THE VANCOUVER EMPLOYMENT BUSINESS, 1900–1915: SHARKS AND WHITE SLAVERS?

by

Robin John Anderson

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

HISTORY

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

March 1991

APPROVAL

NAME: ROBIN JOHN ANDERSON

DEGREE: M.A. (History)

TITLE OF THESIS: The Vancouver Employment Business, 1900-1915: Sharks and White Slavers

EXAMINING COMMITTEE: CHAIR: J.I. LITTLE

HUGH JOHNSTON
PROFESSOR AND SENIOR SUPERVISOR
HISTORY DEPARTMENT

VERONICA STRONG-BOAG
PROFESSOR
HISTORY DEPARTMENT

ALLEN SEAGER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
HISTORY DEPARTMENT

JEAN BARMAN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
EXTERNAL EXAMINER

DATE APPROVED: MARCH 19, 1991

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

The Vancouver Employment Business, 1900-1915,
Sharks and White Slavers?

Author: _____
(signature)

Robin John Anderson
(name)

March 19, 1991
(date)

ABSTRACT

This study looks at commercial employment agents in the two decades leading up to the First World War, when such agents played an important and controversial role in the expanding Canadian and American economies. The thesis examines the poor reputation attributed to employment agencies by turn-of-the-century British, American and Canadian reformers, and compares this to the specific activities of Vancouver's employment agents before the war. Because this study offers an international and local perspective, it uses both the original published papers of labour market reformers as well as the few sources left by local employment agents. With regard to the latter, an attempt is made to reconstruct Vancouver's employment agent community through extensive newspaper advertising and directory research. These sources shed light on a much discussed but little researched area of Canadian economic and social history.

This thesis reveals that the number of Vancouver's employment agencies for men and women mushroomed between 1900 and 1915 in response to population growth and an expanded demand for male resource and railway construction workers and female domestic, clerical and service workers. These agencies performed a necessary function in the regional and local economy, but their lasting reputation has been as omnipotent crooks and swindlers. This study argues that the negative stereotype of the employment "shark" is not deserved for most of Vancouver's pre-war employment agents. All agencies for white men and women were marginal, fragile businesses which operated in a limited competitive environment and mostly during periods of labour shortage. Most agencies operated within a unified class experience, as agents came from and often returned to the same working-class background as their working clients. Elements related to their self-interest, such as fee structures, market conditions and geographic proximity, forced most agents to cultivate a reasonable relationship with their working clients. Agents could not survive a bad reputation. For self-serving reasons, trade unionists, progressive reformers, charity organizations and other critics employed well-worn and unfounded humanitarian arguments in calling for the tight regulation or abolition of employment agencies. The fight against petty employment agencies was part of the growth of large-scale business and state structures, and reflects the decline of small-scale, competitive capitalism in the early decades of the twentieth century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Veronica Strong-Boag and Allen Seager for their friendship and guidance as this thesis took shape. I would also like to thank Ross Mackenzie for listening to me endlessly work through a countless number of themes that did and did not make it into this work. This study would not have been completed without the great patience and intellectual engagement of Hugh Johnston, as I tried (and tried again) to find my footing in untravelled territory. A very special thanks goes out to Erin Stainsby-Anderson, who taught me a subjective lesson about the importance of home and family. Above all, though, I would like to thank Meg for teaching me how to write. There ain't no greater gift.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

THE MYTH OF PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

> Such has been the experience of Canada with private commercial employment agencies: the sins of commission and the spirit of venality which controls the conduct of many of these agencies, coupled with the inability of all of them as unco-ordinated activities to so function as to meet successfully the needs of modern industry, have led the governments of Canada to indict them as being incapable of efficiently discharging the responsible duties attaching to employment service work.[1]
>
> R.A. Rigg, Director of the Employment Service of Canada, 1926.

This study began as an investigation of criticisms of private employment agencies in the two decades before World War One. It now stands as a two-pronged investigation of local Vancouver agents and the wider anatomy of criticism that grew up around them. It argues that most of the criticisms aimed at Vancouver's so-called employment 'sharks' are not supported by evidence. The content of these criticisms, sometimes economic and always moral, might be irrelevant in any case. Those groups that called for the regulation or abolition of employment agencies did so for narrow self-serving reasons that had little to do with altruism. Whether it was the organized business community, organized labour or social reformers, there existed a gap between their stated humanitarianism and their latent self-interest. In short, the unorganized and parochial employment business stood in the way of groups who aimed to profit from ever-larger organization. When the state entered the employment market in 1918 with the creation of the Employment Service of Canada, no one ran to the commercial agent's defence.

As way of an introduction to this study, a brief look at the typical moral and economic critique of employment agencies as seen through the works of the American Frances Kellor and Canadians Edmund Bradwin, Bryce Stewart and R.A. Rigg would be revealing. These commentators typified the widespread view that private employment agencies were economically inefficient and morally abusive.

The first extensive critique of employment agencies was published in the United States in 1905.

---

[1] *The Labour Gazette* April, 1926, 335

Frances Kellor's *Out of Work*[2] grew out of that progressive concern for urban social problems and empirical study at the turn of the century. Kellor and her male and female colleagues went out into the field—New York, Boston and Chicago—masquerading as both employers and job seekers. Some 732 agencies were visited, scrutinized and judged. All in all, employment agencies were found wanting, and "at least partly responsible," writes Kellor, "for the doubling of wages, the dissatisfaction of employers, the interference with households, the swindling of penniless, homeless, but worthy men and women out of fees and positions, and the misleading of ignorant immigrants and innocent city and country girls to the number of many thousands a year."[3] This was not the worst of it. According to Kellor, women's agencies drove job seekers to immorality:

> The surroundings, the business methods, and the frauds pale into insignificance beside the conscious, deliberate immorality of many offices and the traps which they set for their unwary and helpless victims. The bare fact is that while advertising honest work and while furnishing it to some, many also degrade, debase and ruin others, and later cast them out moral and physical wrecks. Not only are they robbed of their small savings, herded like animals, and subjected to many indignities by proprietors, but they must submit to association with and temptation by street-walkers and immoral men; not only must they lodge under conditions which rob them of their self-respect, but unsuspectingly they are sold into disreputable houses and held as prisoners.[4]

Kellor's study was coloured by middle- class concerns for proper conduct and appropriate environmental conditions. In visiting one New York office for domestic servants, Kellor was appalled when she was met by the agent's daughter washing the dishes in the kitchen. The young girl asked Kellor, who was masquerading as a prospective servant, to have a seat at the kitchen table while she retrieved her mother. Opening a window to the street, the daughter hollered to the agent who was chatting with a neighbour in the tenement opposite. The experience taught Kellor the desperate need for all women's agencies to be placed on a "proper business basis".[5] Kellor was as horrified by the job seekers as she was by their job agencies. This is clear from her descriptions of male agencies. Many of these were connected to saloons or pool rooms where unemployed men would smoke, talk, eat, play card games and drink. In one such agency, Kellor found "all kinds of indescribable baggage, dirty and disorderly beyond

---

[2]Her full title was *Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies, Their Treatment of the Unemployed and Their Influence upon Homes and Business* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press) 1905.

[3]Ibid., 3.

[4]Ibid., 78-9.

[5]Ibid., 22-3.

description." The unemployed were often encouraged by agents to bring cold food into the agencies and to congregate on the street outside. Not all men's offices were this disreputable, wrote Kellor, but given time all would naturally degenerate.

Kellor's study helped to reinforce the poor reputation of employment agencies in the United States. In Canada their reputation fared no better. Reports and opinions of abuses and inefficiency paralleled the American experience. Perhaps the best Canadian example of such a critique of men's agencies was delivered by Edmund Bradwin's 1922 study of railroad camp life in the pre-World War One period, *The Bunkhouse Man.* Bradwin considered private employment agencies unnecessary evils. Questionable practices, such as unkept promises about wages and conditions, fee or transportation over-charging, physical abuse of ignorant immigrant workers, and simple fraud were, according to Bradwin, the keys to success in the employment business. "Responsible men," he writes, "who at one time may have engaged in this occupation were gradually eliminated, their places being taken by another type who placed mercenary objects to the fore."[6] Bradwin believed that the employment business was inherently corrupt, particularly in the hands of "foreign-born men," whom he felt were in control of the business.[7] If immorality, misrepresentation and abuse were considered foundation stones of the employment agent's trade, so too was the agent's complete and unhealthy dependence on the employer. Kellor and Bradwin's employment agents ground down the workers, not simply for their own profit, but for the benefit of employers. Thus, the employment business, by its very nature, was structured against the interests of working people. Both Kellor and Bradwin applauded the efforts of the 'impartial' state to run the employment market for humanitarian reasons.

Most American and Canadian critics argued that humanitarian abuses were only half of the problem with employment agencies. The multiplicity of hiring points, represented by the many private offices, helped to render the labour market unorganized and inefficient. Bryce Stewart, Bradwin's classmate at Queen's University before the war, was one of many progressive political economists in the United States and Canada who condemned commercial agencies and applauded proposals for state-administered labour exchange systems on economic grounds. "Even if there were no long record of offence against private agencies," wrote Stewart as Director of the newly-created Employment Service of Canada in 1919,

> the majority of Canadian employment officials would still hold that the organization of communication between employers and employed is a natural monopoly of the state.... There should be a broad field for an Employment Service in Canada. We have a serious distribution problem owing to 'the inconvenient shape of the Province,' as an English observer put it almost a

---

[6]Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: a study of work and pay in the camps of Canada, 1903-1914* (New York: AMS Press [reprint 1968]), 60.

[7]Ibid., see 60-1.

century ago. It applies to labour as much as to goods and any machinery that makes for the efficient distribution of one or the other will soon be regarded as indispensable.[8]

R.A. Rigg, Stewart's successor at the ESC when the latter resigned in 1922[9], delivered a eulogy to the commercial employment agent in 1926 that best combined the humanitarian and economic critique. While "agents are utterly unprincipled in character and ghoulishly cheat and rob those who stand in extreme need of sympathy and assistance," wrote Rigg, "the evil of their nefarious methods registers itself to the disadvantage and loss of employers, [methods which are] incapable of meeting the needs of modern conditions."[10] This then was the reputation of employment agents. Regardless of its activities, the reputation of the employment 'shark' preceded it.

Historians have done little to undermine the traditional humanitarian and economic critique of employment agencies. But this is not because of extensive research into the activities of agents. In fact, those historians who bother to mention employment agencies at all employ and parrot the views of the early twentieth-century critics mentioned above. The only modern book-length study of employment agencies is Tomas Martinez' 1976 study of the American experience, *The Human Marketplace.* Martinez concludes that most agencies in the pre-World War One period abused their clients because the "human marketplace" cannot be separated from the capitalist system. In short, the employment business was abusive endemically because of its role within an inherently unjust economic system. Martinez does distance himself from the sources he employs; "in the pursuit of profits," he writes, "private employment agencies have engaged in activities deemed abusive by the 'moral crusaders' of the day."[11] However, this distancing does not lead to re-evaluation of the social role of the agent for obvious reasons: theory negates the need for research. As such, the traditional critique of the employment agent is left unanalyzed and untouched in Martinez' work.

Very little work has been done on the experience of employment agencies in Canada. Historians interested in patterns of working class life occasionally mention agencies, usually as a business without diversity, always as an extension of the employer's will and seldom as anything but an abuse to workers. A

---

[8]Bryce Stewart, "The Employment Service of Canada," *Queen's Quarterly* 1919, 61.

[9]On Stewart's resignation and the decline of the ESC in the 1920s, see James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 39.

[10]R.A. Rigg, "Canada's Experience with Private Employment Offices," *Labour Gazette,* April 1926, 334.

[11]Tomas Martinez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1976), 46.

more developed area of study has been the growth of state control of the job market in Canada, and the relationship between government bureaus and commercial agencies. For instance, Michael Piva in his study of the Toronto working class looks briefly at the activities of employment agencies within that city. "The employment business," writes Piva, "was both profitable and corrupt. Frauds were common."[12] Piva commends early efforts by the city to control the employment market through municipal bureaus, but argues that such efforts were too sporadic to compete with private agencies. Only with the creation of the nationally-coordinated Employment Service of Canada during wartime, argues Piva, was there an effective alternative to abusive commercial agencies.[13] To Piva, state control of the labour market was a victory for the workingman.

Donald Avery's work on immigrant labour in the Canadian west also mentions the important role employment agents had in delivering ethnic workers to railway and resource camps on the prairies and British Columbia.[14] Avery suggests that upwards of 200,000 men were handled yearly by commercial agents, and that the majority of these agents were ethnically-aligned with their worker-clients.[15] Robert Harney has looked closely at immigrant labour recruitment in Montreal's Italian community at the turn of the century and, specifically, at the notorious activities of Antonio Cordasco.[16] Harney finds cultural explanations for the nature of job recruitment in the Italian community and, unlike Avery, finds ethnic middlemen like Cordasco self-determined and motivationally-independent from employers. Nonetheless, both Avery and Harney condemn commercial agents as exploitive and parasitical.

In a series of essays on commercial agencies and state employment bureaus, Udo Sautter argues a slightly different line. According to Sautter, employment agencies were indeed predatory and immoral. However, the state employment system constructed at the end of the war was not intended to right these wrongs, but was designed to increase economic efficiency and decrease social turmoil as an instrument of social control.[17] The demands of wartime industry for an organized labour market and fears of post-war

---

[12]Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 82.

[13]Ibid., 81-84.

[14]See Donald Avery, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the 'Foreign' Navvy, 1896-1914," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1972, and *Dangerous Foreigners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979).

[15]Ibid., 31.

[16]Robert Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: a case study of Padronism," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, Volume 4 (1979).

[17]Sautter's themes have been developed in a series of published and unpublished papers: "The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada, 1900-1920," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (Autumn 1980), 89-112; "North American Government Labor Agencies before World War

chaos are aptly demonstrated in Sautter's work.[18] However, his indictment of commercial agencies is drawn from the same largely American progressive critique already cited, and is much less convincing. "No subject preoccupied critics of the pre-World War 1 job scene more intensely," writes Sautter, "than the abuses perpetrated by greedy employment agents upon the gullible or otherwise helpless jobseeker."[19] In stressing the hard-worn moral and economic dimensions of the employment business, Sautter varies little from progressive critics eighty years before him.

This study attempts to look beyond the stereotype of the employment 'shark' created by progressive reformers, and maintained by historians. Emphasis on agent abuses has served to obscure and simplify our view of the employment business; such a view has also served to legitimize state entrance in to the job market in 1918 (mind you, in Sautter's case we are compelled to ask if the cynicism of state paternalism was preferrable to the inhumanity of competitive capitalism). This thesis argues that employment agencies in the pre-war period were more useful than abusive; they served their clients' needs, usually by finding them jobs and sometimes by providing other support services. Abuses did occur—the majority of which will probably never be known. However, there was nothing endemically unethical about the employment business—nothing dictated that the novice agent necessarily bacame the veteran 'shark'. That is a myth perpetrated by groups (progressive reformers, organized labour and 'enlightened' employers) who felt threatened by the unorganized activities of employment agents. Vancouver's employment business, in fact, was characterized by a plurality, diversity and smallness which leant itself to competition between agencies that often favoured workers. Most employment agencies in Vancouver were so marginal that they only operated during boom periods and high seasons when labour shortages were the rule; and like most very small and competitive businesses, the Vancouver employment agent was forced to cultivate a reasonable relationship with his or her clientelle.

Vancouver's employment agents have been chosen to study for three reasons. First, the city's agents were an essential cog in the regional economy and in capitalist social relations before World War One. Their importance has been sometimes recognized but seldom studied. One aim of this study, then, is to map out the contours of Vancouver's employment business: who were the agents, whom did they serve, when did they operate and how did they make their money? Not until we answer some of these questions can we pass judgement on the employment 'shark'. These are difficult questions to answer, however. Employment agents left few sources and no business records. Rather, this study has had to rely on

---

[17](cont'd) One: A Cure for Unemployment?" *Labor History*, 24 (1983); "Workmen and the Labour Market: an Aspect of Early Industrial Civilization in North America," Unpublished Paper, 1986.

[18]See Sautter, "The Origins of...", 103-111.

[19]Sautter, "Workmen and the...", 8.

circumstantial evidence derived from local directories, newspaper advertisements and brief government documents. The result is that many crucial details of the employment business remain a mystery. Still, enough evidence exists to suggest that Vancouver's employment business was divided three-fold—Asian men, European men and European women—to reflect the racial and sexual divisions in the regional labour market. This study concentrates on the two agency sectors representing European men and women, and leaves the study of Chinese, Japanese and East Indian agencies to those with the language skills to do a much better job. In any case, the activities of most Asian labour contractors were considerably different than European agents; most operated in a paternal, contract labour system which followed (or led) Asian workers from continent to continent, job to job and meal to meal.[20] The white agents in this study simply sold jobs to workers and little more. Yet these differences are not enough to ignore the Asian sector of the local employment business, and for this reason, Chapter 3 presents a structural overview of the city's agents which necessarily includes Asian contractors, agents and go-betweens. However, the following four chapters (Chapters 4–7) look specifically at agencies for European men and women. In these chapters the activities of a few specific agents are highlighted to demonstrate some general themes about the business sectors. The spectacular growth of these agencies before World War One suggests the extent to which capitalist social relations (specifically the job-search process) were mediated by small, fragile, self-motivated businesses.

