamental principles of liberty and justice. In this 1919 image from the *British Columbia Federationist* (Figure 2.10), the female figure of Justice is on her knees from the corruption of the Canadian state during arbitration of labour-capital struggles.⁵³ Both the IWW and the BCFL doubted the state could serve as an impartial mediator.⁵⁴ This image interprets the outcome of the general strikes of 1919 which began in mid-May when Winnipeg’s metal trade workers walked off the job. Solidarity among the working people in Winnipeg was strong enough that a city-wide general strike ensued.⁵⁵ Shortly afterwards, cities across Canada supported the Winnipeg General Strike by striking in sympathy with many shared grievances, namely unemployment, low wages, high consumer prices, long work hours, unsafe work conditions, employer blacklists, and non-recognition of collective bargaining rights.⁵⁶ Overall, strikers and labour sympathizers maintained strategies of passive resistance and peaceful protest by not activating parades, massive demonstrations, and picketing.⁵⁷ However, the silent parade which did take place in Winnipeg on June 21st was remembered as “Bloody Saturday” as a

⁵² “The Fatal Embrace,” *One Big Union Monthly*, October 1920.

⁵³ *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 June 1919.

⁵⁴ Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 63.

⁵⁵ The ramifications of this strike must not be underestimated. The city was greatly paralyzed by no mail services, streetcars, taxis, newspapers, telegrams, telephones, and janitorial services, as well as limited gasoline, milk, bread, and meat. For a detailed analysis of the strike, see D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 45-7.

⁵⁶ Gregory S. Kealey, “1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 12.

⁵⁷ Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, 48.

result of the injuries, arrests, and even death caused by the Canadian state's deployment of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.⁵⁸ This image conveys dark clouds and shadows looming over Winnipeg. With bleeding cuts on her face, Justice is on her knees, her scales crushed into the ground. The large, dark, and militaristic government clutches her neck and raises his arm to slay her. She represents the mortality of justice for the strikers of the 1919 labour unrest and conveys the irony that Canadians fought against militarism on European battlefields, and yet it roamed free in Canada.

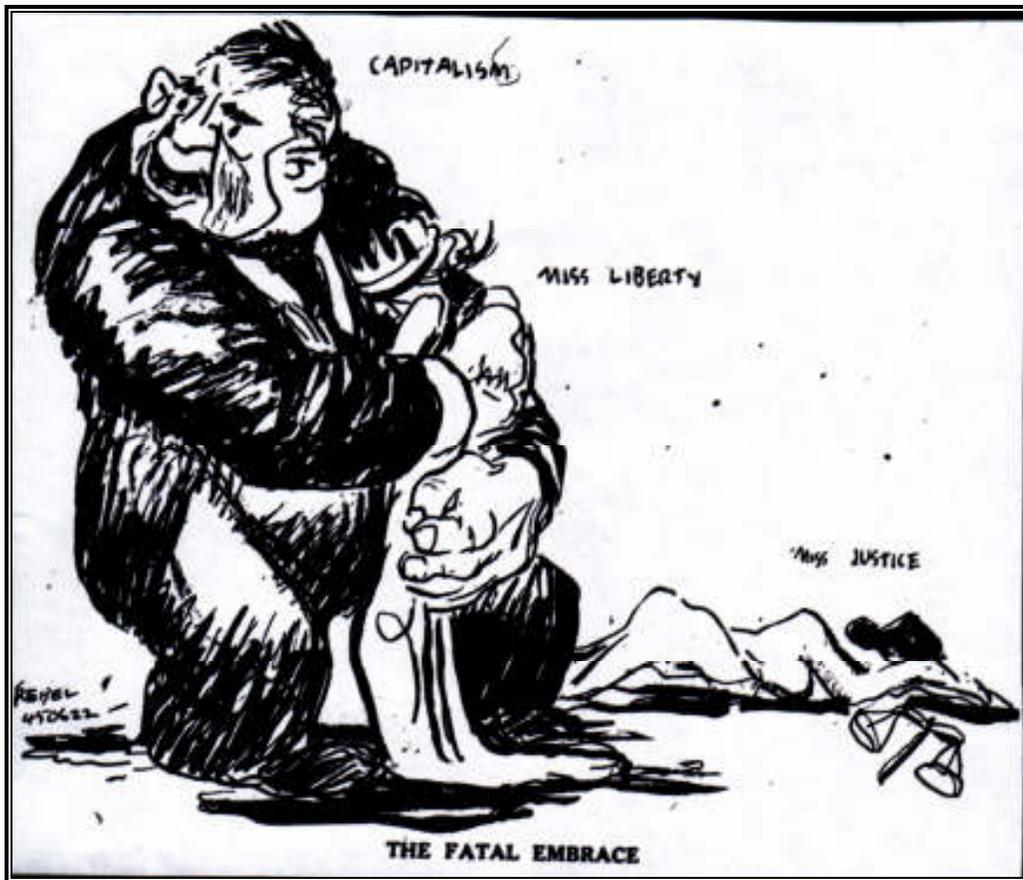


Figure 2.9- "The Fatal Embrace," *One Big Union Monthly*, October 1920.

⁵⁸ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 176.



Figure 2.10- *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 June 1919.

In creating these images of perilous virtue, the IWW and BCFL meant to disturb and provoke the working class community into a radical indictment of capitalism. In his analysis of the artistic culture of the IWW, Salvatore Salerno asserts that, “worker artists went beyond formal political expressions to create a language and symbolism that made the IWW’s principles meaningful within the context of the worker’s cultural and social alienation.”⁵⁹ However, this chapter contends that while the Wobbly images, poems, and lyrics of class oppression and revolutionary struggle provided outlet, clarity, and meaning to the working class community, they conformed to conventional political expressions and social norms of the feminine gender, and in doing so reinforced the ideological power of sex and gender inequality already in place. Carolyn Kitch, in her analysis of the leftist paper *The Masses*, similarly argues that this magazine “reiterated

⁵⁹ Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 149.

conventional norms of womanhood” and confirmed “the true ideological power of the stereotypes already in place in American culture by the second decade of the century.”⁶⁰ Alongside the mainstream press of the day, the radical labour newspapers of the IWW and BC Federation of Labour conveyed a similar powerful feminine culture of virtue as well as vice.

For example, the IWW and BC Federation of Labour similarly utilized a narrative of prostitution. Discussed in the previous chapter, the female prostitute was the master symbol for understanding uncertain and ambiguous change in the early 20th century, and the IWW and BCFL readily utilized it in their condemnation of the mainstream press.⁶¹ Images from the *Industrial Worker* and *BC Federationist* represented the mainstream press as a provocative agent of the capitalist class who distracted readers from analyzing the source of acute social problems such as abysmal housing, homelessness, insufficient wages, unemployment, poor health, and starvation. The mainstream press was portrayed as a young seductress in the act of distorting the oppressive nature of the capitalist system with her own promises of monopoly on “truth.” This 1917 image from the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.11) utilizes the biblical story of John the Baptist and Salome to criticize the destructive and lethal relationship of the working class and mainstream press.⁶² As the capitalist press, the bejeweled Salome carries the “head of labour” as reward for her seductive dance around the truth concerning the real state of affairs between labour and capital. She has successfully tempted her readership, and King Herod, her capitalist stepfather, is pleased. King Herod resents John the Baptist because he had condemned King Herod’s marriage to the former

⁶⁰ Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 92.

⁶¹ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 90.

⁶² “Only Wants Head of Labor!” *Industrial Worker*, 22 September 1917.

wife of his half-brother.⁶³ This image suggests that the IWW resembles John the Baptist in that it also exposes and condemns moral, political, and economic forms of corruption, and has been severely punished by capitalist class power. This image utilizes the biblical story of John the Baptist to forewarn its working class readers that the capitalist temptress of the mainstream press will readily seduce and please her capitalist stepfather by putting labour's severed head on a platter. While this image (Figure 2.11) suggests a tragic death of the radical labour movement if the capitalist press flourished, many more images reassured that the IWW was a relentless force to be reckoned with. In this 1920 image from the *One Big Union Monthly* (Figure 2.12), a mainstream press temptress, scantily-clad with newspaper pages of lies, is certain she cannot be denied by the worker.⁶⁴ She is self-assured of her desirability when she declares, "Oh, I'll get you." Her efforts are in vain, however, because this Wobbly is not swayed by her scandalous ensemble of lies. His response to her haughty remark of "I'll discredit you before the world" with a confident comeback of "Sure, just like you captured Petrograd" reflects his pride in the 1917 October Revolution in Petrograd in which millions of workers seized control of factory production and distribution while the Bolshevik-led soviets rose to power. The mainstream press could not deny the working class power of mass strike action. With comparisons of the capitalist press to a conniving, loose woman who deceives the working class, these images advocated readership of the Wobbly press illegally circulating throughout the United States and British Columbia.⁶⁵

⁶³ *The Victorian Web: literature, history, and culture in the age of Victoria*, s.v. "Salome," <http://victorianweb.org/gender/salome.html> (accessed 4 June 2005), *Olga's Gallery: Online Art Museum*, s.v. "St. John the Baptist," <http://www.abcgallery.com/religion/salome.html> (accessed 4 June 2005), and Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, s.v. "Salome," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salome> (accessed 8 February 2010).

⁶⁴ *One Big Union Monthly*, July 1920.

⁶⁵ Wobbly newspapers, leaflets, and magazines were sold at IWW bookstores, newsstands, and by Wobbly delegates who received them in bundles from publishing headquarters. From 1917 to 1923 in particular, American Wobbly delegates risked arrest, trial, and imprisonment for the mere possession of IWW newsprint. To evade arrest and state-sponsored raids, many newspapers, leaflets, and magazines did not disclose the location of publication. See Dione Miles, *Something in Common: An IWW Bibliography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 17-18.



Only Wants Head of Labor!

Figure 2.11- "Only Wants Head of Labor!" *Industrial Worker*, 22 September 1917.



KEPT PRESS: Oh, I'll get you. I'll destroy you. I'll discredit you before the World.
I. W. W. MAN: Sure. Just like you captured Petrograd.

Figure 2.12- *One Big Union Monthly*, July 1920.

The *British Columbia Federationist* printed similar images of the mainstream press. In this 1919 image (Figure 2.13), capitalism, donning a top hat, dress coat, and Canadian Manufacturers' Association badge, asks his "dirty daughter" to whitewash his corruption.⁶⁶ His daughter is the mainstream press who is dressed in newspapers and a flashy feather hat-- an early 20th century symbol of prostitution.⁶⁷ Published shortly after the Winnipeg general strike and the nation-wide sympathy strikes, this image uses discarded handcuffs, rifles, and canes to represent the violence which brought the labour struggle to an end. By the end of the strikes, the federal government had established a program of strengthening its military as an instrument against future labour unrest. This program was undertaken by the federal department that arranged for armed troops, armoured cars, and an observation plane in Winnipeg during the strike.⁶⁸ In this image the militia man, announcing the "Official Communiqué" of those "killed, wounded, arrested, raided, and seized" during the summer of 1919, as well as the reactionaries are reduced in size to represent their willing subservience to capitalist enterprise and its press. As with the IWW, the BC Federation of Labour utilized the female figure to represent deceit and corruption, and to expose how white-washing was endemic in the mainstream press. In the cities of Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg the "kalsominers" or whitewashers were kept busy.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ "He 'Kept' Press as Plain and Fancy Kalsominers," *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 July 1919.

⁶⁷ Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, 90.

⁶⁸ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 102.

⁶⁹ Kalsomine is a white liquid containing zinc oxide, water, glue, and colouring matter. It is used as a wash for both walls and ceilings. *Dictionary.com*, s.v. "Kalsomine," <http://dictionary.reference.com/search> (accessed 22 August 2005).



Figure 2.13- "He 'Kept' Press as Plain and Fancy Kalsominers," *British Columbia Federationist*, 18 July 1919.

While the radical labour newspapers represented the mainstream press as a loose woman, they utilized images of an "old maid" to deride the passivity of the craft union movement. As federations of craft unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) were committed to selling skilled labour at high wages and to organizing strikes that would increase their efficacy in relations with capitalist employers.⁷⁰ The IWW argued that craft unionism's commitment to the union contract for better wages and working conditions was an act of acquiescence and compromise to the employers' control and exploitation of the workplace.⁷¹ In this 1910 image (Figure 2.14), a Wobbly looks on with approval as an English trade unionist shouts

⁷⁰ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 256.

⁷¹ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 256. Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 15.

“Take that!” as he kicks an English labour leader right where it counts-- in the “sacred contract.”⁷² With nervousness and surprise, the labour leader tries to be stern when he says, “You young brat, is that the way you treat your father!” Disheartened by the altercation, AFL leader Samuel Gompers as “Mama Gompers” looks for reassurance from her petite American Federation of Labor child when she says, “Well I’m sure my boy would not do such a naughty thing, would you dear?” Holding Mama’s hand, her timid child reassures her with, “No Maw.” Represented as a little Lord Fauntelroy, the AFL is frail and meek in contrast to the rugged, rebellious adolescence of the IWW represented here as a solid, strapping young lad.⁷³ This image of “Mama Gompers” is similar to many narratives of craft unionism as an “old maid” too gullible, feeble, docile, and ineffectual to confront the capitalist employer. In a 1917 narrative titled “A Lady-like Union,”

The companies operating in this district adopted the eight hour day last winter, but later told their employes [sic] that on April 1st the joke of a twelve hour day would be restored. The dullers [sic] held meetings and organized to resist. They decided to be very ladylike and named themselves the “Oil Workers Association.” An IWW tried to explain organization to them and was thrown out of the hall. Unions were too rough for them. They finally consented to organize in the AFL and are now being craft-divided, and are threatening to swat the bosses with some nice, gay confetti.⁷⁴

In this narrative an AFL craft union is bullied by an employer to accept the twelve hour workday. Despite the bullying, the craft union obstinately refuses education and organization by the IWW.

⁷² *Industrial Worker*, 17 November 1910.

⁷³ Katherine L. Carlson, “Little Lord Fauntelroy and the Evolution of American Boyhood,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no.1 (Winter 2010), 39.

⁷⁴ M.B. Butler, “A Lady-like Union,” *Industrial Worker*, 12 May 1917.



Figure 2.14- *Industrial Worker*, 17 November 1910.

The BC Federation of Labour used images of a worn, defeated old maid to criticize the Canadian state for its role in capital-labour struggles. In this 1919 image from the *BC Federationist* (Figure 2.15) an old, frumpy woman representing the federal government wears striped stockings, over-sized shoes, and large knitting needles for hat pins as she bounds for the “Labor Temples throughout Canada.”⁷⁵ Her handbag of “American Capital” accompanies her tiring efforts to swat at or sweep away the labour movement. The fat, cigar-puffing grain profiteer confirms that her political and economic endeavours are motivated by American profiteers. While the shiny, decorative diamond hanging from her hat is likely a reward for giving favour to capitalists, she looks worn, tired, and rather poor. Her hair is frizzy, her fingers poke through her gloves, and her face is dirty

⁷⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 4 July 1919. As a side note, the federal government became a union government in 1917 when several Liberals joined Prime Minister Borden’s executive on a shared platform of conscription and prohibition.

from an exhaustive swatting and sweeping of labor temples. As with Wobbly newspapers, this labour paper was arguing that the Canadian state was a tool of capitalist enterprise.

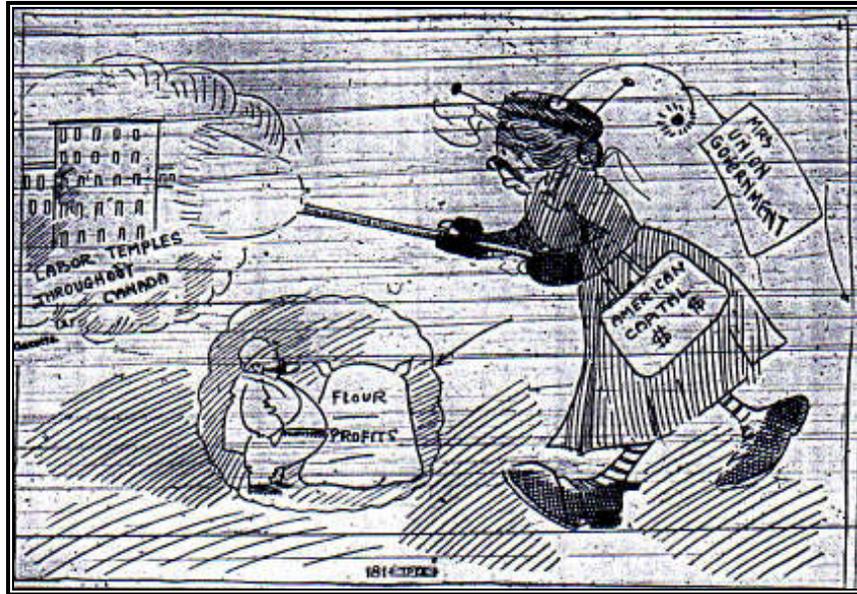


Figure 2.15- *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919.

Collectively, the narratives and images of the “old maid” and “loose woman” were instrumental to the IWW and BC Federation of Labour’s indictment of the capitalist press, the craft union movement, and the government. These usages of the female figure and the feminine gender to critique social, political, and economic spaces largely comprised of men symbolized the confusion, disorientation, uncertainty, and corruption that the IWW and BCFL identified in the capitalist system. The IWW and BCFL utilized conventional norms of the feminine gender that society generally understood to be “true,” and for this reason were successful in conveying their social criticism and calls for change. Salvatore Salerno contends that these images and narratives were a “means of both disseminating political ideology and creating a worker’s culture that challenged the definition of American life imposed by government and business elites.”⁷⁶ However, his assertion that the IWW created a working class culture that challenged “the definition of

⁷⁶ Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 140.

American life” neglects the ways in which the radical labour movement reinforced conventional gender norms as well as contemporary social norms of separate spheres and proper places for men and women. In his analysis of socialist imagery, Eric Hobsbawm agrees that “the iconography of the movement reflects this unconscious reinforcement of the sexual division of labour.”⁷⁷ The radical labour movement’s conventional usage of the feminine gender was not only evident in its metaphorical usage of the virtuous goddess, the loose woman, and the old maid, but also in its narratives of the rebel girl and union wife.

Through the narratives of the rebel girl and union wife, young women were empowered but not necessarily emancipated by their roles as helpmates to the radical man. That is, if the emancipation of women within a feminine culture is to be measured by the degree to which women were agents in its definition and fruition, then the emancipation of real rank and file women in the radical labour movement was constrained. The images and narratives of the rebel girl and union wife determined how rank and file women ought to support the radical man in free speech fights, general strikes, and sabotage of the workplace. The IWW was committed to unionizing women workers, demonstrating this by recruiting women as members, union organizers, and union officials, and by collecting minimal initiation fees and dues.⁷⁸ For waged women workers in Canada and the United States, these low fees and dues were crucial to their unionization; after all, what drove women to waged labour was not boredom or “a change of scenery”-- it was poverty.⁷⁹ As women gained employment in the expanding retail and clerical services as well as the industries previously designated male, they turned to unions and women’s labour organizations for support in their struggle for better wages, working conditions, and collective bargaining rights. As a result,

⁷⁷ Hobsbawm, “Man and Woman: Images on the Left,” 107.

⁷⁸ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement: From Colonial Times to the Eve of World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 394.

⁷⁹ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 9.

more than 200 strikes involving women workers during the years 1915 and 1920 equalled the number of labour disputes involving women in the entire period from 1890 to 1914.⁸⁰ As young women became increasingly present in the workplace by the end of the First World War, radical labour organizations felt the push to harness the social and political energies of women. The images of the rebel girl represent the attempts of the IWW to map out young women workers' agency into its anarcho-syndicalist cause.

The rebel girl was a young woman worker who eagerly joined the radical man in labour activism. The IWW celebrated this "heroic woman" who was resilient to public scrutiny and bold with her protests against the realities of economic poverty and social injustice.⁸¹ At free speech fights the Wobbly's rebel girl advocated the right to organize and to speak out against oppression. In this 1921 image from the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.16), the rebel girl holds a mainstream newspaper titled, *The Daily Dope*.⁸² She says to herself, "Gee! I wish we had some real men in America instead of a helpless lot of ninnies whose minds are poisoned by this dope." Her presence on the city streets as a publicist for radical labour activism not only taunts acquiescent and apathetic working class men, but emasculates them as well; only "ninnies" submit themselves to falsities of the mainstream press. The rebel girl implores working people to acknowledge the writing on the wall: "Read the *Industrial Worker* and learn the cause of unemployment. Join the IWW and help us remedy conditions."⁸³ In this 1922 image from the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.17), a rebel girl conducts a crowd of men and women in song.⁸⁴ The rebel girl did not fear reprisal for her actions; rather, she invited it. By filling the jails, bull pens, old schoolhouses, and abandoned hospitals with rebel girls and radical men, the political system eventually exhausted itself and was

⁸⁰ Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 175.

⁸¹ McCallum, "A Modern Weapon for Modern Man," 120.

⁸² "The Rebel Girl," *Industrial Worker*, 26 February 1921.

⁸³ "The Rebel Girl," *Industrial Worker*, 26 February 1921.

⁸⁴ *Industrial Worker*, 6 May 1922.

forced to admit that the radical labour movement had its own reserve army of labour activists which would not give up on the struggle.⁸⁵ In addition to his songs about jail, hobo jungles, strikes, and mass demonstrations, revered Wobbly Joe Hill wrote of the female heroine, “The Rebel Girl:”

To the working class she’s a precious pearl.
She brings courage, pride, and joy
To the Fighting Rebel Boy...
Yes, her hands may be harden’d [sic] from labor
And her dress may not be very fine;
But a heart in her bosom is beating
That is true to her class and kind.
And the grafters in terror are trembling
When her spite and defiance she’ll hurl.
For the only and thoroughbred lady
Is the Rebel Girl.⁸⁶

The IWW had a few leading rebel girls who were arrested and jailed, most notably Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a member of the IWW’s General Executive Board, and Lucy E. Parsons, the widow of Haymarket martyr Albert Parsons. Both women traversed the United States and Canada lecturing at free speech fights on topics such as craft unionism, strike breaking, and union scabs.⁸⁷ Flynn and Parsons’ relentless will, stamina, and perseverance were inspirations in the creation of the rebel girl narrative which rank and file women were to emulate as “tenacious and true fighters.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, 414.

⁸⁶ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 127 and 146. Joe Hill remains a famous Wobbly songwriter. His works were published in the *Industrial Worker* and *Solidarity*, and immortalized in the *Little Red Songbook*. In 1915 Hill was executed at Utah State Penitentiary for allegedly killing a Salt Lake City grocer. In “The Rebel Girl,” Hill likely uses the word “grafters” to refer to capitalists who gain or graft wealth dishonestly and unfairly.

⁸⁷ Albert Parsons was a labour activist who was hanged following a pipe bomb attack on police who attempted to disperse a strikers’ rally at Haymarket Square in Chicago 1886. “Mrs. Lucy E. Parsons,” *Industrial Worker*, 13 May 1909; “Successful Trip of E.G. Flynn,” *Industrial Worker*, 12 August 1909. There was also Edith Frenette who organized working people in the Pacific Northwest. See Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 36.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Women in Industry Should Organize,” *Industrial Worker*, 1 June 1911.



Figure 2.16- "The Rebel Girl," *Industrial Worker*, 26 February 1921.



Figure 2.17- *Industrial Worker*, 6 May 1922.