Secondly, Vancouver's employment agents were chosen because its critics were organized and vocal. Thus, another aim of this study is to clarify the anatomy of criticism aimed at Vancouver employment agents before and during World War One. The most vocal critics of agencies had the most to gain from their demise; the stereotype of the abusive agent was exploited by local critics to serve less than altruistic purposes. The extent to which Vancouver agents and their critics were representative is unclear. Not until other local studies of employment agencies are done to separate fact from fiction will that issue be dealt with. But, clearly, relentless attacks by British Columbian reformers combined with similar efforts in other Canadian regions to prepare the way for the national experiment with a state employment bureau system after World War One. The continuity of the international debate regarding unemployment, the activities

---

[20]The contract labour system involving Oriental workers has been well explored by both American and Canadian historians. For the Chinese, see Peter Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 17–18; Anthony B. Chan, *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983), 37–46; Jack Masson and Donald Guimary, "Asian labor contractors in the Alaskan canned salmon industry: 1880–1937," *Labor History*, Volume 22, no. 33 (Summer 1981), 377–97; and Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), 16–17. For the later experience of the Japanese contract system, see Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: the World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988), and Ichioka's "Japanese Immigrant Labor Contractors and the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railroad Companies, 1898–1907," *Labor History*, Volume 21, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 325–50; and Ken Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 63–70.

of private employment agencies and their state labour exchange alternative is discussed in Chapter 2. While locally-born motives explain the critique of Vancouver's employment agencies, the local debate was influenced by the progressives of the international labour exchange movement. The movement served an illustrative function in British Columbia by providing a 'scientific' alternative to commercial agencies, an agreed-upon language of debate, and the weight of respected experts in Britain, the United States and Canada. In the end, the vacuum left by the exit of an unorganized, de-centralized, inefficient and parochial mess of agencies in Vancouver was temporarily filled by a paternal, national system dedicated to central authority, efficiency and the interests of monopoly capitalism. To take up part of the slack after the experiment was starved by the King government in the mid 1920s were employer-run job agencies dedicated to creating a docile workforce through nefarious hiring practices such as blacklisting. Although the employment market during and after the war is not discussed here, evidence suggests that employer and state employment offices were not improvements on pre-war commercial agencies.

The final reason for choosing Vancouver and the subject of economic intermediaries is personal. I have always been a Vancouver middleman. For much of the 1970s, I made a reasonable living buying used furniture in the dusty cluttered second-hand stores of Vancouver's east side, taking the pieces home for refinishing, and then selling them to antique shops on the city's west side. We were called 'pickers', and were disliked yet tolerated by both the second-hand 'Jacks' and the Granville street 'shoppe' set: the Jacks thought our offers too low while the Shoppes believed our prices too high. But for a time we were necessary to both. Some west-side retailers tried (many successfully) to sidestep local pickers by volume buying in Britain or the United States. Pickers like myself were wiped out. Now I am an intermediary in the writing of social history. I purchase my lowbrow goods in dusty archives or in cluttered libraries, take these pieces home for refurbishing, and then sell them to highbrow consumers. In fact, this study is unified by a subjective theme about the role of those who derive their living and meaning from being in-between. My background, my subject and the process of creating this thesis reflect and encircle this theme.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR EXCHANGE DEBATE

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of progressive labour market reformers who called for statist solutions to labour supply problems and unemployment. The labour exchange movement that grew out of concern for these problems was an international one which began in Britain, was modified in the United States and which influenced Canadian decision-makers who, in turn, helped shape British Columbia's employment market at the end of World War One. The movement provided a 'scientific' alternative to commercial agencies, offered a unified language of criticism, and did so under the weight of considered opinion of international experts. In Vancouver this was a potent recipe for change: how could British Columbia maintain such a unprogressive situation when the rest of the civilized world was moving forward so quickly?

The labour exchange movement preached the virtues of organization. Only through a rational, scientific restructuring of the labour market, advocates argued, could unemployment be prevented and an efficient use of manpower achieved. Efficiency, an important catch-word of the period, meant a rejection of ad hoc social programs and parochial measures for relieving joblessness. In their place, the movement proposed a centralized and rationally-organized system of labour recruitment. This was a period of optimistic social engineering, of reform proposals which echoed the growing bureaucratization of North American life. American historian Samuel Hays writes:

> The rhetoric and symbolism of the years from the last part of the 19th century until the Great Depression were filled with images of science and technology, efficiency and system, and 'businesslike' alternatives and policy-making by experts. There was such talk as 'scientific social work,' 'human efficiency' and 'human conservation' in national life, 'scientific management' in business and government, 'business methods' in home, church, and place of work, and the systematic application of knowledge to 'reform.' All this was often summed up by the notion of a 'progressive' society moving forward under a new awareness of the world, a new method of shaping it, a new future to be brought into being.[1]

The labour exchange movement fit nicely into the new conception of society: it was necessary, movement advocates urged, that the labour market organize to meet the demands of an increasingly organized and progressive world. Organization was not an end in itself. Rather, labour market reformers saw three

---

[1]Samuel P. Hays, "The New Organizational Society," in Jerry Israel, ed., *Building the Organizational Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 1.

related goals to be gained through organizational means. First, they believed that the economy would benefit from and production would increase through a centralized and rationalized labour market. Business restructuring in this period had proven the benefits of centralization and control; the labour market had to follow suit. Second, reformers believed that social problems related to industry could be prevented by organization. Thus, labour market problems such as unemployment, underemployment or abusive employment practices could be overcome. Third, progressives saw labour market disorganization as a threat to industrial peace. Bringing the employment market under central state control was often legitimized for reasons of social harmony: social control of the immigrant worker was a concern common to American and Canadian public labour exchange advocates; minimizing the effects of endemic industrial problems averted social threats to the system. In short, all three of these goals were capitalism-friendly. They were intended so.

The state played an important role in the progressive's vision of an organized labour market. However, labour exchange advocates were not wedded to the notion of state intervention in the economy. And while advocates innovatively recognized that unemployment was a necessary feature of capitalist progress, they maintained an enduring faith that private industry could meet most social needs: the problem was not one of industry's failure to provide, but of the labour market's failure to organize. In this sense, labour exchange theory helped to maintain the tradition of voluntarism and self-initiative. In fact, the mutually-reinforcing relationship between voluntarism and prevention helps to explain the appeal of the movement during these years. Labour exchange advocates claimed they could *prevent* unemployment, and do so without compulsion. Proposals aimed at *amelioration* of unemployment, such as mandatory unemployment insurance and public works, tended toward compulsion and state paternalism. Given a choice between the elimination of unemployment without an erosion of private initiative and the amelioration of the effects of unemployment through state coercion, it is no wonder that progressives found labour exchange theory so attractive.

While it buttrussed the socio-economic system and liberal intiative, the labour exchange movement was not of a single mind. Reformers argued over the extensiveness of the exchange system, the degree of coercion necessary to ensure its use and the like. For instance, British advocates stressed a more paternal system than did Canadians and certainly more than American reformers. Canadian reformers bickered over whether the system should serve rural or urban interests. Thus, the Canadian employment market was never brought under complete state control as the most extreme advocates had wished. After the creation of the Employment Service of Canada in 1918, the employment market saw an ologopoly of placement organizations in the labour market: government, employers, unions and a few remaining commercial agencies. One goal that all labour market reformers did agree on was the elimination of commercial employment agencies. Commercial agencies were relics of an unorganized and inefficient past.

The key tenents of the labour exchange movement are revealed in the written works of its major supporters. In Britain, fabian economist William Beveridge was the first to map out and apply labour exchange theory on a national scale; his contribution was paramount. In the United States, Beveridge's ideas merged with those of the American Association for Labor Legislation and political economist William Leiserson to form an American response to labour market problems. In Canada, British and American ideas were married to Canadian needs in the work of Department of Labour researcher Bryce Stewart, and were focussed in the work of the 1915 Ontario Commission on Unemployment. These were the leaders of the labour exchange movement. They were responsible for organizing to various degrees the employment markets of three countries.

Beveridge was the first professional expert on unemployment, and his influence on the trans-Atlantic unemployment debate was enormous. He first became interested in the issue while working at Toynbee Hall, a settlement house in London. After preparing a number of unemployment surveys and working with Sidney and Beatrice Webb on the 1906 Royal Commission on the Poor Law, Beveridge was appointed to the Board of Trade. In 1909, with the passage of the National Labour Exchange Act, he became the director of Britain's first nationally-coordinated public labour exchange system.[2] The sum of Beveridge's thought on the causes and the prevention of unemployment is contained in his opus, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry*, published in 1909. *Unemployment* became the bible of the labour exchange movement in Britain, the United States and Canada.

Beveridge was a strong advocate of rational organization. Organization, he argued, was an essential development in industry: the rationalization of private industry, from production to distribution, had translated into higher profits, less waste and, he argued, national prosperity. Unemployment was a problem because the labour market was not organized. Beveridge insisted that some unemployment—the labour reserve—was necessary for economic growth. Without the built-in flexibility of a reserve army of idle workers, industry could not expand.[3] However, due to labour market disorganization, the number of unemployed far exceeded the margin necessary for a smooth economy. Unlike most past economists,

---

[2]John A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 136.

[3]Marx is generally credited with linking the process of industrial growth (capital accumulation) to unemployment (surplus labouring population or industrial reserve army). The application of his labour theory of value (labour as the primary source of all capital) to his observation that increases in total capital witnessed a proportional but diminishing increase in labour, meant that workers laboured, ironically, to put themselves out of employment. "This increase [of necessary labour] is effected by the simple process that constantly 'sets free' a part of the labourers; by methods which lessen the number of labourers employed in proportion to the increased production. The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends, therefore, upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands...[who are] thrown on the streets by their own creation of additional capital." See *Capital*, Volume 1, Part 7, Chapter 25, Section 3-4, 628-648.

Beveridge more strongly identified joblessness as a natural extension of industrial activity; unemployment was not solely due to personal failure but was, rather, related to the structure of industry and to the economy's ebb and flow over time.[4]

Beveridge's goal, then, was to pare-down the labour reserve to the minimum needed for industrial efficiency, and this was best done by organizing the supply of labour to match labour demand. His five major causes of unemployment—seasonal work, cyclical fluctuations, changes in industrial structure (industry re-locations and mechanization), the casual labour system, and competition from "unemployables"—all represented the errors of disorganization and the costs of inefficiency. Seasonal labour was necessary to seasonal industries, but its negative effects on workers and their communities were not necessary. Cyclical depressions, the result of "healthy competition" and a natural cycle of boom and bust, were a more difficult problem, but one that could be relieved through organization. Technological and geographic displacement were clearly preventable through better communication and some social planning. The casual labour system—its maintenance of many separate labour supply centres—was the antithesis of rational organization; while the system was clearly essential to the businesses involved, enforced under-employment was not.[5] Finally, Beveridge was convinced that many good, honest workers were being forced to compete for a limited number of jobs with a hopeless group of "unemployables". Beveridge had come some distance from the Poor Law heritage which attributed poverty and unemployment to personal failure; his belief, however, that upwards of ten to fifteen per cent of the workforce were "social parasites" taking jobs from more honest workers, was a short retreat from the new environmental view of unemployment. The "parasite", Beveridge argued, had to be stripped from the labour market for the benefit of the "deserving" worker.[6]

If the root cause of unemployment was disorganization, Beveridge argued, then "the first step in the attack must be the organization of the labour market."[7] Many of the other proposals from concerned reformers, he claimed, were counter-productive. The creation of new industries and public works to fight unemployment only reproduced the problems of disorganization in new areas; restricting the labour supply through state-sponsored emigration or birth restriction went against Beveridge's sense of holistic economic growth. Instead, he proposed that a national system of labour exchanges be used to direct workers to jobs

---

[4]William Beveridge, *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), pp. 192-97.

[5]Continuing a study of London dockworkers begun by Charles Booth, Beveridge found that almost twice as many casual workers as needed were maintained by each dock company. By combining all the companies' labour reserves into one recruitment centre, the casual-labour system could be eliminated. Ibid., 77-95.

[6]Ibid., pp. 133-43.

[7]Ibid., 197.

and employers to workers.[8]

Beveridge's labour exchange met all the problems of unemployment. Seasonal unemployment could be eliminated by directing workers to counter-seasonal employment and by "dovetailing" jobs. Information on inter-regional and industrial demands for labour could prevent the worst of cyclical unemployment. Changes in industrial structure could also be dealt with by the labour exchange: those displaced by ailing industries or mechanization might be directed to new industries or re-training programs; the problems associated with industrial re-locations would not exist if re-hiring were done through a centralized agency sensitive to the needs of the displaced workers.[9] Most important to Beveridge, the elimination of casual employment and the evils of under-employment could only be accomplished through an effective labour exchange network. By dovetailing part-time jobs through a centralized job registry, maximum full-time employment could be achieved. In this way, the reserve army necessary to industry would be retained, yet pared down to a minimum. Finally, after the elimination of casual labour and the complete organization of the labour market through labour exchange registration, the "parasites" would have nowhere to hide. For this "superfluous" mass, Beveridge suggested labour camps and emigration as solutions.[10]

Jose Harris has written that Beveridge's concern for reform was "inspired less by philanthropic emotion" than a "passion for efficiency and an almost obsessive dislike for social and individual waste. [11] However, this reflects a slight misreading of Beveridge's view of industrial capitalism. The organization of the labour market was intended to aid existing industrial structures, and Beveridge believed the economic system had the potential to improve the prosperity of all classes of society. The sum of unpreventable social problems created by the industrial system was not greater than the benefits of its unfettered progress. Efficiency, therefore, was a means to humanitarian as well as economic ends *because* it served industrial growth. Beveridge saw no contradiction between the welfare of workers and the efficient growth of private industry—they were, in fact, complementary. Beveridge therefore predicted that the public labour exchange would produce wider social and moral benefits: the reduction of unemployment would raise the working class above the degeneration associated with idleness and poverty; the elimination of casual and seasonal labour would enable the under-employed to share in the positive virtues of full employment; and the discovery and elimination of the social "parasite" would remove that contaminant from working-class

---

[8]Garraty, 138-9.

[9]Beveridge, pp. 210-11.

[10]Ibid., 199-206.

[11]Jose Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study of English Social Policy, 1886-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 285.

life.[12]

Beveridge was convinced that labour exchanges would inaugurate a "new era of industrial efficiency" not just in Britain, but throughout the industrial world:

> When all over the United Kingdom and for every trade in it there is a connected system of Labour Exchanges so that no man thinks of applying anywhere else either for workpeople or employment and would not get either if he did, then the labour market for the United Kingdom may be said to be completely organized. Then, or indeed with advantage some time before then, attention can be turned to organising the labour market for the British Empire or the world.[13]

This challenge was taken up by a host of American and Canadian progressive reformers and economists. In the United States, members of the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) and the Beveridgian devotee William Leiserson led the movement. In Canada, the national labour exchange movement found a forum in the 1915 Ontario Commission on Unemployment and a leader in a young Queen's-trained Department of Labour bureaucrat, Bryce Stewart. These progressives were responsible for promoting Beveridge's theory of unemployment prevention and state labour exchanges. The creation of centralized employment systems in both countries at the end of World War One was their victory.

The AALL was formed in 1906 as an extension of the International Association for Labor Legislation, and was initially interested in agitating for workmen's compensation legislation. However, under the control of its secretary, John B. Andrews, the AALL became more concerned with problems related to unemployment.[14] Membership in the AALL reflected the emergence of the social scientist as a potent force in progressive reform. Prominent economists and political scientists, such as Andrews, John R. Commons, Richard Ely, Henry Seager, Isaac Rubinow and Henry Farnam were active members of the organization. The AALL's approach to reform also testified to the membership's faith in rational organization and social engineering. Roy Lubove writes:

> The AALL exemplified ideals of social engineering which emerged in the early twentieth century. The efficient organization of human affairs in a complex industrial society presumably required the same degree of planning and expert administration which prevailed in the business sector. Human conservation depended upon a greater decision-making role

---

[12]Ibid.

[13]Beveridge, 195.

[14]Daniel Nelson, *Unemployment Insurance: The American Experience, 1915-1935* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 13. The American debate over the causes, prevention and amelioration of unemployment was shaped by intellectuals. See Peter Seixas, "'Shifting Sands Beneath the State': Unemployment, the Labor Market, and the Local Community, 1893-1922," PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988, 116-144.

for social workers, social scientists, and other experts.[15]

The "expert" members of the AALL believed that social planning could no longer be left to the whims of narrow interest groups; proper reform was instead the result of systematic planning and objective expertise.

The AALL's views on unemployment were greatly influenced by William Beveridge. In 1910, one year after the publication of *Unemployment*, the AALL turned its attention, almost entirely, to unemployment. During the recessionary years of 1914–15, it sponsored two national conferences on joblessness, out of which emerged the AALL's "Practical Program" for the prevention of unemployment. The "Practical Program", generally attributed to Andrews, was Beveridgian in its explanation of unemployment and its proposals for prevention.[16] Unemployment, wrote Andrews in the "Practical Program," was "not so much due to individual causes and to the shiftlessness of 'won't-works,' as social and inherent in our present method of industrial organization."[17] In order to meet what was clearly "a problem of industry," Andrews proposed four broad measures: systematic public works, a social insurance scheme, voluntary employment regularization of industry and a national system of labour exchanges. With the exception of the public works program, the "Practical Program" was voluntary and preventative in design; the unemployment insurance scheme was preventative through its linkage with the employment stabilization plan.[18]

The heart of the prevention program, however, was the labour exchange. Echoing Beveridge, Andrews called for an efficient, business-like organizaton of the labour market:

> The necessity of organized markets is recognized in every other field of economic activity, but we have thus far taken only timid and halting steps in the organization of the labor market. The peddling method is still, even in our 'efficient' industrial system, the prevalent method of selling labor. Thus a purely business transaction is carried on in a most unbusiness-like, not to say medieval, manner.[19]

---

[15]Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900–1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 32.