From this, the IWW asserted that a partnership of the rebel girl and radical man was necessary for toppling capitalist exploitation. The IWW advocacy of solidarity between the sexes was predicated on a firm belief that both working men and women were thoroughly oppressed by capitalism. In this 1921 image (Figure 2.18), a radical man and rebel girl are partners who host a comedic theatre performance of an inversion of class roles.⁸⁹ This first Act is titled, “The Parasite Leaps into some Real Work.” At centre stage is the capitalist who not only dons the usual top hat, but also a daintily ruffled skirt. His nakedness, with exception of this skirt, symbolizes his complete emasculation. In this image, gender inversion is utilized alongside class inversion as this scantily-clad capitalist stands on a pedestal to dive through a ring of fire and into a pile of hard labour. To the right of centre stage stands a woman worker who supervises an elite woman’s transformation into a washerwoman. This topsy-turvy image is representative of many working class pageantries which challenged the more mainstream patriotic pageantries of the day by allowing its participants to “appropriate history as self-determining actors in a society where they were mostly despised and marginalized.”⁹⁰ While pageants often re-enacted key events in history, this Wobbly image illustrates “The Coming Day of the Proletariat.” For the labour radical movement, the coming day was dependent upon the solidarity between radical men and rebel girls.

⁸⁹ *The Lumber Workers’ Bulletin*, 26 March 1921.

⁹⁰ The Paterson Pageant, for example, featured 10,000 strikers re-enacting critical moments of the strike, namely the mass walkout, the funerals of the martyrs, and the speeches at the graves, for an audience of over 15,000 working class people. See Francis Shor, *Utopianism and Radicalism in a Reforming America, 1888-1918* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 142. Pageantry has been described as “an instrument in raising political consciousness”, as well as a merging of “politics and art, a strike tactic and a cultural revolution.” See Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Trade, 1913* cited in Shor’s *Utopianism and Radicalism*, 142.



Figure 2.18- *The Lumber Workers' Bulletin*. 26 March 1921. The curtains read, "The Coming Day of the Proletariat, Workers Unite and the World Is Yours."

As with the rebel girl, the union wife cooperated with the radical man in the indictment of capitalism. The IWW recognized a symbiotic oppression in the workplace and the community of everyday living, and asserted that radical activism functioned at the points of production and subsistence. The IWW drew conclusions that working class wives and mothers "should be more interested than any other in securing better conditions, shorter hours, and higher wages on the job" because they were the ones who had to "scimp [sic] and save" in order for the family to subsist.⁹¹ Working class women knew all too well the struggles of feeding, clothing, and housing a family with a meagre and unstable income. The IWW recognized how these everyday struggles primarily shaped working class understanding of class politics. Working class men and women were not only educated by theoreticians and philosophers; their knowledge of class oppression was gained

⁹¹ "An Appeal to Women," *Industrial Worker*, 30 August 30 1919.

during their everyday experiences at work and at home.⁹² Working class wives and mothers who maintained the household were therefore identified as having the heightened responsibility of encouraging and supporting labour activism. An October 1919 article in the IWW's *One Big Union Monthly* declared that wives and mothers, in spite of numerous duties, had much "more time to read and study than the boy on the job."⁹³ A 1924 edition of the Wobblies' *Industrial Worker* printed a letter from a working class mother who strongly asserted, "I want my boy to start earlier in life as a fighter in the right cause and help to push along that which his father and I are now trying to help."⁹⁴ She held herself accountable for her son's successful growth into a working class activist when she declared,

For myself I ask nothing better than to aid in this great class struggle and I feel that, as "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," it is high time that hand becomes educated along the lines of which way the cradle should be rocked. I would sure like to see all mothers more interested in industrial unionism...⁹⁵

A similar article addressed to women in their roles as educators stated that, "nature has endowed you with brains just as she has man, and you should use them for your own and your family's interest."⁹⁶ As with the rebel girl, the union wife had the right and responsibility to educate the working class community.

In asserting the roles and responsibilities of the union wife, the IWW appropriated conventional gendered norms of the domestic ideology. The IWW was similar to the Knights of Labor which throughout the 1880s argued that women were "the peers of men" who were entitled to equal rights in membership and equal pay for equal work. However, this commitment to women's involvement in the labour movement as workers existed in tension with prevailing norms of

⁹² Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 94.

⁹³ "Women!" *One Big Union Monthly*, October 1919.

⁹⁴ "Women and the IWW," *Industrial Pioneer*, April 1924.

⁹⁵ "Women and the IWW," *Industrial Pioneer*, April 1924.

⁹⁶ "An Appeal to Women," *Industrial Worker*, 30 August 1919.

feminine domesticity and women's proper place in the home.⁹⁷ In this case, the IWW's images and narratives of the rebel girl who publicly acted as a striker and an orator at free speech fights competed with narratives of the union wife who maternally nurtured the radical labour movement from a domestic sphere. The images and narratives of the union wife testify to how the social construction of separate spheres was "a trope that hid its instrumentality even from those who employed it."⁹⁸ That is to say that the union wife narratives directed women on how they should reinforce their family's allegiance to radical activism. First, she must boycott all non-union label goods. When using her husband's wages to purchase food and supplies, she should know that the products were made by union men. Second, her impact on the movement would be of greater consequence when she became an auxiliary member to the IWW. As part of the One Big Union's "intelligence bureau," she would not only "run down sources of scab supplies," but also "ferret out cases requiring aid" from prison comfort clubs.⁹⁹ In a 1921 article titled, "Help the Boys in Jail," union wives and daughters were encouraged to send out Christmas packages to imprisoned men.¹⁰⁰ This article also reminded union wives, "Don't forget the class-war widows and children" because they were "deprived of their breadwinners." In this 1923 image from the *Industrial Worker* (Figure 2.19), the union wife is "the angel of the working class" who provides a cornucopia of food, clothing, and encouraging words to class-war prisoners.¹⁰¹ Overall, the union wife was responsible for the continuing education of her family, the ethical purchasing of union-made goods, as well as the maintenance of a maternal support network for class-war prisoners, widows, and children. From her domestic threshold, she nurtured the radical labour movement.

⁹⁷ Christina Burr, *Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth Century Toronto*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 127 and 150.

⁹⁸ Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History*, 75 no.1 (June 1988), 30.

⁹⁹ "When Work Women Organize," *Industrial Pioneer*, September 1923.

¹⁰⁰ "Help the Boys in Jail," *Industrial Worker*, 17 December 1921.

¹⁰¹ "The Angel of the Working-Class," *Industrial Worker*, 22 December 1923.

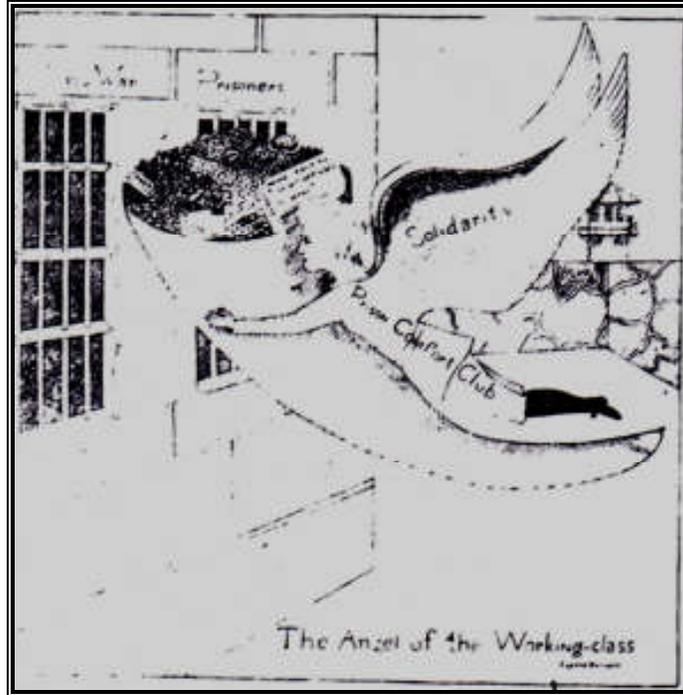


Figure 2.19- "The Angel of the Working-Class," *Industrial Worker*, 22 December 1923.

Together, the images and narratives of the union wife and rebel girl aimed to map out the role of women in labour activism. These constructions of women's empowerment were in part based upon a residing conclusion that women, if not guided, would dampen the radical labour movement with conservatism. However, the Wobblies were not suggesting that women were inherently conservative.¹⁰² The IWW contended that women became conservative-minded as a result of the capitalist press and the ever-expanding consumer market. The Wobblies resented the capitalist press for trying to keep "the facts" of exploited labour and dangerous working conditions from the wives, mothers, and daughters of working men.¹⁰³ A 1923 article acknowledged that "the trouble is that the capitalist side reaches her most through church, press, and movie."¹⁰⁴ If women fully understood the exploitive nature of capitalist productions, they would not, according to the

¹⁰² In his study of the IWW in the Pacific Northwest, Mark Leier asserts that, "it should not be inferred that workers with families are necessarily inclined to conservatism." Radicalism was not "a special prerogative of men," nor was it "akin to sowing wild oats." Leier points out that many men and women became militant and radical in order to protect their families. See Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 114.

¹⁰³ "An Appeal to Women," *Industrial Worker*, 30 August 1919.

¹⁰⁴ "When Work Women Organize," *Industrial Pioneer*, September 1923.

IWW, reinforce the profit system through mass consumption. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn stated that too often union wives were “alienated through their lack of understanding” about the need for industrial unionism, and thus were prey to the “smooth-tongued agent of the employers” who tell them that their husbands participate in free speech fights and general strikes because they were “lazy” and not concerned about the welfare of their families.¹⁰⁵

A 1919 Wobbly narrative titled “A Rebel Worker” illuminates this concern that radical working men battled conservatism in the home. In this narrative a “weak and emaciated” woman relentlessly criticizes her husband for attending a union hall where he just “gabs.”¹⁰⁶ The radical man argues with her that he was not predestined to “grind out his life” for a capitalist who reaps all the fruits of his labour. She responds, “You know God made you to work, and you should be satisfied to work.” Despite his repugnance of her “religious prattle about humility and duty to the bosses,” she proceeds to praise their neighbour Williams for being “an honest, God and law fearin’ man” who would never consider walking off the job as a striker. Declaring that Williams “has about as much manhood as a bowery drunk,” the radical man reminds his wife that Williams’s family has not benefited in any way from his daily strikebreaking toils at the workplace. His wife reaches the pinnacle of acquiescence, passivity, and defeatism to the capitalist status quo when she proclaims,

There you go knocking again. All you do is knock neighbours and rich men. The rich men own the world. They could let us starve if they wanted to. We couldn’t stop it. All we could do if they wouldn’t give you a job would be to starve.¹⁰⁷

She believes her husband to be a “traitor to the government” when he demands that workers of all industries should confront both capital and the state. The radical man declares her the real traitor

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Women in Industry Should Organize,” *Industrial Worker*, June 1, 1911.

¹⁰⁶ “A Rebel Worker,” *Industrial Worker*, 16 July 1919.

¹⁰⁷ “A Rebel Worker,” *Industrial Worker*, 16 July 1919.

“to every man that ever did an honest day’s work.” This narrative is representative of a strong, residing belief that women had the potential to hinder the progress of the radical labour movement.

Ironically, at the same time the radical labour movement was appropriating conventional norms of feminine domesticity, it was also fighting against conventional norms of working class women’s sexuality reminiscent of Victorian codes of morality. Of all the social problems late 19th and early 20th century reformers focused on-- gambling dens, impure drinking water, intemperance, and crime-- prostitution was deemed “the social evil.”¹⁰⁸ The social reform movement was characterized by a syllogistic conclusion of working women’s prostitution which inferred that because all working women were paid low wages but not all working women resorted to prostitution, that insufficient wages were not the cause of prostitution-- it was sexual deviancy.¹⁰⁹ Late 19th century Toronto reform mayor William Howland, for example, applauded working class women who endured their economic destitution over prostitution stating, “A good woman will die first.”¹¹⁰ The predominant assumption here was that immoral working class women were bartering their sexuality for personal gain and pleasure. By contrast, the IWW insisted that prostitution was deeply embedded in the profit system, arguing that “the economic failure of capitalism created prostitution, not the moral failure of women.”¹¹¹ In a 1922 article, the IWW argued that the city streets were the only option for destitute women who lacked a family support network. As women were compelled to live in cheap room and boarding houses, “they came in contact with all sorts of undesirable companions.”¹¹² For the Wobblies, these undesirable companions were wealthy capitalists.

¹⁰⁸ Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 111.

¹¹⁰ Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 34.

¹¹¹ Ann Schofield, “Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Woman Question in the Journals of the AFL and IWW, 1905-1920,” *Feminist Studies* 9, no.2 (Summer 1983), 350.

¹¹² “The Female of the Species can be Saved by Industrial Unionism too,” *Industrial Worker*, 12 August 1922.

The IWW argued that prostitution was fuelled by “the lust of the leisure class” for profit and sexual dominance of the working class.¹¹³ A 1909 article from the *Industrial Worker* explained how city officials, and by extension the capitalist class, secretly condoned prostitution because it brought revenue to the city treasury. In its account of fifty-eight prostitutes who were apprehended in Spokane, forced to pay fines to the city treasury, and then ordered to leave town, this article argued that these women were ordered to head to Pasco and Seattle because these cities’ treasuries were low in funds. The article detected a pattern of sexual exploitation of women,

The victims of capitalism will be ordered to another town, where they will be allowed to ply their usual vocation, until they can donate to the sidewalk fund, so that the goodie-goodie ladies of society will not dirty their skirts, while on the way to church, where they can thank God for all the good things that have been bestowed upon them in the past week.¹¹⁴

This article concluded that, “Half the cement sidewalks in the cities of America ought to have stamped deep into them, ‘Built by prostitutes.’” The IWW also argued that working class women were sexual conquests for capitalist men, signifying their dominance of the working class. A 1922 article titled, “The Female of the Species can be Saved by Industrial Unionism too” asserted that “the youth and beauty of the working girls [were] just as naturally desired by men of wealth who have lost all desire, even respect, for women of their own station.”¹¹⁵ Ultimately, the IWW identified the roots of prostitution as twofold. Many working class women became prostitutes out of economic destitution, not moral deviancy, and prostitution was a result of the capitalist class’s desire for profit and sexual dominance of the working class. The IWW challenged contemporary convictions of prostitution as a working girl problem. By doing so, the IWW hoped to emancipate young working women from the heavy weight of class and gender-based discrimination.

¹¹³ “An Appeal to Women,” *Industrial Worker*, 30 August 1919.

¹¹⁴ Fred Heslewood, “Women Are Freed To Leave Spokane,” *Industrial Worker*, 29 July 1909.

¹¹⁵ “The Female of the Species can be Saved by Industrial Unionism too,” *Industrial Worker*, 12 August 1922.

The IWW's stance on prostitution was progressive for the day in that it held the social and economic system accountable, and it demonstrated compassion for prostitutes who were at risk of exploitation and violence. However, this stance did not break them from deploying the derogatory image of the despicably cheap and loose woman as a cipher for corruption. In this 1923 image (Figure 2.20), California is a sleazy woman with a low-cut neckline and a string of pearls who reports back to her boss that she has fulfilled his order of "railroading two more working men to the Pen."¹¹⁶ With a cigarette dangling from her dark and thin lips, she conveys no remorse or shame in stating that she did what he wanted, and now she wanted to be paid. Her dark eyes, perhaps black and blue eyes, suggest she is abused by her employer. He demonstrates that he has no respect for her by remaining seated in his chair. He even uses a stick to pass her the money. She was desired for completing the task of selling out her class, and after that she should "beat it" until he has use for her again. In an earlier June article of the *Industrial Worker*, California was referred to as the "plague spot of America" because it had a large number of workers imprisoned in a state penitentiary for "class-war convictions."¹¹⁷ In this image, California is a prostitute selling the working people to the capitalist class for personal gain. Images of the cheap and conniving woman were also used as a biting criticism of political socialism. In this 1909 image (Figure 2.21), a Wobbly laughs at the spectacle of a sleazy woman.¹¹⁸ She is ridiculous with her exceedingly pronounced cleavage and crinoline that attempts to accent a dress bearing her name, "Political Socialism." Her comment of "Oh, I could be happy with either if t'other dear charmer were 'way'" indicates that political socialism is desperate for attention, and willing to accept support from anyone who will offer it. Looking rather relaxed in his clean suit, the Wobbly casually leans against a chair and rhetorically asks, "Don't she look silly enough?" By contrast, the American Federation of Labor craft

¹¹⁶ *Industrial Worker*, 26 December 1923.

¹¹⁷ "Plague Spot of America Will Yet Be Cleaned Up," *Industrial Worker*, 27 June 1923.

¹¹⁸ "The IWW Is Its Own Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Power," *Industrial Worker*, 9 September 1909.

unionist, with his worn face and patched clothes, appears confused. He has a question mark above his head, and his pipe smokes the word “anti-revolutionary.” His cane bears the name “craft division,” testifying to his confusion and stagnation. While the primary ideologues of the Socialist Party asserted that the party would educate and elevate the class consciousness of workers, the IWW asserted that the best-taught lessons of class oppression and struggle were in the workplace. The IWW believed in the initiative of the rank and file, and did not regard political indoctrination as the keystone to solidarity and activism.¹¹⁹ The woman in this image was an exposure of how political socialism was alluring yet confusing, desperate, and ridiculous. In these images, class betrayal and party politics were personified as prostitutes. These images contradict the IWW’s compassionate and sympathetic understandings of prostitution and expose how the radical labour movement was somewhat implicated in the contemporary mistrust of the feminine gender and, by extension, women’s public presence.



Figure 2.20- *Industrial Worker*, 26 December 26 1923.

¹¹⁹ Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 39.



Figure 2.21- "The IWW Is Its Own Legislative, Executive and Judicial Power," *Industrial Worker*, 9 September 1909.

Despite the contradicting discourses and representations of prostitution, the IWW wanted to emancipate working class women from sexual oppression. By the second decade of the 20th century, the radical labour movement supported the rising birth control movement which advocated women's rights to personal sexual fulfillment. At the same time church doctrines and scientific teachings of medicine, sexology, and psychology were "conspiring to contain women's sexual expression within the bounds of conventional marriage," a construction of "a respectable female sexuality not exclusively procreative was emerging from the chrysalis of Victorian 'passionless' womanhood."¹²⁰ From this, the Birth Control League of Canada rose with inspiration from the founder and activist of the Birth Control League of America, Margaret Sanger.¹²¹ Up until the 1920s, public discussions of birth control, namely abstinence, withdrawal, rhythm method, abortion,

¹²⁰ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds. *No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), 86.

¹²¹ Sanger herself lectured in Vancouver in 1923. Light and Pierson, *No Easy Road*, 84-86.

and infanticide, were limited because distribution of contraceptive information, products and medical services (abortion) had been illegal since 1892.¹²² Nonetheless, Sanger in 1914 started a magazine titled *Woman Rebel* that was circulated by her anarchist friend Emma Goldman as well as the IWW. Sharing information on European contraceptive products, Sanger argued that working women had rights to sexual freedom, not “forced motherhood.”¹²³ At the time, middle class reformers could not reconcile the birth control movement with their idealization of motherhood as women’s primary source of power in the family as well as the nation. Alarmed by post-war decline in the birth rate and by waves of eastern and southern European immigration, middle class reformers instead advocated “a boost” in the Anglo-Saxon population of Canada.¹²⁴ As early as the late 19th century, the largest supporters of the birth control movement came from socialists and anarchists.¹²⁵ After printing the first 1000 copies of Sanger’s pamphlet *Family Limitation*, the IWW watched as the pamphlet numbers soared from 100,000 to 10 million printed copies.¹²⁶ The IWW also assisted the birth control movement by generating rallies as well as meetings that would support legal defenses for arrested birth control advocates.¹²⁷ The efforts of the IWW must not be underestimated; the Wobblies demonstrated commitment to working class women’s sexual emancipation.

In turn, the birth control movement complemented the IWW tactics of halting the capitalist class’ supply of exploitable labour. In a 1916 article in the Wobbly newspaper *Solidarity*, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn argued that,

¹²² Margaret Hobbs and Joan Sangster, *The Woman Worker 1926-1929* (St John’s, NF: Canadian Committee of Labour History, 1999), 217.

¹²³ Meredith Tax, “Rebel Girls and the IWW,” in *The Rising of Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880-1917* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 158-9.

¹²⁴ Hobbs and Joan Sangster, *The Woman Worker*, 218-9.

¹²⁵ Hobbs and Joan Sangster, *The Woman Worker*, 217.

¹²⁶ Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 34.

¹²⁷ Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 34. In the Pacific Northwest, Wobbly and Doctor Marie Equi was a main distributor of this contraception information. See Tax, “Rebel Girls and the IWW,” 157-9.

We do know that too many babies lower the laborer's standard of living and make mental and physical prostitutes of the adult family members... We think that society as a whole should have nothing to say regarding the prevention of conception until it guarantees some measure of well being to those who are born.¹²⁸

The IWW suggested that birth control would reduce the working class supply of labour to the capitalist class, thereby driving wages competitively upwards. That is, the IWW understood how birth control reduced capitalist profit and exploitation-- the root cause of working class poverty.¹²⁹ While the Wobblies may have understood how birth control was an important movement towards women's sexual emancipation, they were primarily concerned with how birth control was a contributing answer to the class question of exploitation. With Marxist overtones, the Wobblies primarily treated women's sexual oppression as a problem solved by the toppling of the class system.

With a compulsion to interpret social and sexual oppression as problems that would be solved by eradicating class, the IWW dismissed the suffrage movement as a futile process for reaching sex and gender equality. This assertion was built upon two firm assumptions: capitalism, not patriarchy was the root cause of all oppression, and a cross-class suffrage movement gave a false impression that working class and upper class women shared similar experiences.¹³⁰ By addressing women's emancipation as a question answered by class, the IWW avoided any recognition of how working class men contributed to the oppression of working class women. Historian Verity Burgmann identifies how the Wobblies believed it was, "not men but capitalism, not

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Problems in Organizing Women," *Solidarity*, 15 July 1916. See also, Schofield, "Rebel Girls and Union Maids," 341.

¹²⁹ Hobbs and Sangster, *The Woman Worker*, 218-9.

¹³⁰ Schofield, "Rebel Girls and Union Maids," 354.

a sex but a system was responsible for the condition of women.”¹³¹ In a 1911 article titled, “Women in Industry Should Organize,” Elizabeth Gurley Flynn argued that “much more than the abstract right of the ballot is needed to free woman; nothing short of a social revolution can shelter her cramping and stultifying spheres of today.” In this same article Flynn acknowledged that working class women must patiently wait for this revolution:

Likewise I feel the futility, and know many other Socialist women must, through our appreciation of these sad conditions and our deep sympathy for our sister women of extending to them nothing more than the hope of an ultimate social revolution. I am impatient for it. I realize the beauty of our hopes, the truth of its effectiveness, the inevitability of its realization, but I want to see that hope find a point of contact with the daily lives of the working women and I believe that it can through the union movement.¹³²

For historian Philip Foner, the IWW did not actually ask rank and file women why they needed and wanted the vote. He argues that the IWW made “a vast oversimplification to say that women workers had the same economic power as men to redress their grievances, and to conclude that they therefore did not need any political power.”¹³³ According to historian Ann Schofield, the IWW deplored working class women’s involvement in the suffrage movement because it united them with upper class women. She asserts that, “Efforts for cross-class organization on issues [such as suffrage] were seen as vitiation for the overall struggle for class-based organization.”¹³⁴ Ultimately, Wobbly leaders, both male and female, defined how sex and gender equality would be achieved by rank and file women. Unfortunately, leaders such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn were not necessarily representative of who rank and file women were and what they wanted for themselves socially and politically. Flynn, for example, was unconstrained by family obligation and was able to travel

¹³¹ Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102.