[16]AALL, "A Practical Program for the Prevention of Unemployment," *American Labor Legislation Review*, Volume 5 (1915), 173–93.

[17]Ibid., p.173.

[18]The employer's payments into the unemployment insurance scheme were to be adjusted to his record of creating steady employment. In this sense, the scheme was slightly coersive, but in no way compulsory. The employer could choose whether he wanted in or out of the plan. Nelson, 16.

[19]AALL, "Practical Program," *ALLR*, Volume 5 (1915), 176.

The report asserted that an exchange network was an "essential step" towards a solution to unemployment, and of as "much importance for the employer... as it is for the worker."[20] The AALL also asked the labour exchange to do essentially Beveridgian tasks: de-casualization of casual labour; information gathering on changes in labour demand; dovetailing of seasonal industries; and retraining of technologically-displaced workers.

The "Practical Program" also alluded to the problem of "unemployables". According to a separate report, the competition between "deserving" and "undeserving" workers was responsible for aggravating already poor conditions during the hard winter of 1914. "Where no attempts were made to separate unemployable and unemployed," read the report, "measures for the unemployed suffered... hindering constructive efforts. Where an effort was made to distinguish between the two classes, it was found that the machinery was usually lacking for dealing with the lazy and inefficient, who are most often confused with the genuine unemployed."[21] A labour exchange system was necessary to protect "deserving" workers; the exchange offices, wrote Andrews, "would not be allowed to become resorts for sub-standard labor."[22] The AALL's concern over "unemployables" reveals the limits of the movement's humanitarian purpose. For all its rhetoric on objective study and rational/scientific organization, the AALL could not escape its own moral standards of proper behaviour. Economics and morality were, in fact, never far apart in the AALL's judgements. These judgements were most often couched in economic terms: the lazy or otherwise handicapped were inefficient—and inefficiency could not be tolerated in the new organized society. "Efficiency and goodness," writes Samuel Haber, "came closer to meaning the same thing in these years than in any other period of American history."[23]

That the AALL defined goodness in economic terms is not surprising. Unemployment was, after all, an economic problem, the labour exchange essentially an economic solution. What is surprising, however, is the extent to which the movement's advocates linked the drive for labour market organization to the maintenance of American national character. Of course, the preventionist goals of the exchange helped: unemployment threatened "American civilization"; "more good men," wrote AALL executive Henry Seager, "had been turned into embittered advocates of social revolution by unemployment than by any other single cause."[24] The political perils of inaction, wrote Andrews, were matched only by

---

[20]Ibid.

[21]"The Separation of Unemployable and Unemployed," *ALLR*, Volume 5 (1915), 539.

[22]"Practical Program," 178.

[23]Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), ix.

[24]Henry R. Seager, "Introductory Address," Proceedings of the 1914 National Conference on Unemployment, *ALLR*, Volume 4 (1914), 356.

unemployment's "wastefulness to society." And "American society cannot afford indefinitely to postpone serious consideration of the problem."[25] The voluntary nature of the exchange system also helped to link the movement to positive American liberal virtues. If, as Andrews argued, unemployment was a threat to individual rights, then the proposed exchange system was a bulwark for individualism. [26]

The AALL was always close to the centre of the labour exchange movement in the United States. Andrews, Seager and the rest of the organization's executive were responsible for translating Beveridge's theory into American terms and pressing for its implementation. Yet the most important single figure in the American movement, the reformer who was most cognisant of specific American conditions and their effects on the practical organization of the labour market, was William Leiserson. Leiserson strongly endorsed the work of Beveridge, commenting once that the Englishman's analysis was "the most important contribution to an understanding of employment since *Das Kapital.*"[27] However, Leiserson saw in Beveridge's work solutions, not only to industrial unemployment, but to problems related to immigration and the immigrant's adjustment to American life. In this sense, Leiserson expanded on Beveridge's views to include the assimilation and control of an alien workforce.

Leiserson's interest in the plight of immigrant labour was arrived at honestly. Born in Estonia in 1883, he came to the United States with his mother in the early 1890s and settled in New York City. Leiserson experienced first-hand the difficulties of finding work as he pushed himself through public school and university. While looking for a summer job in Chicago in 1906, Leiserson became embittered by his own experiences with private employment agencies in that city. Hungry and exhausted, he finally landed a job in a department store. He never forgot the experience.[28] While completing his PhD at Columbia, Leiserson worked as an investigator for the 1911 New York Commission on Unemployment, where he prepared an important report on labour exchanges. Soon after, he returned to Wisconsin to set up and administer that state's first employment exchange system. By the time the United States entered the First World War, Leiserson had helped create public exchanges in a number of states, and was considered, according to the New York *Tribune*, "one of the foremost authorities in the country on employment problems. [29]

---

[25]John B. Andrews, "Organization to Combat Unemployment," *ALLR*, Volume 4 (1914), pp. 211-13.

[26]Ibid., 213.

[27]Garraty, 140.

[28]J. Michael Eisner, *William Morris Leiserson, A Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 30.

[29]Eisner, 31. For a good discussion of Leiserson's views on unemployment and their impact, see Seixas, "'Shifting Sands Beneath...," 136-43. Seixas argues that Leiserson, more than any

Leiserson accepted Beveridge's view of unemployment. "The labor reserve," wrote Leiserson in 1916, "is no more 'unemployed' than are firemen waiting in firehouses for the alarm to sound."[30] If the labour reserve was an industrial necessity, unemployment certainly was not: "An organized market for labour is needed to eliminate waste, to facilitate exchange, to bring supply and demand quickly togther [and] to develop the efficiency that comes from specialization and a proper division of labour." The public exchange could prevent unemployment, and do so with "decency and efficiency".[31]

Leiserson's America was not Beveridge's Britain, however. Huge numbers of immigrants and internal migrants created distinct problems for labour market reformers in North America. One extension of the immigrant/migrant movement that blocked organization of the labour market was the huge growth of commercial employment agencies all over the continent between 1890–1914. These agencies placed more workers in more jobs than did any other institution.[32] William Leiserson led a group of American reformers in condemning the abusive activities of commercial agents. "The employment business," wrote Leiserson in 1914, "lends itself easily to fraud," and the goal of the public exhange must be "to eliminate the private labour agent, whose activity as middleman is so often accompanied by fraud, misrepresentation and extortion."[33] However, as with most critics of commercial agents, Leiserson's real concerns were economic: agencies broke all the rules of Beveridgian labour market organization and were unable to match supply and demand effectively. Mirroring Beveridge's London dockworkers' dilemma, "the

---

[29](cont'd) other labour market theorist, stressed the labour exchange's advantages to the business community. Leiserson's first goal, writes Seixas, was to enhance "industrial progress". "Strict attention to sound administrative principles, not wholesale political or economic re-ordering, would produce the needed changes. [Leiserson's approach] did not challenge the rise and fall of industries and firms, the dislocations resulting from the competitive struggles of industrial capitalism; it did not meddle in any way with the free rein of capital to hire and fire and dislocate: most of this was necessary for 'industrial progress'." For this reason, argues Seixas, Leiserson played a profound part in winning business support for labour market reform. It should be noted that Seixas credits these reformers with consciously colouring their proposals with appeals to business efficiency and industrial progress as a means to gain higher humanitarian ends. Whether progressives sought an end to the misery of unemployment through business rhetoric, or the continued growth of industry through the rhetoric of humanitarian reform, as this thesis implies, is a matter of interpretation.

[30]William Leiserson, "The Problem of Unemployment Today," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume XXXI, no. 1 (March 1916), 12.

[31]Ibid., 33.

[32]Udo Sautter, "Workmen and the Labour Market: An Aspect of Early Industrial Civilization in North America," Unpublished Paper, 1986, 7.

[33]Udo Sautter, "North American Government Labor Agencies before World War One: A Cure for Unemployment?" *Labor History*, Volume 24 (1983), 375; William Leiserson, "The Theory of Public Employment Offices and Principles of their Administration," *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 29 (1914), 29.

multiplication of agencies has the same evil effect as the multiplication of labor markets. They merely make more places to look for work; and the more places the more are the chances that man and job will miss each other."[34] In short, agencies, because they were small and many, kept the labour reserve higher than necessary for industrial growth. Also, because of the lack of communication between agents, they could not hope to carry out the coordination necessary during seasonal and cyclical fluctuations, or provide a responsive service to changes in technology or industrial re-locations. As well, agents cared little about the quality of the workers they handled and, thus, served to keep "unemployables" in the workforce—the irresponsible labour agent could not be expected to weed "parasites" out of the labour market. Agents were inefficient. They abused workers and impeded industrial growth. According to Leiserson, organization of the labour market began with the abolition of employment agencies.

Finally, Leiserson saw a wider social purpose behind the public labour exchange that could not be filled by the agency. If "favorable economic experiences incline the immigrant favorably toward things American," he argued, then "unfavorable experiences, [such as] unemployment, exploitation by labor agents and low standards will make him antagonistic to things American and cause him to idealize his old home."[35] The disorganized labour market only served to ghettoize ethnic minorities and, thus, separate the native from the foreign-born rather than unite the two. "If we wish to weave the immigrants into our American community," Leiserson continued, "we must provide the administrative organization that is capable of accomplishing such a purpose."[36]

Leiserson's suggestion that a public exchange be used to better assimilate ethnic minorities was a distinctly American contribution to labour exchange theory. The AALL, however, refused to endorse this function for two reasons. First, the AALL was constantly battling the general impression that the public exchange would simply become dumping-grounds for "down and outs".[37] Thus, any promotion of a national exchange system for the benefit of the "alien", it was feared, would only scare away native American workers. Second, the abolition of agencies and the channelling of immigrants through public exchanges smacked of government coercion. The AALL endorsed regulation of agencies to ensure "fair and reasonable treatment of workers," but would not demand their abolition.[38] The superintendent of the New York Free Exchange well expressed AALL opinion, noting that "the unscrupulous private agency

---

[34]Leiserson, 1914, 34.

[35]William Leiserson, *Adjusting Immigrant to Industry*, (New York: Harper Bros., 1924), 24.

[36]Ibid., 26.

[37]There was truth in this view. Most municipal exchanges were opened during periods of high unemployment—whether seasonal or cyclical. For two Vancouver examples, see Chapter 5.

[38]The AALL called for a "needful supervision and regulation of private exchanges" through state licencing and regular inspection. "Practical Program," *ALLR*, 180.

may have cause to fear the government bureau, but no well-conducted and properly-managed private employment agency need have any fear of the public bureau."[39] No fear, except that of healthy competition. The AALL was convinced that the public system could battle—indeed, win the war—against commercial agencies, and do so within the rules of the marketplace and without compulsory measures.

The labour exchange movement in Canada found a forum during the 1915 Ontario Commission on Unemployment. The Commission heard evidence from a number of British and American labour exchange experts, including written correspondence from William Beveridge, AALL Secretary John B. Andrews and an appearance by William Leiserson. Canadian Labour market reformers included Bryce M. Stewart of the Federal Department of Labour, the Dominion Statistician R.H. Coats, and Commissioner Gilbert Jackson. The Commission was created to investigate the causes, prevention and amelioration of unemployment in Ontario. Yet its recommendations were national, even international, in scope—recognizing that Ontario's industrial problems could not be solved by Ontario alone. A key Commission recommendation aimed at preventing unemployment was the institution of a provincial system of labour exchanges. The Commissioners acknowledged that a nationally-coordinated system was essential, and that an Ontario system would fail without national cooperation. In this sense, the Commission's *Report* was really a national blueprint; its recommendations had country-wide impact.

The Commission synthesized the prevailing British and American scholarship on the causes and prevention of unemployment. The body condemned the disorganized Canadian employment market as a major source of friction on labour mobility. Increased labour mobility was stressed as a key to unemployment prevention along with proportional development, voluntary regularization of employment by employers, discriminant public spending and directed agricultural settlement.[40] A more mobile labour force, argued the Commission *Report*, was achievable through a coordinated state employment system. All of this bore the stamp of British and American labour exchange advocates. The Ontario Commission, however, went beyond the theoretical framework provided by Beveridge, Leiserson and others, to answer some practical questions about the exchange system's application in Canada. For instance, which level of government would organize the local employment outlets and how would power and policy be distributed through the system? The answer, claimed the *Report*, lay in the so-called Federal Plan first designed for the United States by William Leiserson. Germany's decentralized municipal system and Britain's strongly-centralized national system may have suited those countries' political development, but neither would suit Canada's federal constitution.[41] Leiserson's plan seemed the best solution. The municipalities

---

[39]Comment from "General Discussion," *ALLR*, Volume 5 (1915), 281.

[40]Ontario Commission on Unemployment, *Report* (Toronto: *Sessional Papers*, 1916), Part 1, 19-40.

[41]Ibid., Part 2, 130-32.

would have little control at all; the state (or provincial) and federal governments would divide responsibility on the basis of function:

> Responsibility for mobilizing the labour supply within the State boundaries rests with the State itself. On the other hand, the drift of labour between States in accordance with changes in supply and demand, since it is the business of no State in particular, rests with the Federal Government. The Federal Government assumes responsibility only for the transference of labour between one State and another.[42]

This was not an equal division of power, however. The rational use of local labour pools meant the manipulation of the labour market on a national level. Thus, while each province was given the burden of organizing the exchanges themselves, power over policy was firmly in the hands of a Federal employment Director and a governing body known as the National Advisory Council. Each province would have its own advising council, as would each employment office. However, it would be the National Council that would determine the country's overall labour needs, set policy, generate publicity and statistical data, and make sure each provincial system met the standards and responsibilities set out by the Council itself.[43]

The Commission *Report* outlined some of the policy priorities of the proposed National Council. First, the exchange system would help to control the immigration flow in order to meet national economic goals. Information on labour demand gathered by local offices would provide the data to determine immigration policy. The *Report* echoed Beveridge's dream of a coordinated Imperial labour exchange system to orchestrate labour migrations throughout the empire.[44] An imperial plan was in the future, admitted the *Report*, but Canadian control of labour migrations was possible now. Second, the *Report* emphasized the central role the exchange system would have in organizing seasonal farm workers on a country-wide basis. Chronic shortages of seasonally-required workers on the prairies could only be solved through national organization of labour; the "Harvest Excursions" fashioned on an ad hoc basis by railway companies were inadequate and inefficient.[45] In this, the *Report* fought the common perception (especially amongst farmers) that labour exchanges were designed to meet urban, industrial problems, and did not apply to rural society. "There is a tendency to regard the work of a Labour Exchange as limited to urban occupations," read the *Report*. However, "a flexible system of employment bureaux can be no less useful

---

[42]Ibid., 133.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., Part 1, 43.

[45]Ibid., Part 2, 131. For a discussion of migrant farm workers, see John Herd Thompson, "Bringing in the Sheaves: the Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929," *Canadian Historical Review* 59:4 (1978), 467-89.

to the farmer, than to the manufacturers, railroad or contractor."[46] The *Report* connected urban unemployment to rural labour shortages: an effective use of labour included taking idle city workers and placing them on farms. The Commission sided with coercion in this respect. Each labour exchange would 'encourage' applicants to seek farm work, whether the applicant came in off the street or was channelled through the exchange via the agricultural training schools, with which the exchange system would have a close relationship.[47]

Third, the National Council would work to keep men's and women's employment separate and make sure these this distinction was upheld in the provincial systems. At each level—national, provincial and local—separate departments would be set up for women. Women would be represented in each level's advisory body; the *Report* suggested that the provincial councils have eight members, two of whom would be women. The practical structure of the exchange system from the local office to National Council was to be streamed according to sex: each would keep its own accounts, statistics and employer-employee contacts; each office would keep separate entrances for men and women. The labour exchange system would maintain and promote the sexual division of labour.[48] Fourth, the National Council would ensure that all provincial exchange systems maintained their "neutrality" from capital and labour. This amounted to informing applicants of industrial disputes before they were sent to a job: "that is," read the *Report*, "to register vacancies created by a strike or lockout, and give applicants for work formal notice of the dispute." The system could not appear to favour either employers or workers or it would atrophy from boycotts bred from suspicion: the "system must rest on the confidence of workmen and employers...[;] distrust of either would be fatal."[49] The limits of neutrality were never explored by the *Report*, but there were lengths to which the exchange system would not go in order to please some workers. Governing bodies at all levels, for instance, were to ensure that the system not degenerate into a "clearing house for unemployables". Exchanges would divorce themselves from charity; "men should be sent to situations because they can fill them satisfactorily, and not merely because their need for work is great."[50] Each exchange was also expected to root out "undesirables" and "shirkers" who would be given compulsory work to do.[51] In fact, the labour exchange movement was so biased by its material goals that neutrality was impossible. Movement advocates (like most progressives) believed that labour and capital were equally-potent partners

---

[46]Ontario Commission on Unemployment, *Report*, Part 2, 131.

[47]Ibid., Part 1, 37-38.

[48]Ibid., Part 2, 134 and Part 1, 45.

[49]Ibid., Part 1, 43-44.

[50]Ibid., Part 1, 42.

[51]Ibid., 44-45.

in the construction of a potentially-benign economy.