¹³² Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Women in Industry Should Organize,” *Industrial Worker*, 1 June 1911.

¹³³ Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, 405.

¹³⁴ Schofield, “Rebel Girls and Union Maids,” 338.

extensively as an orator of free speech fights, in part because she did not actually toil in waged work.¹³⁵ Rank and file women were not primary agents in the definition of social and sexual empowerment within the radical labour movement, and for this reason they were not entirely emancipated by it.

Through this analysis of the IWW, BC Federation of Labour, and the One Big Union, the radical labour movement is revealed as deeply embedded with both masculine and feminine cultures. Through narratives and images, the female figure was a metaphor for these organizations' virtuous struggles against class exploitation as well as the vice lingering within their enemies-- the capitalist class, the craft union movement, and the mainstream press. The narratives of the rebel girl and union wife as helpmates or partners to radical men were inspirational figures meant to empower rank and file women as working class activists. However, these constructions of the rebel girl and union wife were defined by men, and to lesser extent women, who did not challenge conventional gendered norms of separate spheres and proper places for women and men. While the radical labour movement was committed to eradicating sexual oppression, it was limited by its own compulsion to make social issues, such as prostitution, problems that could be solved by eradicating class. The IWW, BCFL, and OBU did not consider the ways in which working class men contributed to the oppression of women. Because these radical labour organizations sought to define the nature of working class women's empowerment, rank and file women were not entirely emancipated by the feminine culture of labour radicalism. However, this analysis of images and narratives does not gauge the degree to which real rank and file women allowed this feminine culture to map the course of their lives. The analysis of radical labour newspapers in this chapter

¹³⁵ Throughout her autobiography, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn identifies that she was not a waged worker. However, the IWW paid her as a public speaker whenever it could afford to do so. Flynn also describes how her mother and father played integral roles in raising her son Fred. As a traveling public speaker, Flynn was often apart from her mother, father, and son who lived in New York. See Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: an Autobiography; My First Life 1906-1926* (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 77; 83; 118; 123; 214.

offers only part of the historical record of working class women in the early 20th century. It is through analyses of young working women's activities in work and leisure that reveal whether and how these women adopted, adapted, and re-created constructions of feminine culture in ways that actually empowered and emancipated them. This is the focus of the following chapter.

**“NO HAIRPINS WERE SHED”:
TELEPHONE OPERATORS AND THE VANCOUVER SYMPATHETIC STRIKE OF 1919¹**

Chapter one reveals how mainstream presses such as the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province* and *Daily World* constructed images of a naïve, self-centred, and sexually active working girl who bordered “the deserving poor” and “the common prostitute” as a cipher for 20th century immorality and deviancy. Chapter two shows how radical presses such as the *Industrial Worker* and *British Columbia Federationist* created images and narratives of strong-willed, intelligent, pleasant, and pretty rebel girls and union wives that would map out the social activism of rank and file women. Collectively, these chapters examine mainstream and labour newspaper constructions of the feminine gender and young working women, and now this chapter focuses on whether or not real rank and file women in Vancouver, British Columbia brought these contradicting images and narratives of their sex, gender, and class into their own working lives. The evidence of how these young women did not interpret these constructions as limitations to their social and political lives, but rather as malleable spaces from which to assert their own convictions, testifies against the effectiveness of the historiographical concept of objectification. That is, this chapter suggests that objectification may account for the convictions, sentiments, and motivations behind the images and narratives, but it does not effectively illuminate the collective reception and response to them. In this chapter there is no analyses of young women’s diaries, letters, written testimonies, or oral histories because the actions carried out by thousands of young women workers, during one of the most labour militant time periods of the 20th Century, demonstrates how constructions of sex, class, and gender were avoided, ignored, and re-invented. Using articles from Vancouver newspapers, this chapter discusses the labour militancy against the State and capitalist organizations in the year

¹ “Ring Up to Ask if Phones Work,” *Vancouver Province*, 13 June 1919.

1919 in order to understand how telephone operators carved out their own identity in the Vancouver strike which responded in sympathy and solidarity to Winnipeg's own general strike.

In their early years as unionized workers, Vancouver telephone operators struggled with exclusion from the decision-making practices of their union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). In 1902, telephone operators working for the New Westminster and Burrard Inlet Telephone Company joined Local 213 as an auxiliary. As one of the earliest successes in unionizing women workers in Vancouver, this auxiliary was led by elected female officials. However, male delegates from Local 213 were everpresent for what historian Elaine Bernard identifies as "purposes of liaison."² According to Bernard, the union's development of the female auxiliary with a liaison to the all-male Local 213 stemmed, in part, from an assumption that it was unnecessary to include women in the actual decision-making practices of the union local. Women's waged labour was only a temporary stopover on the route to domesticity; with the high turnover of women workers, the union assumed there was little point to including women in regular union activities. As a result of women's temporary presence in the waged workplace, the union also rationalized why educational programs on the functions and advantages of unionism were only necessary for men.³ Regardless of their commitment to worker solidarity, telephone operators were deprived of union decision-making and education. For almost twenty years, the telephone operators struggled with their auxiliary status within the union.

That is, the telephone operators struggled to convince Local 213 that they too would be resilient and militant contenders in union negotiations with employers. While a 1902 strike may have won recognition of all telephone company employees as a single bargaining unit, the craftsmen by 1906 had signed a closed shop agreement that excluded telephone operators. The

² Elaine Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982), 16.

³ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 31.

craftsmen of Local 213 later rallied behind the telephone operators' strike for their own closed shop as well as a draft agreement on working conditions, but this support came only after telephone operators were individually taken into the telephone company's office and given an ultimatum to permanently resign from the union or quit work within twenty-four hours.⁴ Despite the Local's support, the telephone operators' strike was crushed by the end of 1906. The telephone operators were without an organization to resist company dominance of the workplace. Not until the economic boom and labour shortages in the final years of the First World War would the telephone operators re-organize themselves as Local 77A, Telephone Operators' Union of the IBEW. Despite their new status as a Local, the telephone operators did not convince the union they were ready and capable of union negotiation and activism. In 1918, Local 213 negotiated for its electrical workers a closed shop blanket agreement with Vancouver's light, power, and telephone utilities; the telephone operators of Local 77A were excluded from these discussions. According to historian Elaine Bernard, Local 213 determined that the newly-formed Local 77A was "unable to weather" a potential strike against the telephone company.⁵ In a similar analysis of early 20th century telephone operators and the union movement, historian Stephen Norwood argues that operators' unions often fell under the domination of a labour movement that viewed itself as "the protector of the weaker sex."⁶

This perception of telephone operators as fledgling unionists remained strong when telephone operators were discouraged from participation in a twenty-four hour memorial work stoppage in peaceful protest of the shooting death of former BC Federation of Labour Vice President, Ginger Goodwin. On this day, veterans stormed the Vancouver Labour Temple to

⁴ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 32-3, 39.

⁵ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 46.

⁶ Stephen H. Norwood, *Labor's Flaming Youth: Telephone Operators and Worker Militancy 1878-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 7.

smash doors, windows, books, and records in denunciation of the labour movement's alleged anti-patriotism and pro-German sentiments.⁷ Vancouver Trade and Labour Council Secretary Victor Midgley was forced onto the ledge of a second-storey window, but managed to climb back inside the building. Francis Foxcroft, a member of Local 77A and telephone operator for the Labour Temple, stood in front of the window to prevent a second attempt by veterans to throw Midgley from it.⁸ As a token of appreciation, the Labour Temple presented Foxcroft with an amethyst and pearl pendant. Despite being "bruised considerably in the process" of helping Midgley, Foxcroft told BC Federation of Labour reporters that she "would be willing to perform the same service for any of them under the same circumstances."⁹ Overall, the attempt to exclude women from this memorial work stoppage exemplifies how the telephone operators were not accepted as labour activists at the forefront of class politics.¹⁰ Despite the ambitious labour newspaper images of rebel girls and union wives, the male-dominated labour movement did not fully accept women as militant waged workers.

As a result, large employers such as the BC Telephone Company were unfettered in their endeavours to inhibit the economic and social independence of women workers. Utilizing Taylorist language of speed, efficiency, proficiency, quotas, and mechanization, the BC Telephone Company's in-house monthly journal *Telephone Talk* espoused scientific management of the telephone operators' workplace. A 1912 publication asserted how "every second of time counts," and for this reason operators "must be drilled and treated about the same as a company of

⁷ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 54-5.

⁸ Later, Midgley was forced to kiss the British flag before being badly beaten. See Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour Boag Foundation, 1967), 73-4.

⁹ "Presentation to Miss Foxcroft," *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 August 1918.

¹⁰ Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 220.

soldiers.”¹¹ Young women aged seventeen to twenty of “neat appearance,” “fair education,” and “medium height or taller” were recognized as being transformable into effective workers of the Taylorist model.¹² The telephone company established training courses on “cultivating the happy voice” in “a very businesslike way” to restrain “the gushing, talkative girl,” as well as educating “the girl who is inclined to be sulky” that “she is being spoken to for her own good.”¹³ On a regular basis, the company instructed voice training practices in pronunciation and enunciation as well as breathing and callisthenic exercises. Historian Stephen Norwood describes how American telephone companies designed similar training schools for voice modulation. Through singing scales, female students practiced breath control, proper positioning of the body, and “loose and free movement of the tongue.”¹⁴ Many of these training and management practices were often pseudo-scientific in nature. The BC Telephone Company determined, for example, that Anglo-Saxon women were better suited for telephone operation than Asian women because the latter were incapable of pronouncing the letter “r.”¹⁵

This scientific and pseudo-scientific management of telephone operators was coupled with paternalism. The BC Telephone Company was similar to many early 20th century capitalist enterprises in that it cushioned the workplace with cafeterias, retiring rooms, and seasonal parties in order to alleviate and disguise routinized exploitation. During the summer season of 1917, the company-owned “Oaks Point Camp” opened for vacationing young operators to attend free of charge.¹⁶ By 1919, the BC Telephone Company announced the grand opening of the Georgia Telephone Club on Vancouver’s Seymour Street. This club proudly incorporated a large dining hall

¹¹ “Profession of Operating,” *Telephone Talk* 2, no.5 (May 1912), 10.

¹² “Profession of Operating,” *Telephone Talk* 2, no.5 (May 1912), 10.

¹³ Miss Nettie Radcliffe, “The Relation Between the Supervisor’s and the Operator’s Work,” *Telephone Talk* 8, no.2 (February 1918), 5.

¹⁴ Norwood, *Labor’s Flaming Youth*, 43.

¹⁵ “Instructions for Operators,” *Telephone Talk* 2, no.12 (December 1912), 9.

¹⁶ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 46.

which served three-course meals at half the price of regular restaurants, a billiard room, and a lounge adorned with leather chairs, davenports, and a player piano. According to *Telephone Talk*, “eating at noonday at the new club [was] a popular pastime” as seventy to seventy-five employees from various departments attended the dining hall daily. The large kitchen not only provided meals to dining hall attendees, but it also packaged meals to cafeterias at other offices.¹⁷ The telephone company also provided telephone operators with athletic programs that were otherwise unaffordable to them, such as the Fairmont Tennis Club and the Bayview Physical Culture Club which offered horseback riding and swimming.¹⁸ Collectively, these inexpensive meals and familial social gatherings represented “safety valves” that the company used to divert the telephone operators attention away from workplace discontent that could inspire unionism.¹⁹ Historian Joan Sangster argues that capitalist enterprises such as the BC Telephone Company have long disguised themselves as “benevolent paternalists” in order to discipline those who have demonstrated, through unionism, their refusal of insufficient wages and poor workplace conditions.²⁰

The BC Telephone Company chaperoned the work and leisure of its female employees for another important reason. The company’s orchestrations of young working women’s labour and leisure were also responses to contemporary perceptions of feminine instability. The BC Telephone Company believed it was restoring femininity’s moral integrity which was perceived as particularly unpredictable in the working class community, as we saw in chapter one. The training sessions, athletic programs, Georgia Club, Oaks Point Camp, and *Telephone Talk* represent the company’s many attempts to save young working women from moral instability that threatened a healthy

¹⁷ “Georgia Telephone Club,” *Telephone Talk* 9, no.3 (March 1919), 5.