If the Ontario Commission *Report* was the key forum for labour exhange reform, its most important spokesperson was Bryce M. Stewart. Stewart was a researcher in the Federal Department of Labour and a slavish Beveridgian. Extensive studies and writings on unemployment, state labour exchanges and private employment agencies made him Canada's authority in the field.[52] When, as we shall see, the various provincial exchange systems were brought under the national control of the Employment Service of Canada (ESC), Stewart was the obvious choice for its director.[53] Unlike some American exchange advocates, Stewart believed that a state system could not hope to compete with commercial employment agencies. Agencies, he admitted, had provided a needed service, especially for immigrants during periods of economic expansion.[54] Like all North American labour market reformers, however, Stewart recognized that commercial agencies might undermine the work of state exchanges. To Stewart, the state had a natural right to control the employment market: he wrote in 1918 that even "if there were no long record of offense against private agencies, the majority of Canadian employment officials would still hold that the organization of communication between employers and employed is a natural monopoly of the state."[55] To this end, he stressed heavy regulation of private agencies,[56] and applauded municipal and provincial efforts

---

[52]Stewart wrote extensively on social reform, labour and employment. His work includes: "The Housing of our Immigrant Workers," Political Science Association *Papers and Proceedings* I, 1913; *Report of a Preliminary and General Social Survey of Port Arthur*, Methodist Church of Canada, 1913; "Distribution of Labour in Canada," *Labour Gazette* March 1915, 1063-73; "Public Employment Bureaus and Unemployment," *Canadian Municipal Journal*, October 1916, 522-23; "The Employment Service of Canada," *Queen's Quarterly* 27:1 (1919), 37-61; "The Problem of Unemployment," *Social Welfare*, March 1921; "Unemployment and Organization of the Labour Market," American Academy of Political and Social Sciences, *The Annals*, CVII (1923); *Unemployment Benefits in the United States: The Plans and their Settings* (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1930); *Statistical Procedure of Public Employment Offices* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1933); and "Administration of the Public Employment Service in Canada," in *Administration of Public Employment Offices and Unemployment Insurance*, Bryce Stewart (ed.) (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1935).

[53]For information on Bryce Stewart as a social reformer in the Queen's University mold, see Barry Glen Ferguson's "The New Political Economy and Canadian Liberal Democratic Thought: Queen's University, 1890-1925," Unpublished PhD Thesis, York University, 1982, 370-404. Stewart as civil servant has been sketched out briefly in J. L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 44-46, and in James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 19-22 and 37-40.

[54]Stewart, "The Employment Service...", 39.

[55]Ibid., 44.

[56]Stewart, "Public Employment Bureaus...", 522.

to control and limit agent activities through licencing.[57] Stewart agreed with Beveridge that labour recruitment should be rationalized throughout the Empire by way of an Imperial exchange network. But if Beveridge was happy to use the "colonies" as dumping grounds for the irreducible surplus, Stewart meant to use the network to defend against such British abuses. In the past, Stewart argued, "we have been unable to give proper guidance to intending immigrants [and] many have come whose training did not qualify them for success in Canada." Through an Imperial employment system, however, "it should be possible to reduce the number of these misfits."[58] Plans for an Imperial labour exchange system never went further than the level of rhetorical massage; like most efforts at imperial institution-building in these years, national concerns were incompatible and paramount. However, Stewart's national efforts were rewarded, as his and the vision of other exchange advocates were largely realized.

After the publication of the Ontario Commission *Report*, and because war-related labour demands increased in 1916, the steps toward a national exchange system were taken quickly. Provincial governments were encouraged by Stewart and the federal labour department to set up their own bureaus, which would eventually be brought under a federal-provincial cost-sharing plan.[59] Ontario acted quickly by opening eleven bureaus in eighteen months after 1916. British Columbia followed suit when it created its own Department of Labour, and with it, provisions for a provincial employment system. The British Columbia Returned Soldiers' Aid Commission of 1916 had helped to apply pressure for a labour exchange network to help with future demobilization.[60] The first BC labour exchange was opened in Vancouver in July 1918.[61] By 1918, only the Maritimes and Quebec did not have provincial networks.

A parallel legislative effort was made to curtail the activities of commercial employment agencies. By war's end, Quebec and Ontario had taken a regulatory hold over agencies. The four western provinces

---

[57]For the history of regulations meant to control agencies in Canada, see R. A. Rigg, "Canada's Experience with Private Employment Offices," *Labour Gazette* April 1926, 331-35, and Udo Sautter, "The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada, 1900-1920," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 6, 1980. The 1913 Dominion Immigration Act requiring agents serving immigrants to meet a mountain of clerical regulations was "highly satisfactory" according to Stewart. See *Labour Gazette* March 1915, 1064, and Stewart, "The Employment Service...", 40.

[58]Stewart, "The Employment Service...", 57.

[59]See Ibid., 46. The 1918 Dominion Employment Offices Co-ordination Act set aside funds for the maintenance of provincial offices. Ottawa's allotment to any province was not to exceed one-half of the provincial expenditure. It is unlikely many provinces would have built employment systems without this encouragement. Ibid.

[60]See British Columbia *Sessional Papers* 1916, 6 Geo. 5, J9-10.

[61]Sautter, "The Origins of...", 103-04 and Stewart, *Statistical Procedure of...*, 156.

went several steps further by passing laws making it illegal for agents to charge fees for their services.[62] Commercial agents were still reeling from the depression of 1913–15, and very little was needed to push most out of business. In Ontario, the burdens of regulation infected economic wounds to eliminate most of those agents operating in 1912. In British Columbia the commercial employment business had its legs cut out from under it—by 1921 less than a quarter of the agents active in 1912 were still in business. Many of the remaining agents in BC were Asians dealing in casual Oriental labour—a sector that authorities were unable or uninterested in patrolling. The labour exchange movement saw its vision realized by the end of the war.

Udo Sautter demonstrates that war-time economic and political pressures were responsible for the creation of the Employment Service of Canada in 1918. Concern, first, with manpower distribution and later with post-war demobilization brought the Canadian State into the employment market.[63] Apart from the timing of its creation, however, the ESC was the direct heir of an international labour exchange movement. The Service took its structure from that recommended by the Ontario Unemployment Commission, which was heavily informed by British and American exchange advocates. The Service's director, Bryce Stewart ensured the application of accepted Beveridgian principles.[64] The elimination of commercial employment agencies was never the primary aim of the movement or the ESC: competitive, inefficient and parochial, the commercial agent was simply a stumbling block to be pushed out of the path of the "new era". No better statement of this vision was made than Frank Beer's in *The New Era in Canada*:

> The plan advocated is the adoption of national co-operative methods and ideals as a substitute for class and self-centred individualism. The benefits of the competitive system have already reached their apex. The future lies with that country which most wisely organizes its material and human resources, recognizing the solidarity of the interests of society in co-operative effort and the conduct of public business. Democratic government calls for better, not less, organization.[65]

---

[62]Sautter, "The Origins of...", 110.

[63]Ibid., 110–11.

[64]Ibid., 108.

[65]John Ormsey Miller (ed.), *The New Era in Canada* (London: Dent, 1917).

***

The international labour exchange movement helped to legitimize the words and actions of local critics of commercial agencies in Vancouver before and during the war. And while the following chapters will show that the pressure of local opinion was paramount in the in the attack on agencies, the wider labour exchange movement sealed their fate by providing a 'scientific' alternative to commercial agencies. It would have been remarkable had British Columbia not danced to the music of the labour exchange movement, and, indeed, by 1919 few Vancouver agencies remained. The reasons for their decline, however, are complex. As we shall see, most were devastated by depression, and all were left friendless by local public opinion. Not until after World War Two would Vancouver's employment agencies proliferate again.

CHAPTER III

AN OVERVIEW OF VANCOUVER'S EMPLOYMENT BUSINESS, 1898-1915

This chapter outlines the broad contours of Vancouver's employment business between 1898 and 1915. As can be seen by Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter, the number of agencies grew dramatically after 1898. Only five agencies operated in the city in 1898, but by 1905 fifteen existed; and, in the spring of 1910, thirty-five competed for business.[1] However, these figures obscure the temporary nature of most employment businesses. Throughout the 1898-1915 period, fully 138 agencies opened and, often quickly, closed their doors for business. The average lifespan of the Vancouver employment agency was less than three years. Many opened only for one season—especially those which operated as adjuncts to other ventures—most often real estate offices. A number of agents were far more enduring, however, and this helped to cement their position in a business where familiarity was an asset. Thus, some twenty or so names dominated the Vancouver labour business during the period. Had one been looking for work between 1898 and 1915, many of these men or women would have been familiar. If the names meant little, the location of their agencies were common knowledge. In fact, there were far fewer locations than individuals or businesses during the period—location was a key to success in the employment business, and certain key addresses were the homes of many different agencies.[2] The contours of the employment

---

[1]Information on the numbers, names and activities of the Vancouver employment business have been finessed from a number of primary sources. Since employment agencies were such marginal endeavors, no business or personal records were left. However, agents did use classified advertisements; this study is based on a long and rather pedestrian compilation of over twenty years of newspaper advertisements. Three Vancouver newspapers were used: The Vancouver *World*, The *News Advertiser* and the *Province*. Information from these newspaper sources was correlated with an exhaustive name and street search drawn from *Wrigleys* and *Hendersons* Directories over the same period. The result is, I hope, a near-complete picture of Vancouver's employment business in its broad outline.

[2]Because actual numbers of workers placed by **all** agencies cannot be determined from available sources, a rise and fall in the **number** of agencies has been used to measure industry growth. Growth in the number of agencies indicates a perceived increased opportunity for profits and, we assume, an increased use of agencies by employers and job-seekers. Conversely, a decline in the number of agencies indicates a decline in demand for agency services. Had the war and its initial depression not interrupted 'normal' industry growth patterns, it is likely that a handful of agencies would have come to dominate the employment business. However, a movement towards monopolization is not evident for the period under study; the number of agencies reflects their use by workers and employers. Some humanitarian critics of employment agents have argued that fluctuations in the numbers of offices had little to do with demand and more to do with the supply of men and

business were dictated by the demands of Vancouver's local and regional economy. This chapter, then, is concerned with the impact of cyclical and seasonal patterns, as well as labour market structures, on the shape of Vancouver employment agencies between 1898 and 1915.

Cyclical Patterns

The growth and decline of agencies in Vancouver parallel patterns of city growth between 1898 and 1915. Robert McDonald has offered a periodization of Vancouver's economic history which is helpful to understanding the ebb and flow of agency growth.[3] After an initial period of internally-generated growth and subsequent decline, Vancouver emerged as the metropolitan centre of the growing resource economy. This initial growth period—1898–1907--was first fuelled by the Klondike gold rush and then sustained by the new prairie demand for forest products. As well, salmon canning, railroad construction, and wholesale merchandizing tied Vancouver to the provincial and, ultimately, continental markets.[4] Vancouver's workforce reflected this metropolitan connection to the provincial resource economy. The city became the regional employment centre for railway, logging, sawmill and shingle, and cannery workers. "By 1900," writes McDonald, "new railroad and shipping ties had solidified Granville's earlier function as a labour distribution and service hub. The Terminal City became the 'centralization point for all men seeking work' on the transcontinental railway, as well as the place from which workers headed to coastal fish canneries and logging camps."[5]

Agency activity in the city before 1898 was little and sporadic. No more than three or four agencies operated at the same time; and virtually all of those that did dabbled in the labour business as a supplement to other, more important concerns. For instance, Mason and Johnson Real Estate added "employment agency" to their shingle in the fall of 1889, promising employers to furnish "free of charge, all Hotels, mills, merchants, contractors, manufacturers, masters of boats etc. with good reliable men and

---

[2](cont'd) women willing to run such disreputable offices. Why people became employment agents, given the trade's poor reputation, is an interesting question. However, the growth of the entire sector demands a more systemic explanation—one which relates job intermediaries to labour market conditions.

[3]R.A.J. McDonald, "Business Leaders in Early Vancouver, 1886–1914," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1978, 75–117.

[4]McDonald, 75–96. Also see, Robert McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver, 1886–1914: Urbanization and Class in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 69–70 (1986), 35 and James Robert Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action in the Working Class of Vancouver, British Columbia, 1900–1919," Ph.D. Dissertation, Carleton University, 1986, 120–197.

[5]McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver...", 39. The quotation is from the *Vancouver Daily Province*, August 6, 1912, 1.

domestic servants, such as workmen, cooks, teamsters, and laborers."[6] However, Mason and Johnson's true interest was in the real estate market, as it was for most of the part-time agents in the city. Still, neither of the partners ever abandoned the employment business: Mason surfaced on his own in 1893 as a "Real Estate, Commission and Employment Broker and Auctioneer"; Johnson, for his part, emerged in 1898 with the odd combination of "Employment Agent, Gardenhose and Sprinklers."[7] Early agencies did not specialize. The Klondike gold rush and, later, the building boom on the prairies initiated a period of moderate growth in the employment business. Some fifty agents opened their doors for business between 1898 and 1907. The summer of 1906 saw thirty agencies in business. Part-time agencies were still a persistent feature, as chronic labour shortages made the employment business appear an attractive venture to many. For this reason, agencies continued to be short-term endeavors, the average lifespan for the part-time agency seldom exceeding a year. By the fall of 1907, a continent-wide recession had begun, abruptly ending the prosperity of the past decade or so. "A month ago everything was booming," claimed the December 1907 edition of *Westward Ho*, "now nearly all native industries have closed down. Smelting, lumbering and logging are at a complete standstill, and mining has been reduced by at least two-thirds."[8] The metropolitan connections of Vancouver's economy were painfully revealed as hundreds of unemployed workers crowded into the city's eastside between 1907 and 1908.[9] By the autumn of 1908, Mayor Bethune felt compelled to place notices in newspapers across western Canada warning "all parties that the labour market in Vancouver is rather overdone, and [that] no inducement can be offered for labourers before, at least, next March or April."[10]

The economic slump of 1907-8 hurt the Vancouver employment business. Yet, the total number of active agencies was inflated by fringe players in the real estate business who entered the employment business on a part-time basis before and during the recession in order, presumably, to profit from the pools of unemployed men through registration fees. If this was the reason, it backfired on the twelve real estate agents who added employment to their land businesses. Faced with an angry army of the unemployed lined up outside their door, virtually all dropped the agency label as quickly as they had picked it up. The bulk of the thirteen agencies that permanently closed in 1907 was made up of these land offices (see Table

---

[6]*World* January 4, 1990.

[7]*World* August 1, 1893; and June 1, 1898.

[8]Cited in Patricia E. Roy, "Vancouver: 'The Mecca of the Unemployed,' 1907-1929," *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, Alan F. J. Artibise, ed. (Regina: University of Regina, 1981), 394.

[9]Ibid., 393-95.

[10]Cited in Eleanor Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," *BC Studies* 51 (Autumn 1981), 7.

3.3(f)). Because of the buoyant land market after 1908, the real estate agent did not enter the employment business again. The effects of the 1907–08 recession underline the fagility of Vancouver's employment agencies. One bad year or one bad season could push most agencies out of business.

When economic growth returned in the spring of 1909, it did so with a vengeance. The 1909–1912 period of city growth—what McDonald dubs the "Triumph of the Speculator"—was fueled by heavy speculative investment, both in local real estate and in regional resource development.[11] Construction in the city boomed and building trades' employment soared. While fish canning's share of the provincial workforce declined, the forest industry rebounded from the 1907–8 recession to become the province's leading resource sector. In addition, writes James Conley, between 1909 and 1912 British Columbia became "a gigantic railway construction camp," as the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern railways were pushed through to their completion. Vancouver was at the centre of this regional boom; the combination of internal and externally-connected growth pushed the city's population from 66,000 in 1908 to over 120,000 in 1912.[12]

Economic growth brought with it a lively employment market. The *British Columbia Magazine*, with tongue in cheek, warned "hoboes" to avoid Vancouver as "work stares in your face from every labor agent's window. If you come here," the report continued, "you are likely to get shanghaid into a logging camp or a railway construction camp and put to work...."[13] The employment business in Vancouver grew in response to the overall expansion of the employment market. At the end of 1908, twenty-four full-time agencies were operating, but just barely. With few job opportunities, most were not advertising at all. Five new agencies did open in 1908, yet all but one closed before the spring of 1909. The economic upswing in 1909 brought this decline to an end and began a dramatic upswing in the employment business. In all, forty-nine new agencies opened their doors for business between 1909 and 1912 (see Table 3.2). Closings remained fairly high as well—due, in part, to competition and, as we shall see, the inability to survive seasonal slowdowns. Even so, the total number in each of these boom years never dipped below thirty; in 1912, a record thirty seven agencies opened their doors. Had regular winter work slowdowns not inflated the tally of failures, the total number might have even been higher. Increased specialization and cut-throat competition between agents serving similar employment sectors characterized the labour business in this period. In addition, some of the agents associated with the years 1909–1912 were recent arrivals to the city; a handful of these agents became well known simply by their last names—Maloney, Sells, Waine and Hicks—and their advertising stressed this. In many ways, the employment business took on the appearance of a popularity contest between rival agents in the boom years between 1909 and

---

[11]McDonald, "Business Leaders...", 97–117.

[12]Ibid., 97.

[13]Cited in Bartlett, 7.

1913—the golden age of the Vancouver employment agent.

The boom collapsed at the end of 1912, as the pre-war depression based partly on European uncertainty shattered investor confidence. Vancouver was hit hard by the contraction of capital. "The real estate markets and construction industries," writes McDonald, "were hit first, and hardest, when the financial stringency began...credit became scarce and prices plummeted."[14] The completion of both west-bound railways by 1914 did not help the job situation; work on the Pacific Great Eastern stopped as well. With the sharp decline in building construction, both in Vancouver and on the prairies, logging, sawmilling and shingle-milling activity dropped off dramatically.[15] The outbreak of war in August 1914 only served to accelerate the depression. An estimated 4000 unemployed packed into Vancouver's east end by December 1914, and many more were leaving the city in search of work elsewhere.[16] It was not until 1916 that some prosperity returned in the form of local military contracts and tightening commodity markets world-wide.

The employment business for men was all but wiped out by the 1913-1915 depression. Agencies were the children of employer demand—without demand, the business died. Poorly funded and built too close to the economic ground, employment agencies felt the depression immediately. Twelve of the thirty-four agencies in 1912 did not re-open their doors in 1913. Twenty agents were still registered in the directories and newspapers in 1915; but, as in 1907-8, most of these were probably inactive. An important exception were a few agencies dealing in women (mostly domestic) workers. These agencies continued to advertise aggressively as the employment market for low-paid domestic workers remained fairly strong during much of the 1913-1915 depression.[17] The more seasoned women's agents, such as Katherine Maloney or Alta Crawford, moved from 1912 to 1913 and 1914 with relative ease—their experience seems typical of the women's employment business as a whole. More will be said of women's agencies later in this chapter.

A renewed period of agency growth did not accompany the return of prosperity under 'war capitalism' in 1916. Rather, the provincial and federal governments, as well as the employers themselves,

---

[14]McDonald, "Business Leaders...", 114.

[15]Roy, 398.

[16]Patricia Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980), 87.

[17]Table 3.3 indicates that, in fact, half of those agencies dealing in women's work did not re-open in 1913. But the data misleads here: of the eight women's agencies operating in 1912, two were new that year and one had never dealt in women workers before—and probably did so in 1912 because of stiff competition in the male trade. Neither of the new agencies survived into 1913, and the newcomer to the female field returned to male labour by the spring of 1913.

took over the role of labour distribution. For this reason, the number of agencies continued to decline from 1916 on. Commercial agencies continued to have a role in the post-war period, but that role was very much reduced in size and function. By 1924, numbers were down to the pre-1900 levels, not to rise again until after World War Two. Thus, the history of the commercial job go-between really ends in 1915. Government legislation in 1918 aimed at outlawing the fee-charging agency served only to maintain what was accomplished by the 1913-15 depression.

Seasonal Patterns

In addition to long-range fluctuations, the employment business was also shaped by short-term seasonal patterns within the regional economy. "On top of cyclical economic flutuations," writes Eleanor Bartlett, "were more regular seasonal variations. The province's resource industries were active primarily in the spring, summer and early fall. When winter closed these operations, the workers flocked to Vancouver to find other work or to spend their unemployment."[18] The local construction industry was also plagued by seasonal layoffs. In 1903, for example, rain curbed building for four months. And seasonal layoffs were not always the result of bad winter weather. In the autumn heat of 1909, all work on the upper section of the Grand Trunk Pacific stopped because water levels had fallen to such an extent that supplies could not be brought up river. [19]

During the winter months, the population of Vancouver's east-side swelled with out-of-work transients. Even in boom times, the problem of seasonal unemployment could become acute. In the winter of 1909-10, for instance, the Vancouver Associated Charities reported an increase of transients over the previous recessionary year.[20] Associated Charity Superintendent MacMahon showed the then-appropriate concern, arguing "the time had come for a sorting process... to get the sheep away from the goats to discourage the efforts of professional beggars."[21] Not insignificantly, the organization suggested a free civic labour bureau be established to "systematize" the declining level of aid.[22] The local employment market took on a strange appearance during the winter months. Gone were real jobs from newspaper want ads; in their place appeared a plethora of so-called "business chances"—mostly commissioned sales positions for "men of the hustling kind". Most of these "opportunities" were offered

---

[18]Bartlett, 8.

[19]*News Advertiser* December 1, 1909.

[20]*News Advertiser* January 25, 1910. The A.C. reported 809 cases in 1908 and, as of January 24, 843 cases in 1909.

[21]*News Advertiser* December 14, 1909, 5.

[22]Ibid.

up by companies outside the province, with the result that the job market as revealed in newspapers took on an international character in the winter months.

The Vancouver employment agent responded to yearly seasonal layoffs by going into another line of work, going into hibernation, or going out of business. With the exception of agencies dealing in female domestic labour—who followed their own seasonal patterns quite distinct from male workers—employment agencies were fair-weather friends to resource workers. For instance, in the late summer of 1910, William Waine, proprietor of the International Employment Bureau, launched what he called "the largest and most modern labor bureau in Canada." In a series of display advertisements in local newspapers, Waine begged for the "patronage of laboring men for milling, logging, railroad and construction camps." To attract the employer, Waine boasted of clean private offices for employers to "meet" their prospective employees.[23] By November, however, all evidence of the International Employment Bureau's existence had disappeared. In fact, every winter since he came to the city in 1906 saw Waine slip into an occupational hibernation. The same can be said for all the agencies whose livelihood was linked to seasonal industries—which meant virtually all unskilled and most skilled male labour. Thus, for example, thirty-five agencies were active from April to October 1911; yet in the later November-March period only seven bothered to advertise, and of these five were requesting counter-seasonal (mostly domestic) workers. Seasonal fluctuations were potential killers of agencies regardless of the economy's activity the rest of the year. The attrition rate hovered between twenty-five and thirty-five per cent throughout the period. The highest percentage of closings occurred in 1907 (a recession year) and 1912 (a boom year) when over fifty per cent of agencies permanently closed down (see Table 3.2(d)). Insufficient savings to carry the business through seasonal layoffs made the winter months a graveyard for employment agents—especially those dealing in male workers.

Women's agencies were shaped by different yearly patterns. As we shall see, domestic labour and the agents who supplied it followed middle-class household rhythms and family patterns which had a seasonality all their own. Indeed, the Christmas season was, perhaps, the most active time of year for domestic agents, as extra help was employed to meet the needs of the city's west-side social calender. The shortage of domestic and restaurant help was particularly acute in the winter of 1911-12. Louise Neily's B.C. Female Employment Office responded by running regular newspaper display advertisements for the month of January 1912. One such advertisement made plain the urgent need that day for "5 family cooks, 14 generals, 6 waitresses and numerous children's nurses."[24] In contrast, male employment agencies in the same month were desperate, dying or dead. Harry Meaker's Vancouver Employment Agency was thin enough to try anything. The same day as Neily's itemized want ad, Meaker pleaded with employers to

---

[23] *News Advertiser* October 15, 1910.

[24] *World* January 22, 1912.

"phone in orders—urgently." A week later, he announced to the "ladies of Vancouver... a free registration office for all kinds of female help, such as nurses, cooks, waitresses, chambermaids and general housework by day, hour or week."[25] Just how successful Meaker's foray was is unclear. One thing is certain: few agents dealing in male workers ventured into the women's employment market to supplement their business. Inexperience in the field, inappropriate locations and the perception of stiff competition from existing women's agencies prevented them from doing so.

The employment business, therefore, heaved and sighed along with the long-term cyclical and short-term seasonal patterns of the regional economy. Most agents lacked the means to ride out the roller-coaster economic ride in Vancouver and, as a result, the rate of success in the employment business was very low. Employment agencies were so marginal, most only operated when there was a surplus of jobs. Still, some did re-appear year after year. They were able to do so, in part, because they filled a necessary function—within the local and regional economy, and within the lives of workers themselves.

Segregated Labour Market Patterns

In his study of the American employment business, Tomas Martinez argues that pre-World War One agencies in eastern industrial cities were divided according to sex.[26] Martinez claims that the applicants, agents, employers, agency locations, fee rates and placement techniques were quite different for 'unskilled' men and women domestic workers. The employment business, thus, achieved a level of specialization before World War One that mirrored a structural division within the labour market—in this case, a division based directly on gender and indirectly on skill. The Vancouver experience was no different. Yet Vancouver's regional resource and railway development attracted an inexpensive, large-scale Asian labour force which, in turn, demanded its own employment market. Gillian Crease's work on the Vancouver labour market supports this conclusion:

> Sex segregation was a feature of the labour market in British Columbia as it was in the rest of the country and indeed throughout the industrial world. But the British Columbia labour market was also firmly segregated on the basis of race. The major racial division was drawn between Asian workers, from China, Japan and, in lesser numbers, India, and 'white' workers of European extract[ion], predominantly of British origin.[27]

---

[25] *News Advertiser* January 29, 1912.

[26] Tomas Martinez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), 18-33.

[27] Gillian Creese, "Race, Gender and Socialism in British Columbia," Unpublished Paper, 1988, 3.

Vancouver's employment business reflected the racial and sexual divisions of the regional labour market, and comprised three three general agency sectors: Asian, European male and European female. Because the Asian immigrant working class was overwelmingly male, there were no Asian women's agencies.

James Conley, in his work on the Vancouver working class, agrees that labour market segments were defined by sex and race. Conley suggests, however, that functional catagories of occupation and skill also helped to divide workers—more often within each of the three segments, but sometimes across them as well. Thus, writes Conley, "divisions by racial and ethnic group, by gender, and by skill each involved distinctive labour market, consumption, consumption market, and workplace practices that reinforced and signified each other."[28] Vancouver's employment business was responsive to sectoral and skill divisions within the labour market. Agencies dealing in European males, for instance, achieved a moderate degree of sector specialization: distinct railway, logging and mining agencies emerged after 1908. The same could be said of women's employment, as new clerical agencies separate from domestic ones first developed just before World War One. Generally speaking, skill was not reflected in the structure of the Vancouver employment business, which catered to jobs defined as 'unskilled' because of their high rates of turnover. Even this generalization is questionable, however: as we shall see, male agencies dealt in mechanics enough to threaten provincial union officials. Furthermore, household workers have not traditionally been defined as skilled, even though their skills were considerable and varied. Vancouver's employment business developed to serve the structural divisions within the labour market.

The three sectors of the employment business expanded and contracted to reflect their specific labour market conditions. As Table 3.3 indicates, the peak years for Asian agencies (but not necessarily Asian employment) were between 1906 and 1910, when these made up about forty per cent of all active employment agencies. Their strength in these peak years reflected a number of new Japanese agencies in 1906–07. For cultural and economic reasons there was a tendency towards large Asian labour businesses—particularly at the height of immigrant waves. Also, Chinese and Japanese labour contractors often operated a number of other businesses, and were more prominent members of their business communities than their European counterparts. For these reasons, the number of Asian employment agencies remained more constant through the period. The decline in the total number of Asian agencies after 1910 was accomplished at the expense of Japanese agencies when immigration, and the economy attached to that, declined. While their numbers declined after 1910, Asian agencies continued to persist after the creation of the Employment Service of Canada in 1918 (see Table 3.3(d)). The Employment Service of Canada was uninterested in finding Asians jobs; in fact, the public labour exchange maintained a

---

[28]James Conley, "'More theory, less fact'? Social reproduction and class conflict in a sociological approach to working-class history," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13 (1-2), 1988, 90.

tradition at the municipal and provincial levels of excluding Orientals from the labour market.

The number of agencies dealing in European male labour peaked between 1909 and 1913, when they made up around fifty-five per cent of all active agencies (See Table 3.3(c)). This sector of the employment business was more closely linked to long-term and seasonal fluctuations than were those serving Asians. For one thing, Asians worked at such low wage scales that they and their agents were often less affected by economic downturns than those serving European males. Also, the Asian employment business was vertically integrated, allowing agents to profit from a worker's temporary idleness through accommodation, food and travel fees. The same was not true of the white male employment business. These agencies typically contracted with prospective employees only once when money, usually a dollar, was exchanged for job information. White agencies were less inclined, unlike their Asian counter-parts, to profit from their clients from the boat to the grave. The decline of European male agencies between 1913 and 1915 was sharp. By the end of the war only four were in operation.

The employment business for women was always strong. Very low wages, chronic shortages of domestic help and, after the 1907-08 recession, an expansion of alternative job areas for women kept the business buoyant through good and bad times alike. If newspaper want ads are to be believed, the supply of women workers before 1907 was entirely inadequate to meet the demand for domestic help. After the turn of the century, when the Chinese domestic became unfashionable and, possibly, indiscrete, the demand for female domestics became insatiable. Still, the difficulty of finding women to fill positions, as well as the YWCA's involvement in the placement business, kept commercial agents out of the field until the second decade of the century. The peak years of the women's employment business were not until 1911-15, when numbers rose to match the declining Asian agencies (see Table 3.3). More important than numbers, however, was the apparent strength of women's agencies over the 1911-15 period. Katherine Maloney's Universal Female Employment Office, Alta Crawford's Central Female Employment Agency and Emma Smith's Agency—three important agencies—appeared so active during the 1913-15 depression that all other agencies, male or female, Asian or European, were dwarfed in comparison.

***

The next four chapters offer a more detailed look at the two European sectors of Vancouver's employment business. In the case of men's agencies (Chapters 4 and 5), the activities of agents raised the attention of vocal critics who called for their regulation and/or abolition. These critics raised humanitarian and economic concerns that belied narrower self-serving motives. Men's agents were more sinned against than sinning. The agencies for white women (Chapters 6 and 7) women never achieved the same notoriety. The 1912 British Columbia Commission on Labour, created in part to investigate commercial agencies, completely ignored their existence. However, behind this overt silence lay an indirect critique of women's agencies by organized women's reform and charity groups—particularly the Young Women's Christian Association—who condemned agencies on moral grounds.

TABLE 3.1

Employment Agency Growth—1898-1924

Year	Total	Year	Total	Year	Total
(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
1898	5	1907	34	1916	15
1899	8	1908	26	1917	14
1900	9	1909	30	1918	11
1901	9	1910	35	1919	8
1902	13	1911	35	1920	7
1903	14	1912	37	1921	5
1904	17	1913	28	1922	5
1905	15	1914	22	1923	4
1906	30	1915	20	1924	4

Source: Vancouver City Directories; Newspaper Classified Ads.

TABLE 3.2

Agency Openings and Closings: 1898-1924

Year	Total	Open[29]	Close[30]	Year	Total	Open	Close
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
1898	5	–	–	1912	37	12	14
1899	8	3	–	1913	28	5	8
1900	9	1	1	1914	22	2	5
1901	9	1	1	1915	20	3	5
1902	13	5	2	1916	15	–	4
1903	14	3	–	1917	14	3	3
1904	17	3	4	1918	11	–	3
1905	15	2	4	1919	8	–	1
1906	30	19	9	1920	7	–	2
1907	34	13	13	1921	5	–	–
1908	26	5	8	1922	5	–	1
1909	30	12	9	1923	4	–	–
1910	35	14	11	1924	4	–	2
1911	35	11	10				

Source: Vancouver City Directories; Newspaper Classified Ads.

[29]First year open

[30]Last year open

TABLE 3.3

White Male, Asian and Women's Agencies: 1898–1924

Year	Total	Male	Asian	Women	Real Estate
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
1898	5	3	1	1	–
1899	8	4	2	2	–
1900	9	4	4	1	–
1901	9	4	4	1	–
1902	13	7	6	–	–
1903	14	6	8	–	–
1904	17	6	8	2	1
1905	15	6	8	1	–
1906	30	11	12	1	6
1907	34	14	13	1	6
1908	26	11	12	1	2
1909	30	14	12	4	–
1910	35	18	13	3	1
1911	35	20	9	6	–
1912	37	19	7	11	–
1913	28	17	6	5	–
1914	22	12	6	4	–
1915	20	12	4	4	–
1916	15	7	4	4	–
1917	14	7	4	3	–
1918	11	5	4	2	–
1919	8	4	4	1	–
1920	7	4	3	–	–
1921	5	2	3	–	–
1922	5	2	3	–	–
1923	4	1	3	–	–
1924	4	1	3	–	–

Source: Vancouver City Directories; Newspaper Classified Ads.

CHAPTER IV

MEN'S EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES IN ACTION

Unfavourable animal metaphors abound in humanitarian discussions of employment agencies. Agents for white male workers were often called *sharks*; and like sharks they were thought to be ruthless. Typical abuses, it was argued, included: fee splitting (a labour turnover game played with camp foremen at the expense of workers); misrepresentation of the existence or nature of jobs; adjustable fee rates to best exploit more desperate or more gullible workers; refusal to return fees to disappointed clients; and theft of workers' possessions.[1] Beyond these specific accusations were more general humanitarian complaints against white agents. Contrary to Asian labour contractors, who were not seen to be in conflict with their worker clients, European employment agents were offered as ethnic *parasites* feeding off their countrymen. In his study of railway camps, Edmund Bradwin described the European agent as a "smooth-tongued individual, rich in dialects, who... is not unlike the trained *steer* of the stockyards which decoys into chosen channels its kindred brutes, yet always to its own advantage."[2] In fact, if surnames are any indication, most of Vancouver's white agents were Canadians or Americans of British origin.

Critics argued that employment agents dealt only in unskilled labour and, consequently, could get away with abuses—a belief which implied that skilled workers would never accept such treatment. "Employment offices," claimed M. Allerdale Grainger in his 1906 novel, *Woodsmen of the West*, "are below contempt—they are for men strange to the country, incompetents, labourers, farm hands, and the like."[3] Grainger was quite correct, employment agencies placed all these. However, they often found jobs

---

[1]For a detailed examination of these traditional complaints in the American context, see Tomas Martinez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), 43-56. For the traditional view of abuse by agencies in the Canadian context, see Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: a study of work and pay in the camps of Canada, 1903-1914* (New York: AMS Press (re-issue), 1968), 54-61.

[2]Bradwin, 57. The emphasis is mine.