¹⁸ “Physical Culture Club at Bayview,” *Telephone Talk* 9, no.8 (August 1919), 22; “Fairmont Tennis Club,” *Telephone Talk* 9, no.3 (March 1919), 22.

¹⁹ Norwood, *Labor’s Flaming Youth*, 50.

²⁰ Joan Sangster, “The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers,” *Labour/le Travailleur* 3 (1978), 121.

reproduction of working class families. The company also created a paternalistic workplace for women in order to remedy public disapproval of women working in the public domain and to reassure its middle class customers that they were receiving “respectable” services. Young women provided cheap labour, thus capitalist enterprises such as the BC Telephone Company had a vested interest in convincing the concerned society that the company provided a safe, secure, and monitored workplace environment for working class women.

The company went so far as to hire “welfare superintendents” as well as an elderly couple to perform parental roles to the telephone operators. At the telephone exchanges, chief operators were appointed by the company as “welfare superintendents” who provided advice and support to telephone operators who needed to “take up personal subjects privately.”²¹ Historian Stephen Norwood similarly identifies how the American Bell Company portrayed the telephone exchange as an extension of the home, hiring operators’ quarters supervisors as “matrons” whose only job was to be concerned for the operators’ welfare.²² The matrons offered advice on personal hygiene, and provided comfort to operators who fell ill on the job. In doing so, the matrons not only strived for a safer workplace, but also an efficient, productive, and profitable one. Citing Bell Company management, Norwood identifies a corporate desire to “[keep] the ranks at the switchboard full at all times.”²³ Alongside its welfare superintendents, the BC Telephone Company employed “Ma and Pa Thorp” who hosted familial-like gatherings for telephone operators, such as Christmas Eve dinners and social evenings with billiards, refreshments, and “musical programmes with dancing in between.”²⁴ These parties were well received; on one occasion, over sixty young women

²¹ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 46.

²² The Bell Company also referred to its telephone exchange supervisors as “older sisters” to the telephone operators. Norwood, *Labor’s Flaming Youth*, 48-49.

²³ Norwood, *Labor’s Flaming Youth*, 50.

²⁴ *Telephone Talk* 9, no.1 (January 1919), 17.

attended.²⁵ In the “District News” and “Social Notes” sections of *Telephone Talk*, the company encouraged women workers to host their own parties at home with games of whist and light snacks for women as well as young men who worked for the BC Telephone Company. *Telephone Talk* conveyed the telephone operators’ healthy and respectable living by reporting their at-home social gatherings as well as their “Adamless Eden” picnics at Cordova Bay and tri-weekly trips to the beach.²⁶ In a 1920 journal, the Bayview telephone operators were praised for their charity work in which they made a hamper of food, toys, and clothing for a destitute family.²⁷ In addition to accounts of parties and good deeds, the “District News” section reported upcoming weddings and farewell parties for young operators. Weddings, being “the order of the day,” were interpreted as rites of passage which the company marked with a gift of a silver tea service.²⁸ Through its in-house journal, the BC Telephone Company prided itself on its female employees who demonstrated moral character, “industrious habits,” and calm temperament.²⁹ Only young women with these dispositions qualified for employment.

Many social theorists have asserted that these corporate strategies of controlling young working women’s camaraderie and leisure time were tributaries to a much larger flood of mass culture that threatened solidarity within the working class community. Historian Eugene Lunn reveals how debates about mass culture and its effects on the working class have a history of their own that dates back to the post- World War II era.³⁰ “Left-humanist” theorists condemned mass

²⁵ *Telephone Talk* 9, no.5 (May 1919), 17.

²⁶ *Telephone Talk* 9, no.5 (May 1919), 17; Vol. 9, no.6 (June 1919), 18; Vol. 9, no.8 (August 1919), 17.

²⁷ *Telephone Talk* 10, no.1 (January 1920), 18.

²⁸ *Telephone Talk* 9, no.2 (February 1919), 15.

²⁹ Sangster, “The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike,” 110. Veronica Strong-Boag, “The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 4, no.4 (1979), 143.

³⁰ Lunn analyses the “unraveling of the classic mass culture paradigm that has been so pervasive since the late nineteenth century,” and the erosion of the “mass culture lament.” See Eugene Lunn, “Beyond Mass Culture: The Lonely Crowd, the Uses of Literacy, and the Postwar Era,” *Theory and Society* 19, no.1 (February 1990), 63.

culture for manifesting “classless social conformity and submission.”³¹ Leo Löwenthal asserts that the working class has been depoliticized by mass culture, and any “revolutionary tendencies” have been “mitigated and cut short by a false fulfillment of wish-dreams, like wealth, adventure, passionate love, power, and sensationalism in general.”³² With reference to the 1880s through to the 1920s, Daniel Horowitz asserts that a transition from “self-control” to “self-realization” occurred. Horowitz contends that during this time period cultural values of self-restraint were challenged by a consumer culture which emphasized individualistic and materialistic fulfillment through petty, albeit immediate, indulgences.³³ According to John Levi Martin, many theorists of sexuality have argued that this cultural shift from self-control to self-realization was complemented and reinforced by changing subjectivities about the sexual morality of society’s largest set of consumers, women and youth.³⁴

The early 20th century advertising industry created a lucrative commodification of sexuality, and in turn a profitable sexualization of commodities that targeted young women. Mainstream newspapers advertised that the latest fashions, cosmetics, and entertainment enhanced women’s attractiveness and desirability to husbands or eligible young men.³⁵ In the same newspaper page, household supplies and remedies were promoted for their abilities to preserve feminine beauty despite the rigours of women’s housekeeping duties. Perhaps it is from this historical evidence that historians such as Bryan Palmer have centred their condemnation of mass culture. Palmer contends that the North American foundation of 19th century working class culture, which he heralds a Knights of Labor creation, was “shattered” as privatized and commercialized leisure

³¹ Lunn, “Beyond Mass Culture,” 63.

³² Leo Löwenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society*, cited in John Storey, *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 106.

³³ Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending*, cited in John Levi Martin, “The Myth of the Consumption-Oriented Economy and the Rise of the Desiring Subject,” *Theory and Society* 28, no.3 (June 1999), 429.

³⁴ Levi Martin, “The Myth of the Consumption-Oriented Economy,” 429.

³⁵ Birgitte Sølund, *Becoming Modern: Young Women and the Reconstruction of Womanhood in the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 40.

“undercut the vitality of working class experience.”³⁶ He asserts that such cultural pursuits “played no part in raising women’s consciousness of their place as workers.” By contrast, working men embodied a heightened consciousness of economic, political, and social inequality because their workplace was often a “battle for their very lives.” For Palmer, the luring “façade of mass culture” had little influence or impact upon rugged men such as coal miners.³⁷ Unfortunately his reduction of music, film, dance, fashion, and dime novels to women’s “measure[s] of escapism from the drudgery of alienated labour” unfairly assumes working women’s frivolity and inclination to submit to the social and political numbness of mass culture.³⁸ His position confirms historian Nan Enstad’s argument that consumer culture is all too often “intricately connected to conceptions of the feminine” and regarded as “inherently opposed to political subjectivity.”³⁹

This historiography of young working women’s consumption of mass culture neglects a more complex analysis of why young working women would be drawn to mass culture in the first place. In this case, the nature of working class leisure deserves analytical consideration. Historian Roy Rosenzweig identifies how late 19th and early 20th century working class leisure was increasingly a male privilege as it drifted away from domestic settings. These predominantly male public leisure spaces, such as the saloon, meant that many women lost the “work and play” nature of household entertainment found in crowded urban tenements.⁴⁰ The saloon and workingman’s club were crucial to the social and political needs of men as they not only offered food, warmth, clean water, and cheque-cashing services, but also newspapers and meeting places for political

³⁶ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto: Butterworth & Co, 1983), 192.

³⁷ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 198.

³⁸ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 197.

³⁹ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4-5.

⁴⁰ Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870- 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 45.

discussion.⁴¹ In her analysis of union culture, historian Ruth Frager asserts that women workers may have attended formal social affairs and lectures held at labour auditoriums, but they rarely partook in the union hall's informal socializing. Such informal conversations not only ignited important and politically productive discussions, but they also reinforced companionship and "a male-centred solidarity."⁴² In her analysis of working class leisure in New York, historian Kathy Peiss declares that "the public culture of workingmen was not only a potential bulwark of solidarity against the ravages of capitalism, [but] it was also a system of male privilege in which workers' self-determination, solidarity, and mutual assistance were understood as 'manliness.'"⁴³

Mass culture was not, however, young women's escapism or emancipation from male-dominated cultural activities. Historians Ruth Roach Pierson and Beth Light argue that mass culture images of the New Woman's "touted sexual revolution" were "largely enacted on male terms and in a pre-contraceptive culture."⁴⁴ Moreover, mass culture exploited women through its commodification of feminine sexuality. Pierson and Light toe a similar line as the left humanist crowd when they argue that mass culture images of young women were responsible for "deflecting attention from the actual political struggles in which women were engaged."⁴⁵ Pierson and Light are referring to middle and upper class feminists of the late 1910s and early 1920s who were politically involved at the community, municipal, provincial, and federal levels, as well as in the politics of labour unions and churches. Unfortunately, both historians fail to recognize how young working women's negotiations of visual imageries such as the New Woman, the Rebel Girl, the Union Wife,

⁴¹ Rosenzweig describes the many natures of the working class saloon. Many were occupational (of a particular trade or factory), ethnic (with communal celebrations and holidays), or neighborhood (with a local multiethnic crowd) in nature. See Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 53.

⁴² Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labor Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 109.

⁴³ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 5.

⁴⁴ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds., *No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), 343.

⁴⁵ Light and Pierson, *No Easy Road*, 343.

or the Hello Girl were “actual political struggles.” Young women indeed mediated conflicting images of their poverty yet impulsive shopping habits, their virginal respectability yet sexual assertiveness, and their social independence yet maternal or daughterly submission to the family.⁴⁶ In many cases, their responses were very much political and not necessarily on “male terms.” From these contradictions concerning their sex, gender, and class, they developed political consciousness that spoke to their own lived experiences as women and as working class poor. Despite cultural developments such as mass culture, there continued to be “the characteristic retention of class discourse in its everyday expression.”⁴⁷ It was from this heightened consciousness that the young telephone operators participated in the labour struggles of 1919. Contrary to what the leading left-humanist, labour, and feminist theorists discussed above might argue, this chapter asserts that Vancouver’s telephone operators were able to re-create their own identity during the national labour unrest of 1919.

Vancouver’s telephone operators participated in a nation-wide general strike that responded in sympathy and solidarity to workers striking in Winnipeg. This was not a regional manifestation of class unrest; thousands of working people across Canada summed up their grievances of unemployment, low wages, high prices, long hours, unsafe working conditions, employer blacklists, exploitation of working women, and non-recognition of unions to the capitalist system.⁴⁸ The country spoke of socialism. First, Winnipeg’s labour struggle began May 15th when the building and trades workers went on strike. The Winnipeg’s Trades and Labour Council held a

⁴⁶ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 62.

⁴⁷ Lunn, “Beyond Mass Culture,” 75.