[3]Martin Allerdale Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 17. Grainger quick dismissal of loggers's agencies is curious. The narrator (Mart) condemns employment agents, yet boards the north-bound steamer with little hope of finding work himself. In all, Mart spends two or three times what he would have spent had he visited a city agency. One wonders if the dismissal of employment agencies was done for narrative reasons. Had Mart secured work through a Vancouver agent there would have been little damatic tension early in the story: the extended stay at the Hanson Island Hotel would not

for skilled workers as well—enough for trades unions to feel threatened by their activities. In any case, the unskilled "brutes" who used agencies were not as docile as Bradwin implied. On more than one occasion workers expressed their collective 'concern' over an agent's transgression. For instance, four men wrecked the interior of an agent's office when he did not return a fee. The employment agent, for simple business as well as persuasive physical reasons, often had to play the employment game by the workers' rules. The traditional view of the omnipotent employment ***shark*** is not accurate.

On the economic side, white male employment agencies were seen by their critics as primary contributors to wasteful labour turnover. The endemic practice of fee-splitting was responsible, union officials, progressives and large employers claimed, for high levels of worker transiency. "One crew going, one coming, and one working"—a common expression of labour conditions at the time—was blamed on the employment agent.[4] The agent's activities were linked, therefore, to economic waste and inefficiency. Yet, there were better reasons for worker transiency than the game of fee-splitting. Foremen and workers argued that work and camp conditions, deplorable food, and the lure of opportunities elsewhere explained labour turnover. The employment agent was a convenient enemy on which to hang any number of failures, and a convenient foil for groups hoping to improve their position in the battle over economic power. Labour leaders, progressive reformers and large employers covered their narrower self-serving intentions with a garb of humanitarianism. This chapter, then, is an examination of white male employment agents, who they were, what they did and why they did it. The following chapter explores the the emotional debate over agency activities which erupted between 1911 and 1913.

Employment agencies which dealt primarily in white male labour are listed in Appendix 1. Of the thirty or so agencies operating after the 1907-08 recession, fifteen stand out as the main actors in the employment business. These key companies and their various proprietors are listed in Appendix 2. Based on evidence presented in Commission testimony and newspaper advertisements, these fifteen agencies approached or exceeded five hundred job placements per peak month (April to October). Fred Lilyman, Harry Welsh (Cosmopolitan), Herbert Hicks and Harry Meaker (Vancouver Employment) claimed before the Commission of around 800-1000 placements per peak month. Based on the volume of advertised jobs

---

[3](cont'd) have happened, and with it much of Mart's character development and the riotous character of loggers at play would have disappeared. As it was, Mart's up-country job search served a number of story-related purposes.

[4]Worker transiency was a major theme of the 1912 British Columbia Commission on Labor, testimony from which makes up much of this chapter (hereafter known as Labor Commission testimony). The quotation in the BC context is attributed to Richard Quance, operator of Quance Lumber Company in Nakusp. Quance explained to the Commission: "That's an expression used to describe labor conditions in British Columbia. It means we have men coming and going nearly every week." Labor Commission testimony, Volume 6, file 12, 310.

in newspaper want ads, six other agencies—Canadian Pacific, Central, Canadian Northern, International, John Shields, and Wolstenholme—might have placed five hundred jobs or more a month at some point in their history. Indeed, if the newspapers are to be believed, at the peak of Sam Sells' business in the spring/summer of 1911, his Canadian Pacific Agency placed upwards of a thousand jobs per month.[5] The remaining five agencies have been included on the basis of their persistence and the strength of their advertising over a period of years. Together, these fifteen agencies dominated Vancouver's white male employment business between 1909 and 1913.

Agencies for white males were roughly divided between those who delivered labour to the massive Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Northern railway construction projects underway by 1908, and those who supplied men to logging, sawmilling and other forest-related industries. Thus, Charles Knight's Reliable Employment lived up to its name, reliably sending railway workers to the CPR and Grand Trunk Pacific for three busy seasons up to 1911.[6] Sam Sells' Canadian Pacific Employment belied its name, however, dealing exclusively after 1909 in lumber workers and loggers.[7] Of course, no agency dealt exclusively with one company or in one industrial sector for its entire history. The tendency was to begin as a miscellaneous agency and specialize over time as one's name became better known and employers presented more and bigger orders. Some agents never did specialize. William Waine, who boasted in 1911 of the "largest and best equipped office in B.C.," claimed that both railroad and sawmill workers were "a specialty". [8] Bigness was a virtue, but not an easy accomplishment, in the employment business. Waine, for instance, felt forced to argue his was "no hole in the wall office," as clearly most agencies were.[9] But Waine was an exception: the best-tread path to success followed a refinement, rather than an expansion of clientelle. Most agencies remained very small.

---

[5]Placements have been roughly calculated through the itemized advertisements that employment agents routinely placed in newspaper 'Help Wanted' advertisements. The Vancouver daily *World* and the *News Advertiser* were used in this calculation. Sam Sells' Canadian Pacific Employment used these ads more than any other agency. An analysis of Sells' job placements was attempted for two four-week periods: July 1911 and April 1913. Inconsistent advertising on Sells' part made it impossible to compare identical months over the two years, or compare seasonal differences over the same year. Nonetheless, the analysis provides some interesting information on numbers placed, frequency of placement, types of jobs offered and the like. An effort was made to avoid counting the same advertised job twice; still, since agents sometimes re-phrased job descriptions in order to entice workers, it cannot be guaranteed that the figures are without redundancy.

[6]See Reliable's display advertisement, *News Advertiser* October 9, 1911, Classifieds.

[7]See Sells' display advertisement in *News Advertiser* July 15, 1909, 3.

[8]*World* June 1, 1911, Classifieds.

[9]Ibid.

Agencies for white males were very competitive. Unlike the Japanese labour contractors who cooperated through commercial networks to divide the profits of migrant Japanese labour, white male employment agents made war on each other. Battle lines formed between agents fighting for the patronage of workers during good times, and for major employers when the economy slowed down. Obviously, competition was most intense between agencies dealing in similar types of work. For instance, in an effort to expand business throughout the province and, in some cases, to steal business away from other agents, a number of agencies employed commissioned salesmen to roam about the province securing orders from employers. The International and Canadian Pacific agencies were notorious for this. Apparently the practice became an annoyance to employers. One agent—Charles Knight of Reliable Labor—tried to capitalize on this sentiment, promising that "the old Reliable labor and Employment office has no canvassing agents whatsoever in its employ. The business is personally conducted by C.W. Knight its manager who carefully selects all help to fill its various orders." [10] Knight's appeal failed; ol' Reliable was gone before the year was out.

Agencies were suprisingly incestuous, given the often bitter competition between them. As Appendix 2 indicates, there was considerable intermingling of agents and their relatives, as they entered partnerships, left, joined other companies or formed new partnerships. Brothers of prominent agents sometimes received apprenticeships at other agencies. For instance, John Hanley, brother of Canadian Northern Employment's Dennis Hanley, began working as a clerk for Gagnon and Lamont's Central Labor Agency in 1912. The following year, John Hanley replaced Gagnon as a principal at Central; and in 1914 he replaced his brother Dennis as a partner in Canadian Northern Employment. New agents often entered the business as clerks at prominent agencies, where they learned the trade, gained a reputation with both workers and employers, and then left to form their own companies —usually in partnership with another agent. Terrence Conway began as a clerk in William Waine's agency in 1909. When Waine formed the International Employment Agency in 1910, Conway left to form his own company, T.J. Conway and Company. Brother Frank Conway joined Terrence in 1911, and both left the failing business in 1913 to do other things: Terrence ran a boarding house and Frank returned to his job as a CPR trackman.[11]

The occupational background of most agents is difficult to determine from available sources because agents, like workers, moved from place to place frequently. Evidence suggests, however, that most labour agents were workers themselves—before and after their stint as employment agents. Some toiled in white collar jobs before starting employment offices. For instance, Frank Robbins (Robbins and Robbins Employment) worked as a clerk in an east end real estate office before starting his labour business.[12] An

---

[10] *News Advertiser* April 15, 1911, Classifieds.

[11] Henderson's Directory, 1909–14.

[12] Information on agent occupational backgrounds has been pulled from city directories; see

agent with the unlikely name Adelard X La Brosse was a bookkeeper for a hardware wholesaler before he opened an agency in 1908; Alfred Sykes also worked as a bookkeeper before his stint with the Vancouver Employment Agency. More often, agents worked in skilled trades or, less frequently, as labourers before opening agencies. Frank Robbins' brother and partner George was a carpenter the year before he created Robbins and Robbins, as was Hugh McDonald of British American Employment Agency. Henry Downing worked as a warehouseman for a metal pipe manufacturer for a few years before launching the BC Employment Agency in 1910. Downing's partner, James Maddison, was a logger. Restaurant work was a popular pre-agent occupation: William Waine of the International cooked for several cafes in 1908 and 1909; Charles Knight began work in Vancouver as a rooming house cook in 1898, then as a cook in an east end restuarant and, finally, as a baker before opening his business in 1907. Employment agents were just as likely to slip back into the working class after their agencies failed. Lester Way got work as a carpet layer for the Hudson's Bay Company after his agency closed in 1915. James Burke left the Labor Exchange in 1916 to become a longshoreman, while Godfrey Sykes and Alfred Sykes (relation unclear) both left employment agencies in 1913 to work as a housepainter and streetcleaner respectively. The fact that agents were themselves part of the working class might not have affected how they treated other workers, but it does serve to complicate the simple, negative agent stereotype. Most agents would have known first-hand the difficulties of securing work, some would have carried common hostilities towards employers and others might have sympathized outright with their worker clients. Still, such working class affiliations were only as strong as the employment business allowed.

The career of Sam Sells of the Canadian Pacific Employment Agency (CanPac) illustrates the small scale of these agents, how self-interest determined their activites, and how competition between agencies shaped their businesses. Samuel Sells came to Vancouver in 1907 from places unknown. Very few of the major agents listed in Appendix 2 were long-time residents of Vancouver; all except Charles Knight came to the city less than five years before opening or joining an agency.[13] The small-time agencies not included in Appendix 2 comprised more long-time residents. It may be that a number of experienced agents came to the city from outside the province between 1907 and 1910, although this is difficult to substantiate. Perhaps Sam Sells was one of these.[14]

---

[12](cont'd) Henderson's and Wrigley's Directories, 1900-1920.

[13]Henderson's and Wrigley's Directories, 1907-1915.

[14]Possibly these agents knew each other from earlier days in the United States; certainly a common criticism aimed at employment agents was that they were American opportunists. James Lodge, a labourer on the Grand Trunk Pacific, complained to authorities in 1913 that employment agent abuses were "the most damning thing that could exist in the civilized world, and [are] done by no less than Americans." Lodge thought it a curse to "allow foreigners to come here and run an office privately which ought to be run by the government as a public office." Labor Commission testimony, Printed Correspondence, file 7.

Sells opened CanPac in 1907 and took Fred Olson in as a partner the following year. The two men stole a page from the immigrant labour contractors' handbook, buying the Home Comfort Lodging House in 1908 in an effort to integrate the company vertically. This was a measure of the competitive nature of the white male employment business. Rather than cooperate with boardinghouse keepers or other agents to divide the business functionally (as the Japanese did), European agents tried to create their own small business empires. To this end, Sells and Olson continued to operate boarding houses in conjunction with their agency until 1913, when provincial legislation barred licenced agents from owning any form of lodging business.[15] Even so, the two men bought and sold a bewildering number of boarding houses between 1908 and 1914: in succession from 1911 to 1913 came the Oxford Rooms, Sells and Olson Boarding House, Keefer Rooms, Workman Rooms, Wardrobe Rooms and Stockholm Rooms. Apparently in an effort to side-step the 1912 law, the two agents altered their names to confuse authorities. Thus, Fredrick Sells and Samuel Olson surfaced as owners of the Stockholm Rooms in 1913. This subterfuge was successful until 1915, when Sells abandoned the boarding house business entirely.[16]

CanPac dealt in all kinds of labour in many different industries during its first years of operation. Calling itself the "oldest and largest agency in the city"—which was untrue—CanPac's advertised appeals to employers in the spring of 1908 were for all types of workers: "skilled and common labor, oriental and asiatic labor if required."[17] That fall, however, CanPac joined in the fevered competition for the business of Foley, Welch and Stewart and their sub-contractors on the newly-announced Grand Trunk Pacific railway. Securing an exclusive Grand Trunk Pacific contract meant an eldorado to any agency; Premier McBride's proviso—that construction begin from west to east in British Columbia—signalled the competition for this fat contract. Before the announcement of construction on the Grand Trunk Pacific, the main railroad labour agent in the city was Alexander Calder. In the 1890s, Calder had sent men to construction and maintenance crews throughout the province. [18] Calder disappears from the historical record in 1900, but reappears early in 1908 as "the authorized agent for Foley, Welch and Stewart, Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Contractors."[19] It is unlikely that Calder actually secured an exclusive labour contract with the Grand Trunk Pacific. It is more likely he received periodic orders to send as many men

---

[15]Directories. On 1912 provincial legislation licencing and controlling employment agencies, see *Labour Gazette*, April 1913, 1103.

[16]Ibid. It is possible that the profits from real estate investment might have motivated Sells and Olson's involvement in boarding houses as much as the employment business; their rapid turnover of boarding houses during the period seems to point to this.

[17]See *News Advertiser*, May 5, 1908 and June 2, 1908, Classifieds.

[18]See, for instance, Calder's advertisement for 500 men to work on the Skagway and White Pass Railway, *News Advertiser*, July 1, 1898.

[19]Ibid., May 15, 1908 Classifieds.

as possible. The practice of railroad contractors was to duplicate orders over a number of agents, in order to inflate the amount of men arriving to the camps. All contractors complained of labour shortages—it was hoped that duplicating orders would help to increase labour supply.[20] This was the Grand Trunk Pacific strategy in the summer and fall of 1908. Testifying later to the Labor Commission, an agent for Foley, Welch and Stewart admitted duplicating orders to Vancouver agencies; because of this, said Donald McLeod, "there was a little dispute between the employment agents[,] a little mixture that had to be straightened out."[21] The 'mixture' began when Sells began to advertise Foley, Welch and Stewart orders in August 1908. To undercut Calder, Sells lowered his fee and offered reduced transportation fares to Prince Rupert.[22] Calder responded in kind, and for the next three months Calder, Sells and a few other agents fought a rhetorical war to secure workers. CanPac claimed a "job for everyone in Prince Rupert," providing, of course, the labour came to them first. Calder countered by lowering his fares further and re-emphasizing that he was "the *only* authorized agent for Foley, Welch and Stewart."[23] Sells responded under his motto, "We get the Men. We get the Jobs," claiming to have the cheapest tickets to Prince Rupert, and informing workers that his was the "most centrally located office in the city." Charles Knight's Reliable Employment joined the fray in September as the "largest [railway] Agency in the city," offering reduced steamship fares to Prince Rupert.[24]

The war over Grand Trunk Pacific workers petered out with the winter slowdown. By spring 1909, Calder was again fending off competitors, as Charles Knight and William Waine (International) continued to joust with Calder over railway workers. Eventually, Calder and the others would be pressured by Fred Lilyman who, in 1911, cut into much of the Grand Trunk Pacific's business.[25] Sam Sells did not rejoin the battle in 1909, however. Instead, CanPac turned to logging and mill workers. Why the agency took this turn is unclear. Certainly the demand for forestry workers was there; Sells or Olson also may have had connections with the industry. In any case, the move was a good one—from 1909 on CanPac was a major

---

[20]See the testimony presented by the representatives of four railway contractors to the Labor Commission: E.R. Ennis on the Kootenay Central, Volume 6, file 9, 21-26; Arthur Schact on the Kettle Valley, Volume 5, file 5, 90-92; Robert Armstrong on the Canadian Northern, Volume 4, file 3, pp. 291-92; and Donald McLeod on the Grand Trunk Pacific, Volume 6, file 12, pp. 325-31.

[21]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 6, file 12, 331.

[22]*News Advertiser* August 2, 1908, Classifieds.

[23]*News Advertiser* Classifieds, August to October.

[24]It is possible that the Grand Trunk Pacific provided agents with these reduced fares. However, there is no evidence of this—agents appearing in front of the Labour Commission claimed that railways did not forward fares to them.

[25]See Donald McLeod's evidence to the Labor Commission, Volume 6, file 12, 331.

actor in the Vancouver employment business.

The day-to-day system Sells and other agents used to bring worker and employer together also reveals the extent to which these businesses were governed by inter-agent rivalries and parochial concerns. Sells and his staff of one or two clerks received orders for work from employers either directly through the office, through the mail, or, most often, by telegram or telephone. Like all agencies, Sells bore the employer's communication and advertising costs.[26] While he seldom saw the employer face to face, Sells maintained contacts with employers through messages in classified ads. For instance, Sells once warned his "up country" clients to "beware other labor supply concerns, only recently established, who are closely imitating our firm's name."[27] Sells suggested clients use his company's full name to avoid such trickery. The imitator, the Canadian Employment Agency, returned the volley, warning workers against agencies "who try to deceive the public by using names of railroad companies."[28] Sells outlasted the Canadian Employment Agency's assault on his clients; the latter company was gone by the end of 1911.

If Sells safely received an employer's order for workers, he would place it on one of several large bulletin boards on the sidewalk outside his storefront. Orders received during the evening (CanPac, like many of the larger agencies remained open at night to employers) were printed as a list in the morning newspaper, such as that reprinted below:

> WANTED: Married man as farm manager for mixed farm - 100 acres. $50 a month - prefer Ontarian or Scotsman
> *One donkey engineer to operate roading donkey engine - $80 a month and board - fare from Vancouver $3.50
> *Stationary engineer in large sawmill in interior - position permanent to right man - $140 a month with board at 90 cents a day - fare $20
> *Capable experienced flunky for logging camp - $35 a month - fare $1.50
> *Logging foreman for up coast logging camp[29]

Sells' advertisements contained a good deal of job information. They usually mentioned wages and board, the cost of transportation or whether the fare was advanced, and any specific details about the job that he or the employer thought worth mentioning. Sells offered, for instance, information on the length of

---

[26]See *News Advertiser* April 15, 1911 Classifieds.

[27]Ibid., June 14, 1911 Classifieds.

[28]Ibid., July 16, 1911 Classifieds.

[29]Ibid., February 18, 1913 Classifieds.

work—whether that was "work till Christmas" for a dozen irrigation workers in the Okanagan,[30] or only two months as a barker in a logging camp.[31] Sells gave out this information at the employer's insistence, not because the worker's necessarily demanded it. Employers and management increasingly complained of high labour turnover, especially in the camps. Arthur Schacht, a Kettle Valley railway contractor appearing in front of the Labor Commission, blamed the men themselves for transiency: "Sometimes [the men] stay a month or six weeks, but I can't give a reason. The wages are good. Conditions are good. They just drift."[32] Labour turnover, especially during shortages, was increasingly condemned by employers as wasteful and costly. But since turnover was perceived as a personal rather than systemic problem, the employer depended on employment agents to separate the 'dependable' from the 'drifter'. This could lead to bribery:

> WANTED: A few good Steady millwrights for sawmill construction at $4.00 a day - transportation will be refunded to men that stay through till end of job. About 3 months work.
>
> Canadian Pacific Employment Agency
> 108 1/2 Water[33]

Once an employer's order was placed on the board outside, or in the morning paper, Sells had to entice workers to his office. Competition between agents made enticements necessary. Newspaper advertisements were obvious lures; a good location was a less obvious, but more important means to ensure workers' patronage. Between 1907 and 1915, CanPac changed locations four times, each time for strategic commercial reasons. With each move, Sells re-inhabited another agency's location in the hope that he might capture the previous agent's business, while retaining his own.[34] Being situated close to the migrant worker's seasonal haunts—such as hotels, boarding houses, bars and restaurants—was also crucial to an agency's success. Poolrooms, in particular, complemented the white male employment business, acting as a kind of magnet for unemployed workers. Harry Welsh of Cosmopolitan Labor operated a huge "Pool and Club Room" in the front of his Powell street offices, in order to attract, entertain and retain prospective

---

[30]Ibid., July 1, 1911 Classifieds.

[31]Ibid., March 16, 1910 Classifieds.

[32]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 5, file 5, 91-92.

[33]*News Advertiser* August 17, 1909 Classifieds.

[34]Sells' first move in 1908 was to 20 Powell, the 1907 location of Evans and Vayer's Agency. Sells moved again in 1912 to 108 1/2 Water, a proven location of several agencies, including Harry Wolstenholme and Coast Labor Agents. His last move was to take over William Waine's long-standing offices at 180 Powell. See Directories 1907-1915.

clients.[35] Herbert Hicks shared commercial space with poolrooms owned by others. Rupert MacEwen, a partner in Standard Labor Agents in 1912, ran the next door poolroom before and after his foray into the employment business. While Sam Sells never owned a poolroom, his office was never far from one.[36] In addition to poolrooms, many agencies had heated waiting rooms, and some even boasted of having "Reading Rooms"—not unlike union hiring halls. Agencies competed, in the rhetoric of one agent, to be "The Headquarters of the Unemployed."[37]

Sam Sells' fees to workers was the same as most agencies: one dollar for what was called "ordinary labor," and a dollar and a half for so-called skilled work. Most agents charged a dime to fifty cents for short jobs of one or two days. [38] These fees seem to have been standard through the industry; fee-cutting was one form of competition that was avoided, and over-charging was avoided for reasons of competition. Registration fees—charges for being on an agent's worklist—were not common in Vancouver's white male agencies. Harry Welsh admitted to the Labour Commission of charging twenty-five cents to clients unable to find work immediately from the Cosmopolitan bulletin boards.[39] Welsh argued the registration fee was necessary to cover the costs of tracking men down when an appropriate job came in. In any case, explained Welsh, municipal bylaws forced agents to return registration fees if, in seven days, a job was not secured. In the fall of 1911, CanPac asked workers seeking employment to "call and list with us," and promised to "return the deposit" if the agency was unable to place them.[40] However, no other mention was ever made of a registration list in the historical record left by Sells' agency. Most likely, the fee was reserved for unusual or more skilled work. A.H. Miller, an employment agent in New Westminster, explained to the 1912 Commission: "Yes. I register a first class man. An experienced man I take his name and look him up. When it comes to laborers, when I get a job I simply put it on the board.... It's like this. Laboring men you would not register because that's work that any able-bodied men can do.

---

[35]Labor Commission testimony, Box 4, Incoming Correspondence, file 5. Welsh used the poolroom as a key come-on in his advertising. A poorly-staged photograph of happy, unemployed workers simultaneously "shooting the break" appeared on the back of stationery which he used as leaflets in local bars and hotels. For good discussion of the relationship between saloons, pool halls and the working class in North American cities before World War One, see Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 72-76.

[36]Directories 1907-1915.

[37]Labor Commission testimony, Box 4, Incoming Correspondence, file 5.

[38]See the testimony of Henry Meaker, Ibid., Volume 4, file 2, 144; and Harry Welsh, Ibid., Volume 4, file 1, 76-77.

[39]Ibid., Volume 4, file 1, 77.

[40]*News Advertiser*, November 1, 1911, Classifieds.

[But] if a man comes looking for [skilled] jobs, you register him and look up his record."[41] Miller did not charge for registering workers.[42]

CanPac focussed on unskilled workers. But like all employment agencies, it placed skilled workers regularly. In a sample of Sells' advertisements for a four week period spanning June/July 1911, CanPac offered work for blacksmiths, second-class engineers, machinists, head cooks and camp bookkeepers. Sells also placed skilled woodsman. Beside the frequent, open calls for sawmill and logging labours were specific, less-frequent advertisements for experienced fallers, buckers, hooktenders and boommen.[43] Employment agencies tended to place all levels of workers within an entire industry—if they were so specialized—not simply the labouring class. The largest single group of skilled male workers regularly placed by Sells or any other agent were carpenters. CanPac sent carpenters to jobs in and out of the city for wages between $4.25 and $4.50 a day. The Vancouver Employment Agency's Henry Meaker told the Labor Commission of the trouble he had filling orders for skilled workers—skilled tradesmen were in short supply. When faced with this problem, Meaker phoned the Labor Temple. The union, he said, would usually send over a man, and either the applicant or, reluctantly, his union would pay Meaker's fee.[44] Contrary to popular belief, employment agencies did place skilled workers. And it was this invasion of membership allocation that explains increasing union hostility towards agencies after 1909.

CanPac, like all agencies, required workers to sign written contracts after a job was chosen from the board. These contracts were meant to rationalize the process for the benefit of bookkeeping, protect the worker and agent from each other's misrepresentation, and protect both from the employer's often capricious behaviour. The elements of all contracts were the same. These included: the name and address of the prospective employer; the level of wages, cost of board and, if necessary, the cost of transportation to the work site; the nature and duration of the work involved; and the amount of the employment fee. A typical contract is reprinted in Figure 4.1. The white male employment agent made every effort to protect himself against what he believed were potential abuses by "undependable" employers and workers. These fears were written into contracts. For instance, the agent agreed to pay back a disappointed client's fee,

---

[41]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 3, file 8, 117.

[42]Ibid.

[43]See *News Advertiser* June 22 to July 19, 1911. For a description of occupations and the work process in turn-of-the-century westcoast logging, see: Ed Gould, *Logging: British Columbia's Logging History* (Victoria: Hancock House Publishers, 1975), 47-62; Ralph W. Andrews, *Timber: Toil and Trouble in the Big Woods* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1968), 69-101; and Donald Mackay, *The Lumberjacks* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), 158-197. For a discussion of woodswork and the hiring process in Ontario before World War Two, see Ian Radforth's *Bush Workers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 25-69.

[44]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 4, file 4, 146.

J.H. Welsh Open Until 12 Midnight

COSMOPOLITAN LABOR AGENCY

Phone SEY.5216 10 Powell Street

Vancouver, B.C., ...191.....

Received from.....the sum of.....Dollars,
for which we have furnished and given to said applicant, information such as we have received, by which he may be able, if competent, to secure a situation as

.....with..... of.....wages.....per.....
or as otherwise may be agreed upon. Should the said applicant not be engaged to go to work, we agree to refund the fee paid within.....hours/days from the time of issueof this contract, upon the applicant bringing a written and signed statement to us from the said employer, his foreman or person in charge of the work, that no engagement has been or will be made with the said employer to go to work for him. Applicant declares he is competent to fulfill duties of position above described, and if not employed because of proving incompetent, he shall forfeit all fees paid. It is mutually agreed that the COSMOPOLITAN LABOR AGENCY are not to be held responsible for any expense that may be incurred by the applicant for work, if situation is not procured.
It is further mutually agreed that the applicant shall proceed
to point of destination.....

REPORT AT THIS OFFICE WITH BLANKETS AT.....
In the event of Applicant REFUSING to proceed to Work for ANY REASON whatsoever, after signing this Contract, the Fee paid shall be forfeited. We will positively refuse Fee paid, unless conditions given above are complied with.

I ACCEPT THIS CONTRACT.....

COSMOPOLITAN LABOR AGENCY, per.....

Figure 4.1. Employment contract between worker and the Cosmopolitan Labor Agency (Source: Labor Commission Testimony, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Box 4, file 30)

only if a litany of conditions was met. "Incompetency"—as Cosmopolitan's contract illustrates—was vague enough to include a wide range of "undependable" behaviour, including: vocational incompetence, tardiness, intoxication, an inability to understand English, or a refusal to work when a strike was in progress.[45] Agents' participation in strike-breaking, along with their invasion of union hiring, were the key criticisms raised against employment agents by organized labour in the province. In fact, most employment agents were uninterested in whether a strike was in progress or not—unless it helped or hurt business. A few agents refused to deal in strike-breakers on a matter of principle, and this gained them the reputation as "good agents". Conversely, agents dealing in scab labour did so at great risk: Harry Welsh of Cosmopolitan became so discredited by his involvement in the 1912 Britannia Mines strike that he was unable to continue in business—workers simply abandoned his agency. Four workers destroyed the interior of Herbert Hicks' office for a similar offence. As a result, agents like Henry Meaker refused to deal in strike-breakers. Others, like A.H. Miller, claimed to handle nothing but union work.[46] In the words of one agent, the "rule" was to "always tell the man exactly what he is going up against and what kind of job it is. It is due to that fact that a man retains his business. If he don't, his business gets away."[47]

Much of Welsh's contract in Figure 4.1 deals with conditions regarding the return of fees. However, employment agents claimed that disputes over fee-returns were rare and usually the fault of the employer. Herbert Hicks guessed that five per cent of the seven to eight hundred men through his office every peak month returned unsatisfied to collect their employment fee. Most of these, claimed Hicks, got their money back.[48] Employment agents blamed employers for these problems. Herbert Hicks:

> "I have an order every time before the man goes [out]. We have had cases where [an employer] orders men and maybe we don't get them out right away and he will get somebody else, and when my man gets there he is refused. The first thing when he comes back I will ask him if there is any other job on the board suits him. If not, he gets his fee back." [49]

In an effort to protect the agent from "undependable" employers, most contracts required the employer or

---

[45]See Ibid., Sample Contracts, Box 4, Incoming Correspondence, file 30.

[46]Ibid., Volume 3, file 8, 117.

[47]On the Britannia strike and Welsh's involvement, see *Labour Gazette*, October 1912, 337-42 and Labor Commission testimony, Volume 4, file 1, 81-84. Welsh was also involved in the 1912 Cumberland strike: see *BC Federationist*, January 17, 1913, 3. The "rule" was explained by Herbert Hicks: see Labor Commission testimony, Volume 4, file 1, 66.

[48]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 5, file 1, 71.

[49]Ibid., Volume 4, file 1, 69.

his foreman to explain why the worker was not hired before that worker could get his fee returned. Fee refunds were probably much more difficult to get than agents claimed—the *run-around* is an old and durable tradition in small business.

Sam Sells and other agents were known to advance transportation or spending money to men heading to up-country camps in order to retain their share of the business. When labour was in short supply, large railway contractors sometimes advanced fares through employment agents. For instance, Foley, Welch and Stewart periodically gave Fred Lilyman funds to advance fares, particularly in the spring start-up. Some agents bore the responsibility of advancing fares themselves, in order to retain the patronage of employers and workers. Most did not like the practice. Lilyman complained in 1913 that high transportation costs had hurt his business. He had advanced fares in the summer of 1912, but by early 1913 the now $8.00 average fare was too high for him or the railway labourer to pay. As a result, Lilyman lost much of his Grand Trunk Pacific business, concentrating instead on Canadian Northern, Pacific Great Eastern and CPR construction and maintenance work where transportation was presumably less expensive.[50] Agents generally found advancing fares a very risky business. Herbert Hicks was forced to offer advanced fares, but lived in fear of being duped by workers: "Lots of men want to get to a particular place and will enquire where that job is and get transportation furnished to them," Hicks complained to the 1912 Commission, " [then] they will go to another job or will stay half a day and then go to the other outfit. They are getting free transportation." In order to counter this practice, Hicks hired a man to "care" for the worker's baggage until both reached their destination.[51] Other agents also hired so-called *travelling men* to protect the agent's investment in transportation fares. Grainger mentions in *Woodsmen* that workers often carried mock cardboard bags filled with dirt that could be abandoned at any moment.[52] Thus, transportation presented a dilemma to agents: the costs of advancing fares often outweighed the benefits, yet the practice was necessary if the agent wanted to compete with other agencies for the patronage of employers and workers.

Finally, after the employer's order was taken, the worker enticed into the office, a job found, the fee paid, the list of conditions met, and, perhaps, the cost of transportation advanced and returned, the relationship between Sam Sells and the worker ended. Of course, Sells hoped to see the worker again at the end of the season—and given CanPac's success, he probably did.

---

[50]Ibid., Volume 4, file 2, 151. It is unclear who if anyone in the Vancouver employment community took up the Grand Trunk Pacific business. Perhaps Edmonton agents took up the slack.

[51]Ibid., Volume 4, file 1, 68.

[52]Grainger, 64.

***

Above all, the Vancouver employment agent's world was a predatory one. The agent served his own interests by responding to the needs of the employment market; competition between agents helped to keep the business more favorable to workers than would an employer's own hiring department or a centralized state employment system dedicated to the employer's vision of economic efficiency. At the very least, the agent's office was a place to congregate, to play cards, to shoot pool. The commercial system clearly had its costs to both workers and employers in the form of occasional job duplication and over-ordering. Conversely, the actions of agents did nothing to improve working conditions, increase union membership, promote working-class solidarity or encourage workers towards revolutionary aims. Agents did not serve the interests of the working class but, rather, helped to reinforce the wage labour system. What they did do—given their buttressing of the capitalist system—was find jobs for men needing work.

CHAPTER V
MEN'S EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES & REACTION

Controversies surrounding white male employment agencies occurred sporadically throughout the 1900–15 period, but peaked in 1913. In tandem with the rising critique of agencies was a deepening commitment to a state–run employment system. This chapter explores the relationship between the critique of agencies and the endorsement of a state system as seen through three important events: the King Commission hearings and reaction of the unemployed in 1907–08, Vancouver's tumultuous winter of 1911–12, and the 1912 Royal Commission on Labor hearings in the spring and summer of 1913. The critique of commercial agencies and the reasons given for state–operated alternatives changed from one social group to the next. Employers, politicians, labour organizers and so–called progressive reformers each offered different reasons and harboured different motives for abolishing agencies and advocating a state–run labour exchange system. Within each group were inconsistencies—organized labour, for instance, could not decide whether the public system should be municipally or provincially organized. Nonetheless, all groups agreed that agencies had to go, and that everyone (barring Asians) would benefit by the state's takeover of the employment market.

Economic recession and the publicity of the Mackenzie King hearings on Japanese employment agencies made the winter of 1907–08 a controversial one for both Asian and European male agencies. A precedent was set that year for making employment agents scapegoats for cyclical and seasonal unemployment. The leaders of Vancouver's unemployed blamed Asian labour contractors (especially Japanese agents) for inflating white unemployment. No concern was given by the unemployed or city officials for unemployed Asians or possible abuses of Asian workers by their labour agents—the abusive agent was a flexible and selectively–placed stereotype. The aims of public labour exchanges were equally flexible, as the organized unemployed demanded a municipal job exchange to weed Asians from the labour market and civil authorities provided one in order to discriminate "deserving" from the "undeserving" unemployed for fiscal reasons.

Minister of Labour Mackenzie King arrived in Vancouver in the fall of 1907 to investigate the well–known race riot of early September and, officially, to "inquire into the methods by which Oriental labourers have been induced to come to Canada."[1] At the centre of the investigation was a Japanese labour

[1]Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the methods by which Oriental labourers have been induced to come to Canada* (Ottawa: Government Printing

company with white and Japanese directors known as the Canadian Nippon Supply Company.[2] It had been the hope of Canadian Nippon to secure a large labour contract with the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, a plan that was dashed when McBride demanded that the railway only use white labour in its construction.[3] Even though Canadian Nippon's plans failed, rumors of an enormous invasion of Japanese workers clouded the air in the summer of 1907 and led, perhaps, to the violence against Orientals on September 7.[4] Mackenzie King's hearings, which were widely publicized in local papers, revealed an intricate and cooperative network of Japanese employment agents, immigration companies, government officials and hotel owners on both sides of the Pacific. The Japanese agents and boardinghouse keepers who appeared in front of the Commission were frank about their intentions—the Grand Trunk Pacific was less so. The result was the villification of a handful of petty Japanese labour agents and, by association, the workers under their care.