⁴⁸ Gregory S. Kealey, “1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 12. There are debates as to whether the labour unrest of 1919 was national or regional in nature. For arguments of its national character, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of the Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 200. Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2004), 55-7. For an argument that 1919 radicalism was largely a western phenomenon, see Ross A. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 9 and 14.

referendum on the question of a general strike; the response was overwhelming as more than 22,000 workers rallied in support within twenty-four hours.⁴⁹ Soon afterwards, unionized and non-unionized workers in cities such as Vancouver, Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Brandon, Port Arthur, Amherst, and Sydney held general strikes in sympathy and solidarity with Winnipeg workers. Vancouver's sympathetic strike was actually longer in duration and involved more workers than the Winnipeg general strike. As many as 60,000 strikers, including the telephone operators, supported the socialist leaders of the Vancouver movement. Among political socialists, craft unionists, and industrial unionists, there was an "underlying sense of grievance" with current labour, capitalist, and state relations.⁵⁰ The Vancouver strike committee believed in the radical demonstration of worker solidarity, declaring,

If the sympathetic strike is wrong; that is, if it is wrong for one branch of labor to come to the rescue of another part of labor; then it is wrong for a life-boat crew to go to the rescue of a stranded vessel; it was wrong for colonies to go to the assistance of the mother land...⁵¹

Demanding more than union recognition, collective bargaining, and fair living wages, the Vancouver strike committee, alongside nation-wide city strike committees, challenged the right and ability of "the ruling class to rule." Using placards that read "by permission of the strike committee," these committees took control of modern city functions of water supply, light, sewer, traffic, policing, and food transportation.⁵² The overall approach of the strike committees was to "do nothing" to provoke violence from strike-breakers, hired vigilantes, unsupportive war veterans, or the Royal North West Mounted Police. While strike committees supported strike meetings in public parks, they did not sponsor the organization of parades or mass demonstrations. The policy of "do

⁴⁹ Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 51.

⁵⁰ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 130.

⁵¹ *Strike Bulletin*, 26 June 1919.

⁵² D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 47.

nothing” also meant that strikers and strike supporters were not to pose for photographs, raise pennants, or wear badges and armbands.⁵³ BC Federation of Labour leader Jack Kavanagh asserted that compliance with the law was the strikers’ best weapon, and that state or vigilante intimidation cannot work on strikers because “every time [they] go to work [they] run the risk of injury and [they] are not frightened.”⁵⁴ Overall, strikers nation-wide were committed to the struggle against the employer class.

While this headlining image from the *Vancouver Province* (Figure 3.1) was light-hearted about the national labour struggle, Vancouver’s leading mainstream and anti-strike newspapers primarily interpreted the city and the nation at large as on the edge of revolt, revolution, and disaster. In this image titled “A Bad Attack” (Figure 3.1), women representing five Canadian provinces are seated west to east on a streetcar.⁵⁵ The younger provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan are represented by petite and dainty young women who express sympathy for Manitoba, a much older woman, who suffers from what appears to be a tooth ache. This ache of social unrest marked “strike” was an all-encompassing pain; clearly Manitoba had stirred up nation-wide concern. Unlike the Western Canadian women, the aged Ontario woman holds up her hand muff as if blocking an infectious disease. She advises that, “The great thing is to keep quiet.” The older, bosomed woman representing Quebec seems to understand just how Manitoba feels with an ache of social unrest when she responds to Manitoba’s discomfort and pain with, “I know. I have it many times, me.” This personification of labour unrest as non-threatening, emotionally sensitive women suggested that the nation-wide strikes did not constitute severe national crisis. By summer 1919 however, Vancouver’s mainstream newspapers declared that Vancouver was, alongside other leading cities, overrun by Bolshevism. According to the *Vancouver*

⁵³ Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike*, 49.

⁵⁴ “Declare It a Class War,” *Vancouver Province*, 11 June 1919.

⁵⁵ “A Bad Attack,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 May 1919.

Province, the strikes were “engineered by a group of anarchists and socialistic agitators for the purpose of destroying the Constitutional Government of Canada...”⁵⁶ In Vancouver, a Citizens’ Protective League formed to combat the strike committee and its supporters.⁵⁷ The League utilized wartime-like propaganda tactics to implore workers “to serve their city and their country” by re-opening all essential utilities and industries. In doing so, these workers would bring law, order, and civility back to their society.⁵⁸ From its own newspaper *The Vancouver Citizen*, the League denied class conflict by arguing that “class” was a Bolshevik manufacture and asserting that everyone in society was “the Masses,”

... the people of Vancouver will not be coerced by any small group of Bolsheviks speaking in the name of labor, and spilling glib phrases about classes versus masses, wage slaves and proletarian dictatorship. This is a war between the masses and the classes. The masses are the people and the classes are the Bolsheviks- slaves are not wage earners but people of Vancouver who are dictated to by the strike committee.⁵⁹

Through the mainstream newspapers as well as its own press, the League argued that strikers were misled by Bolsheviks who manufactured working class grievances for the sake of revolutionary upheaval of the city and the nation.

⁵⁶ *Vancouver Province*, 25 June 1919.

⁵⁷ “Declares That ‘Reds Must Go,’” *Vancouver Province*, 10 June 1919.

⁵⁸ “Citizens, You Are Needed,” *Vancouver Sun*, 11 June 1919. The League went so far as to make wisecracks about burly, bushy, and unclean Bolsheviks, one particular comment being, “Won’t the barbers’ union be strongly opposed to the Bolshe [sic] regime? There won’t be so much business for them then.” See “Industrial Ferment or Industrial Peace,” *The Vancouver Citizen*, 17 June 1919.

⁵⁹ “Review of Situation from Local Standpoint,” *The Vancouver Citizen*, 16 June 1919.



Figure 3.1- "A Bad Attack," *Vancouver Province*, 17 May 1919.

The Vancouver Citizen's League created narratives of victimized women and children to bolster the argument that the Bolshevik-led strike was destroying the moral sanctity of the family and the nation. A 1919 article from *The Vancouver Citizen*, for example, offered a vivid description of how mothers desperately waited for milk at the depot because delivery services were slowed by the strike. These women endured "long line-ups in the broiling sun" and then "trundled home with their babies only to find the milk sour and useless."⁶⁰ The sanctity of young women's virginity was also threatened by the strike. The League cited that there was,

⁶⁰ "Waiting Mothers," *The Vancouver Citizen*, 18 June 1919.

... a decree issued by the Soviet Government in the city of Vladmir, 75 miles from Moscow in Russia, 'Any girl having reached her eighteenth year and not having married is obliged, subject to the most severe penalty, to register at the Bureau of Free Love of the Commissariat of Surveillance.' The League asks, 'What does your sister think about that?'⁶¹

On Vancouver's Cambie Street, Mayor Gale addressed a crowd of approximately four hundred civic employees using a similar language of fear mongering. Asserting that "the first law of civilization is the protection of women and children;" Mayor Gale warned "the innocent, unprotected, helpless women and children of Vancouver" were suffering at the hands of strikers.⁶² With the alleged onslaught of Bolshevism, young women were morally compromised and mothers with babies were malnourished.

Despite the anti-strike and mainstream newspapers' narratives of Bolshevik destitution, starvation, and 'mandatory free love' as a result of nation-wide labour unrest, striking telephone operators offered unwavering solidarity. Their commitment to the strike was, in many respects, representative of what "sympathy" meant to worker solidarity. That is, the telephone operators joined the general sympathetic strike without workplace grievances of their own. While the telephone operators hardly earned a living wage, they fared well in comparison to the women who toiled in the large sectors of domestic service and factory work. The *1931 Canada Census* reports that in 1921, the average annual earnings for women working in transportation and communications (telephone operation) was 675 dollars. Next to the financial, clerical, and professional services, telephone operation was the fourth highest paid employment sector for women. By comparison, women working in manufacturing earned 504 dollars annually and women working in domestic service (categorized in the *Census* as "personal service") earned a meagre

⁶¹ "Sidelights," *The Vancouver Citizen*, 16 June 1919.

⁶² "Will Carry on Municipal Work," *The Daily Province*, 7 June 1919.

326 dollars annually.⁶³ As seen earlier in this chapter, the telephone operators' employment at the BC Telephone Company afforded them summer vacations, social gatherings and activities, as well as regular, nutritious meals. The telephone operators' clean, supervised, and well-instructed workplace earned them a degree of respectability in comparison with other wage-earning women in domestic service and factory work.⁶⁴ With little known grievances with their employer, the telephone operators of Local 77A walked off the job. They left despite uncertainty that their union would include them in collective bargaining and negotiations with the BC Telephone Company. The radical labour newspapers of the day wanted young working women to draw inspiration from the images and narratives of "the Rebel Girl." However, the telephone operators' willing participation in the company's "safety valves" of social functions and cafeterias deflated this expectation. At the same time, mainstream newspapers of the day constructed young working women as vulnerable, naïve, and demoralized within the workplace. Denying these narratives and images of young women workers, the telephone operators determined their role within the general sympathetic strike. While uncovering the roles the telephone operators created for themselves, the remainder of this chapter simultaneously addresses the ways in which early 20th century constructions of gender and class created, edited and even limited the historical record of how the telephone operators asserted themselves in the summer months of 1919.

In their reporting of striking telephone operators, mainstream newspapers centred on the devastating effects of telephone loss to medical services and business practices. Initially, the strike committee utilized the shutdown of telephone service as a card to trump strategic moves by Vancouver city council and the Vancouver Citizens' League to end the city-wide strike. When city council authorized the use of strike-breaking streetcar operators to replace striking operators, the

⁶³ 1931 *Canada Census* cited in Veronica Strong-Boag's "The Girl of the New Day," 149.

⁶⁴ Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling*, 13.

strike committee threatened to call the telephone operators out on strike, closing the lines of communication. Mayor Gale rejected the strike committee's ultimatum to remove the strike-breaking streetcars or lose telephone operation. Using desperate and hyperbolic language, Gale appealed for strikers to spare those "laying [sic] at death's door." He pleaded that the city needs the telephones and the streetcars to allow doctors to "alleviate agony."⁶⁵ The *Vancouver Province* column "Woman's Kingdom" expressed bitterness towards "the union girls" who had shut down the primary form of instant communication. The column claimed that phone users were frustrated with the incompetence of the strike-breakers, and while the service was improving it was a hard lesson in patience.⁶⁶ The strike committee adamantly reminded city council that it had "taken every step possible to prevent unnecessary suffering," and had until this point kept the telephone operators at work "despite their willingness" to join the rank and file.⁶⁷

Despite insisting the loss of telephone service was devastating to medical services and business practices, Vancouver's mainstream newspapers minimized and trivialized the actual role of these working women as strikers. A June 13th article from the *Vancouver Province* mocked the nature of women strikers' intimidation of strike-breakers, contending that it was fortunate "no hairpins were shed" during the "little moral suasion" the women strikers asserted towards the strike-breakers, and that any "overt acts" were "limited to a few pointed remarks between the picketers and those who were going on duty."⁶⁸ A couple of days later an article from the *Vancouver Daily World* stated that "no opportunity [was] being lost" by the Telephone Operators' Union to increase its strength as "strong influences are brought to bear on those operators who have been remaining

⁶⁵ "Reconsider for Sake of Sick Mayor Urges the Committee," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 June 1919.

⁶⁶ Vanette, "Woman's Kingdom," *Province*, 21 June 1919.

⁶⁷ "City Council would rather have Jitneys than Phones," *BC Federationist*, 13 June 1919.

⁶⁸ "Ring Up to Ask if Phones Work," *Vancouver Province*, 13 June 1919.

at their posts.”⁶⁹ Ultimately, these reports testify to how “gendered sensibilities” often “muted the force of conflict.”⁷⁰ By stating that “no hairpins were shed,” the role of women workers as labour activists was gendered temperamental and irrational. Historian Joy Parr argues that shouting matches between women strikers and strike-breakers were often likened to scratching and hissing catfights.⁷¹ By offering vague information on how “strong influences were brought to bear” on strike-breakers, the mainstream press intended to diminish the impact, force, or power of the telephone operators as labour activists. Parr asserts that “gendered identities were masks that changed in the shifting light and shadow of the dispute- mercurial, unpredictable in their affects upon public sympathy.” Parr explains how women strikers who used public shaming on the picket line often attained little public attention and caused only small discomfort to those crossing the picket line. While physical confrontation potentially enhanced their effectiveness as picketers, women strikers like the telephone operators risked compromising the prevailing norm of feminine respectability from which their much-needed power of legitimacy in the workplace derived.⁷² With the mainstream press focused on discrediting them, telephone operators’ legitimacy and authority as strikers was precarious.

As the labour newspapers expressed enthusiasm and support for waged and non-waged women involved in the sympathetic strike, they also revealed their underlying belief that working women did not actually qualify as “workers” in the labour movement. In a June publication of the *Strike Bulletin*, the Vancouver Strike Committee suggested that working men and women share similar class consciousness, “Laboring man and laboring woman, Have one glory and one shame.

⁶⁹ “Phone Service Being Extended,” *Vancouver Daily World*, 16 June 1919.

⁷⁰ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 113.

⁷¹ Parr also recognizes how strike-breaking men who claimed injury from women’s “sharp tongues” were “objects of mirth.” See Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 113.

⁷² Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 110.

Everything that's done inhuman, injures all of them the same."⁷³ The strike committee invited men and women to mass meetings, but in different ways and for different reasons. A June publication of the *Strike Bulletin* advertised,

Meeting in Arena, Sat. afternoon at 2:30pm: This meeting is for all workers, and women invited.⁷⁴

The invitation to "all workers" was uncertain; did the category of "all workers" include wage-earning women? Or, did wage-earning women fall into the invitation category of "women"? Why did women have a special and separate invitation for this particular event? Historian Linda Kealey asserts that women in the labour movement experienced a gendered division of labour as much as they did in labour itself.⁷⁵ The separation of "worker" and women in this invitation is representative of the separate values placed on the roles of men and women in labour activism. In this invitation, as well as others, the "workers" suggest men.⁷⁶ Another publication of *Strike Bulletin* advertised,

Mass Meeting-in the-Arena-Wednesday Afternoon-Chair to be taken at 2:30-
Proceeds to be used for Necessitous Cases-Everybody Attend-Women Invited.

While waged and non-waged women were applauded for their support in labour struggle, Kealey asserts that women were not expected to be at the forefront of class politics because of a "lingering anxiety or expectation that women lacked the capacity for such loyalty" and "they were innately more conservative or more likely to be victims."⁷⁷ The forefront of this strike was thus reserved for male workers. This, in part, helps to account for why a few of the arena meetings were held separately for women. One particular invitation in the *Strike Bulletin* noted that the women's

⁷³ "The Sympathetic Strike," *Strike Bulletin* no.13, 20 June 1919.

⁷⁴ "Meeting To Be Held," *Strike Bulletin* no.7, 12 June 1919.

⁷⁵ Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause*, 14.

⁷⁶ *Strike Bulletin* no.10, 17 June 1919.

⁷⁷ Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause*, 220.

meeting would have women speakers in attendance.⁷⁸ Ultimately, the invitations to workers and women confirm a gendered division of labour activism during Vancouver's strike.

Although male workers were considered the foremost labour activists, the Vancouver strike committee admired the telephone operators for their relentless integrity as sympathetic strikers. In a June publication of the *Strike Bulletin*, an image (Figure 3.2) manipulates gendered values of age, beauty, character, and demeanour to elevate striking telephone operators and deride strike-breaking operators.⁷⁹ At the near centre of this image, the strike-breaker is an older, unattractive woman with a snooty visage and a tacky, mismatched suit dress. Her sash explicitly indicates her stance on the current strike and her purse exposes her as a strike-breaker by trade. This strike-breaker's companion is a prissy, bow-tied kitten as opposed to the aggressive sabo-style cat of Wobbly fame neighbouring the striking telephone operators. Standing against a brick wall, the strikers look younger, fresh, and stylish in their smart, well-fitted suit dresses, matching hats, and bobbed hair. Their visages and body posture suggest they are calm, comfortable, and confident. Overall, their dress and public demeanour indicate their feminine respectability. In his own analysis of this image, historian Todd McCallum asserts that this strike-breaker, through "a transgression of gendered codes of dress," was gendered a "mannish lesbian" to contrast her with the feminine qualities of a "good" woman worker.⁸⁰ Indeed this strike-breaker dons an outfit resembling a man's suit and tie, but so do the strikers. The bobbed hair and lightly-fitted clothing of the 1910s and 1920s did not entirely denote "mannish" or "lesbian," rather they marked a significant stylistic break from the restrictive garb of the faded Victorian past. Therefore, this strike-breaker appears less as a "mannish lesbian" and more as a woman worker who had it all wrong in terms of the style, attitude,

⁷⁸ "Women's Meeting This Afternoon," *Strike Bulletin* no.9, 16 June 1919.

⁷⁹ *Strike Bulletin* no.13, 20 June 1919.

⁸⁰ Todd McCallum, "'Not a Sex Question'? The One Big Union and the Politics of Radical Manhood," *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998), 44.

and general presence of a “New and Modern Woman.” She wore tacky imitations of the latest fashions, her age defied the youthful vitality required of a public presence, and her demeanour was aloof when it should have been confident and alluring. Using gendered values of age, beauty, and character, the *Strike Bulletin* made it clear that a strike-breaker had no class-- in both senses of the word. From this image it is clear the striking operators were valued, even admired for their class consciousness and integrity during the strike.



Figure 3.2- *Strike Bulletin*, 20 June 1919.

During the final days of the Vancouver general sympathetic strike, the telephone operators ultimately asserted their own identity as labour activists. From the very beginning, the Vancouver strike committee promised all strikers would return to work as a unified body.⁸¹ Even after state repression of the Winnipeg general strike and the dissipation of the nation-wide sympathetic strikes, Vancouver strikers confirmed at a June 27th arena meeting, with a vote of 3,788 to 748 in favour, that the strike would continue until all workers were guaranteed a return to their jobs.⁸² Strike organizer Jack Kavanagh reminded attendees that the operators were the most likely to face discrimination in going back to work. The BC Telephone Company was firm in its contention that striking telephone operators could only return to work as newcomers who earned a beginner's wage. Strikers who held supervisory positions in the workplace would be replaced by scabs and strike-breakers.⁸³ The telephone operators refused to return to work under those terms. Six days after this arena meeting, the Vancouver strike ended for everyone except the telephone workers. The strike committee called off the strike when the telephone operators and electrical workers confirmed that together they would confront their employer and negotiate their fair return to work at the BC Telephone Company.⁸⁴ In the *Vancouver Sun*, the electrical workers declared that they "would not call off the strike until their girls make a satisfactory settlement."⁸⁵ The day after the strike was called off, an article of the *BC Federationist* acknowledged the pluck of these women workers,

⁸¹ "Strike Will Be Called Off at 12 Noon Friday If There Is No Discrimination," *Strike Bulletin* no.17, 26 June 1919.

⁸² During the vote count, workers sang the "Marseillaise" and "Keep the Red Flag Flying." See "Strikers Vote to Stay Out," *Vancouver Province*, 27 June 1919. The Winnipeg general strike ended after state repression through the Northwest Mounted Police and imprisonment of strike leaders. The nation-wide general sympathetic strikes subsequently ended. Historian Gregory Kealey asserts that a lack of communication, organization, and coordination were contributing factors. See Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," 35; 42.

⁸³ Elaine Bernard, "Last Back: Folklore and the Telephone Operators in the 1919 Vancouver General Strike," in *Not Just Pin Money*, edited by Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 284.

⁸⁴ "General Strike Has Come To An End," *Vancouver Province*, 3 July 1919. Bernard, "Last Back," 284.

⁸⁵ "Phone Situation Still Unsettled," *Vancouver Sun*, 4 July 1919.

The action of the telephone girls in responding to the call for a general strike has placed them in a class by themselves amongst women workers in this province ... these girls have won the admiration of all those who admire grit and working class solidarity ... That their action will be remembered by the workers not only of this city but by workers all over the continent for their loyalty, goes without saying ... If all the men had displayed the same spirit, the strike could not have been finished with them carrying on their fight against discrimination after the general strike was called off.⁸⁶

The suggestion of male strikers' lack of "same spirit" was exemplified on July 10th when thirty-one electrical workers, on the very same day they intended to convince the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers to sanction their continued strike and provide financial aid, returned to work at the BC Telephone company plant. The telephone operators picketed the plant, resulting in only four of the thirty-one electrical workers making it to work that day.⁸⁷ However, by July 15th all of the electrical workers reported for work. Lacking support from their own union, the telephone operators returned the following day having not guaranteed a fair return to work.⁸⁸ The telephone operators needed the solidarity of their union to make non-discriminatory return to work a possibility. Unfortunately, solidarity lasted two weeks.

Discussions or thoughtful reflections on what happened to working class solidarity among fellow men and women were lacking in both mainstream and labour presses. The *Province* merely reported that the electrical workers returned to work, the telephone operators were to return the following day, and that telephone supervisors would return as operators "taking their ordinary turn."⁸⁹ Shortly after the operators' return, the *BC Federationist* recognized that the very last union to return to work after the Canada-wide labour revolt was the Vancouver telephone operators from Local 77A of the IBEW. The newspaper offered this finalizing comment,

⁸⁶ "General Strike Called Off at 5 p.m. Thursday," *BC Federationist*, 4 July 1919.

⁸⁷ "Telephone Strikers Ask For Sanction of the International," *Vancouver Province*, 11 July 1919.

⁸⁸ Elaine Bernard states that the telephone operators went back to work on company terms. While all workers could return to work, the senior operators and supervisors were reduced to operators. See Bernard, "Last Back," 284.

⁸⁹ "Telephone Strike in Vancouver Off," *Vancouver Province*, 15 July 1919.

The operators displayed a better spirit during the strike than anyone hoped for from a new union. It has been a valuable lesson to the girls and their usefulness in the ranks of organized labor will in no way be reduced by the experience.⁹⁰

The *BC Federationist* made a few appeals to unions, asking for financial aid to alleviate the telephone operators' severe debt. The labour newspapers also encouraged participation in the telephone operators' fundraiser-- a moonlight dance at Bowen Island.⁹¹ By the end of July 1919, the telephone operators of Local 77A were on their own, facing their employer as well as financial ruin.

This study of the Vancouver telephone operators during the 1919 sympathetic strike was not meant to be grim. Despite the outcome of this labour struggle, the operators had proven to the labour movement and to themselves that they could be labour activists at the forefront. They had joined in a massive strike for the first time and remained committed to its cause. Their fervent participation in the strike defied mainstream newspaper constructions of vulnerable working girls lost in the mesmerizing glitz and glamour of cosmopolitan consumerism. They also denied constructions of the fledgling, naïve union maid, as well as the radical rebel girl who must unquestionably march alongside the radical man and his red flag. Unfortunately, these constructions not only dominated the historical record of young working women of the early 20th century, but also the historiography of these women. That is, these constructions have lived on through the work of historians and theorists who have either asserted that working women's participation in mass consumerism translated into political numbness, or suggested that labour activism was epitomized by radical coal miners and loggers. As historians and theorists we should endeavour to uncover how images of young women in work and leisure were ultimately assertions

⁹⁰ "Telephone Girls' Splendid Spirit," *BC Federationist*, 18 July 1919.

⁹¹ This article also encouraged people to complain to the telephone company about poor service in the hopes of getting the scab supervisors fired. See "Hello' Girls on Moonlight Trip," *BC Federationist*, 25 July 1919.

from a complex politics which sought to control women. In turn, we should be willing to uncover the ways in which our historical subjects similarly identified this. Young women's recognition that images of their own sex and gender were too idealistic, unattainable, and even undesirable put them in a powerful position to direct their own lives. Indeed many young women, like the telephone operators, denied the objectifications, expectations and assumptions cast in mainstream and labour presses. The telephone operators are representative of young working women who neither fully accepted nor rejected these constructions of their youth, gender, and class.

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