Vancouver's organized unemployed reacted to newspaper reports on the Commission and severe unemployment by publicizing stories of agency abuse and by demanding municipal action. One labourer-spokesman, Matthew Allen, told Mayor Bethune he had been lured to the city by a Winnipeg newspaper advertisement placed by the "American Locating Company" of Vancouver. Allen came to Vancouver but no work was found.[5] Allen's real concern was with the successes of Asian labour agents. While fruitlessly applying for work at a local sawmill he counted 28 Orientals at work, but was told to see

---

[1](cont'd) Bureau, 1908). Known hereafter as the King Commission *Report.*

[2]Some information on the Canadian Nippon Supply Company is contained in the King Commission Report. But local newspaper reporting is more detailed: see Vancouver Daily *World* hearings for November 13, 19, 21, 26, 28, 29, 1907. The principals of Canadian Nippon included: Saori Goto, a large-scale labour contractor who arrived in Vancouver from Tacoma in 1901; Frederick Yoshi, a well-connected member of the Japanese Consulate; Charles Gardiner Johnson, a prominent white businessman in the city and owner of one of the province's biggest ship brokers, shipping and marine agents; and William Boultbee, Gardiner Johnson's nephew and manager of the Johnson Wharf on Vancouver's waterfront. On Gardiner Johnson and Boultbee, see E. O. S. Scholefield, *British Columbia, From Earliest Times to the Present* (Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914), Volume 3, 518-19 and Volume 4, 517-18. Also see R. A. J. McDonald, "Business Leaders in Early Vancouver, 1886-1914," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1978, 486.

[3]Patricia E. Roy, "Progress, Prosperity and Politics: The Railway Policies of Richard McBride," *BC Studies* 47 (Autumn 1980), 7-8 and G. R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways* (Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Company, 1962), 256-58.

[4]James Morton, *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia* (Vancouver: J. J. Douglas Limited, 1974), 201-13; Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 63-70; and Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978).

[5]*World*, December 6, 1907.

an agent in Chinatown.[6] Another distraught unemployed worker threatened to "blow the mayor to pieces" if Japanese immigration was not stopped.[7] The Vancouver *World* supported the white unemployed, demanding employers "discharge their armies of Orientals, who can be maintained at small cost by the Japanese agencies which brought them here, and give the white men work.[8] The speakers for the unemployed met with the mayor to demand food, shelter and a city labour exchange to weed Asians from the workforce. "Much of the blame for the present state of affairs," argued one man, "is laid at the doors of the Japanese employment agents, [whose] licences should be cancelled and a municipal bureau established.[9] The Vancouver Trades and Labor Council had earlier agreed, resolving that "large employers be requested to give [white] unemployed workers employment instead of the many orientals," and that the city should open "a register for all unemployed white citizens where employers can secure any number."[10]

Mayor Bethune feared that a municipal labour exchange would act as a magnet for unemployed men outside the city. A small employment office had been open in the basement of city hall since October, but was closed in early November when it was swamped by unemployed men; Bethune was convinced the office had become a "rendezvous for a morning loaf of men who could spend their time better rustling for work themselves.[11] Nonetheless, some form of labour office became necessary for administering the work-relief system by early December. The city exchange could be used to distinguish the "deserving" from the "undeserving" unemployed, regardless of their colour. Seeing the fiscal advantages in this, Bethune re-opened the municipal labour office on December 11. As a result, Vancouver's first large-scale free municipal labour exchange really grew out of the civic government's tight-fisted need to separate deserving out-of-works from undeserving out-of-lucks. Yet, the municipal exchange option was also linked to the Canadian-Nippon affair, the related demands of the organized unemployed, and the widely-held perception that Asians were working at the expense of more deserving white workers. In times of high unemployment, Asian workers were defined as "undeserving"—the success of the city's Anti-Asiatic Employment Bureau, which operated throughout the winter of 1907-08, testifies to that.[12] The municipal bureau was a white preserve, designed, in part, to substitute "deserving" unemployed white

---

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., November 18, 1907.

[8]Ibid., November 6, 1907.

[9]Ibid., December 10, 1907.

[10]Ibid., November 9, 1907.

[11]Ibid., November 13, 1907.

[12]See *World* Classified Advertisements, November 1907-February 1908.

workers for "undeserving" employed Oriental labour. In fact, public labour exchanges could be used to shape the labour market in whatever ways its designers wanted; in Vancouver's winter of 1907-08, the organized unemployed hoped to weed the Oriental worker out of the regional labour force entirely.

Vancouver's first municipal labour exchange was never meant to be permanent: by March 1908, the city bureau was closed, and the employment agents—Japanese or otherwise—were back in business.[13] Either as a means to engineer an employed white society or as a way to administer cuts to municipal relief costs, city employment bureaus were meant as temporary measures and were not designed to replace existing commercial employment agencies. Civic bureaus seldom opened past March, seldom supplied 'real' employers in or out of the city and seldom dealt in skilled workers of any kind. Instead, civic bureaus complemented the existing commercial employment system by being an off-seasonal stop-gap until the spring when the 'regular' commercial agencies went back to work. This pattern began to change in the winter of 1911-12. In response to organized labour's attack on the sharks and, in part, for narrow political reasons, a different kind of employment agency was introduced that winter—a more aggressive bureau, less concerned with unemployment and more intent on competing with commercial agencies.[14]

The story of the 1911 civic employment bureau began early in November 1911. Agencies in town signalled the end of the working season: in late October Sam Sells and CanPac promised workers that "we are daily receiving employers' enquiries for help"; but by November 15, all agencies other than those placing women workers disappeared from public view.[15]

By late November, the city was flooded with "out-of-works". To the normal numbers of laid-off resource workers were added out of province migrants lured into British Columbia by Salvation Army schemes, government officials and city boosters in order to provide a labour surplus for spring start up.[16] A

---

[13]Patricia Roy, "Vancouver: 'The Mecca of the Unemployed', 1907-1929," *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, Alan F. J. Artibise (ed.) (Regina: University of Regina, 1981), 394.

[14]Vancouver's winter of 1911-12 is well known for the IWW-led free speech fights in late January 1912. Mark Leier's study, the best account of the fights, enthusiastically reveals the deep divisions within the political left—divisions firmly rooted in the ideological incompatabilities of IWW syndicalism and VTLC/SPC "social democracy". See James Mark Leier, "Through the Lense of Syndicalism: Fragmentation on the Vancouver and British Columbia Left before the Great War," (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1987). Looking through the lense of syndicalism, Leier condemns the social democratic leaders of labour and socialism for hyjacking the IWW-initiated free speech fight, diverting its flight away from truly radical territory and landing the event on the all-too-familiar ground of electoral politics. In the end, writes Leier, "chances for a real solidarity and organization of the unemployed were squandered on the chimera of social democracy." Ibid., 74.

[15]*News Advertiser* October 15, 1911.

[16]Leier, 59.

new 'union' of Pacific Coast Employers' Associations, argued the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council (VTLC) and the BC Federation of Labor, was to blame for the high unemployment. In June 1911, the Employers' Association of Vancouver had opened a free employment agency "on the open shop principle" to break the building trades unions. As part of the on-going open shop drive, employers from San Diego to Vancouver opened similar bureaus. "The intent," cited the *World*, was "to flood the coast with unemployed, and by keeping the labor market over-run, to maintain the open shop. A strong bureau will be established, [and by] a systematic method of misrepresentation and lying advertisements to the effect that there is plenty of work on the coast... uninformed workers all over the continent will be herded like cattle to the Pacific States and western Canada...to fill their places with the unemployed."[17]

The appearance of an Employers' Association free employment bureau would seem to indicate considerable employer dissatisfaction with existing commercial agencies. However, the employer's bureau and the local agencies were indistinguishable to VTLC officials. Both earned their keep by providing strike breakers, both were dedicated to breaking unions, and both were tools of employers. On the heels of a BC Federation of Labor warning against the Employers' bureau, the VTLC officially "expressed themselves opposed to employment agencies in the city." The Council charged that since such agencies were operated by "unscrupulous persons," and were "a menace to the working element of the city," they should be abolished. The Council recommended the municipal government establish its own bureau and "charge the patrons a minimum fee" for the service.[18]

The hostility of local trade unionists towards employer-directed and commercial employment agencies was not lost on Mayor L.D. Taylor. Editor/owner of the Liberal Vancouver *World* and self-styled "friend of the workingman", Taylor faced a December election against James Findlay, a candidate supported by local Conservative Party and business leaders.[19] In an attempt to capture the support of the VTLC, and give the appearance that city hall was interested in the plight of workers, Taylor opened an expanded and revitalized civic employment bureau in the basement of city hall on November 20, 1911. The *World*, of course, met the event with great fanfare. On the stump, Taylor never failed to

---

[17]*World* June 17, 1911. The Employers' Association of Vancouver's employment bureau was directed by an E.C. Goodman and located in an office building in the heart of the city's financial district. It is unknown how successful the union-busting bureau was. During the local building trades strike, scabs appear to have been taken on at the construction site itself, not through any office. See Classifieds for carpenters in *News Advertiser*, June 1911. As for the linkage of open shop bureaus across the Pacific slope, it is impossible to determine how many workers were sent to Vancouver.

[18]*World* December 8, 1911.

[19]Leier, p. 60. On L.D. Taylor and the *World* see Bessie Lamb, "The Origin and Development of Newspapers in Vancouver," (MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942), 36-37 and 40-41.

make mention of his latest triumph. He seldom failed, as well, to link the civic bureau with the unscrupulous employment sharks: "Men can now go [to the civic bureau] and look for work without having to pay fees for the privilege of getting a job. (Applause) There are parties who think they should take the last dollar from a man to send him to a job."[20] Not surprisingly, Taylor's newspaper endorsed the city's venture into the employment business. "Everyone knows that a great injustice is done laborers through unscrupulous private employment bureaus," read a *World* editorial during the campaign. The editorial allowed that "not all of them are unscrupulous," but "when it is considered that the amount which each man is fleeced is only a paltry dollar, the unqualified meanness of the swindle is apparent."[21] The *World* applauded the efforts of the present city government in giving the workingman "the most reasonable protection" against agency abuses, through a government employment bureau "in which the man behind the counter would have no financial interest to send a grader 2 or 3 hundred miles to a fake job in order to get his poor ragged dollar."[22] The newspaper even dragged out local celebrities to promote Taylor's scheme. Joshua Johnston, the city's famous private detective and an unlikely defender of the working class, demanded that any "man who uses his talents for the procuring of the dollar, thereby adding misery to the lot of those who are already miserable, should be driven out of society."[23]

In conjunction with the *World*'s relentless campaign against commercial agencies appeared extensive promotional advertising for Taylor's new civic employment bureau. These advertisements reveal the city's belief that the business community would benefit most from municipal control of the labour market. The ads also show that bureau was in competition with commercial agencies.

MR. BUSINESSMAN
MR. CONTRACTOR
MR. HOUSEHOLDER
MR STOREKEEPER

Do you require any help of any kind?

THE
CIVIC EMPLOYMENT
BUREAU
is at your service
Can supply you with all classes of
labor, skilled and unskilled
Also, men for odd jobs
Prompt service.....No fees

---

[20]*World* November 28, 1911.

[21]Ibid., December 23, 1911.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., January 6, 1912.

The sharks, it was thought, could be run out of business by a progressive city bureau—there was really no need to outlaw them. Taylor believed, as did many who commented on the employment problem, that the agencies constantly had to trick workers in order to stay in business. Thus, given the choice, workers would vote with their feet for a city-operated bureau. Never before had a civic bureau pursued employers with such vigor. "Do you want extra help to move that shipment of goods that arrived yesterday?" asked the bureau in one ad; "are you requiring male help of any kind?" asked another ad aimed specifically at building contractors.[24] The bureau even sent out circulars to employers informing them of the bureau's purpose and its services.[25] Never before had a city bureau claimed to deal in "all classes of labor", or appealed to skilled workers. Unlike previous efforts as well, the new civic bureau was given a full-time staff: P.A. Devine, manager, and J.C. Kenis, assistant, were hired on at $150 and $75 a month respectively.[26] "Mr. Devine," reported the *World* with irony on opening day, "is preparing for a busy time."[27]

City Council gave the new civic bureau a trump card over the agencies by passing a bylaw barring commercial agencies from taking telephone or telegraph orders from employers. All orders for work outside the city had to be in writing from the employer himself. Needless to say, the civic bureau was exempt from the bylaw. In a unique show of solidarity, agents protested the regulation en masse. They argued that any prohibition on telephones or telegraphs would cause "a hindrance to their business" when business picked up in the spring.[28] City Council shrugged off the protest; the *World* pointed out that private agents were finally "being forced to compete with the free labor bureau established in the city."[29]

But the free civic bureau was in no position to compete with agencies dealing in white male workers. There was little work for men in December and January 1911-12. Agents knew this and were hibernating peacefully. Meanwhile, the civic bureau was overwelmed by unemployed workers. On its first day, Devine and Kenis took in over one hundred applications, few of which were filled.[30] In its first four days

---

[24]Ibid., December 1, 1911 and December 11, 1911.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., November 28, 1911.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., December 7, 1911.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., November 28, 1911.

almost five hundred jobless sought out the bureau, but less that a quarter of those were placed.[31] By mid-December Devine admitted that only 150 men had found work through his office, most of whom were placed on city street work—a traditional staple of winter work relief.[32] In all, close to 1500 men applied at the bureau in the month of December, and less that 400 secured work—temporary or otherwise.

Taylor and the *World* measured the success of the civic bureau by the number of applications for work, not the office's ability to place the unemployed. In part, this was due to the bravado of Taylor's election campaign. However, his opponent, James Findlay, not wanting to alienate working-class votes either, also lauded the purpose and efforts of the bureau. Thus, the bureau's success at attracting unemployed workers was seen as a victory over the *shark*—a vindication of the bureau's primary objective. That 995 men applied for work at the bureau by December 22 (only 215 were placed), "clearly shows that this department is doing good work and was an urgent necessity," read the *World*. Mayor Taylor visited the bureau a number of times during the election campaign, and on seeing the crowds "expressed satisfaction with the good work the bureau was undoubtedly doing."[33] One would think a bureau's success is measured by how *few* people are there, a fact overlooked by Taylor and the other bureau promoters.

The civic bureau was not designed to alleviate unemployment, and did not. In January, when the situation worsened and mass street protests were organized by the IWW to demand work, the civic bureau retreated from public view completely. The bureau's failure to alleviate the crisis became an embarrassment to Devine and city council. The unemployed themselves began to avoid the bureau—many left the city entirely. Devine complained of having difficulty contacting men who had earlier placed their names on the waiting list.[34] As a result, the *World* pulled its advertisements on January 18 and never placed them again. The new mayor kept the bureau operating through January, but slowly phased the office out. By early spring Vancouver's new civic employment bureau, like all other earlier efforts, was dead.

The civic bureau died because it failed to help the unemployed. Its existence was an embarassment while men marched through the streets. But another failure was never recognized by those who endorsed the bureau originally. "The real object of the local bureau," argued an executive report of the BC Federation of Labor, "was to enable men to obtain work without having to pay their last remaining dollar to one or other of the employment offices." In this, said the Federation, the bureau has been

---

[31]Ibid., December 1, 1911.

[32]Ibid., December 12, 1911.

[33]Ibid., December 1, 1911.

[34]Ibid., January 22, 1912.

Figure 5.1: *Federationist* cartoon equated the employment agent ("Skinner and Fleecer") with thieves. Source: *Federationist*, November 2, 1912.

"a failure".[35] The *World* finally admitted to defeat as well: "the municipal labor bureau is a failure to this extent...; employees insist on using the offices which charge fees." Nonetheless, insinuated the *World*, "the difficulty is one which the city cannot very well overcome. Provincial legislation is necessary. Had the Provincial government the interests of workers at heart, the scandals in connection with employment offices...would long ago have been investigated and a remedy found."[36]

The rise and fall of the 1911 Vancouver civic employment bureau reveals how reformers linked the activities of commercial agencies to proposals for state-controlled employment markets. And like that of 1907, the 1911 effort shows how criticisms of agencies and calls for state-run labour exchanges were meant to enhance narrow, often very selfish ends. L.D. Taylor introduced the municipal bureau for narrow political reasons, while organized labour supported the initiative to rid the city of agencies that blocked its efforts to control hiring. For its part, the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was always wary of both commercial and state labour bureaus. Experience taught the Wobblies to distrust civic authority; in Portland during Vancouver's 1911-12 winter of discontent, city authorities used their civic bureau to weed out troublesome IWW members.[37] However, the IWW was the only organized group unambiguously critical of state-operated employment bureaus.

The 1912 BC Royal Commission on Labor marks the highpoint of the debate on private employment agencies. The Commission travelled for eight months throughout the province; the first Vancouver hearings in February 1913 took place exactly one year after the civic employment bureau closed its doors. The provincial government had been promising a commission to look into labour conditions for some time; organized labour had been demanding one for even longer. In fact, the question of a labour commission actually arose during debate on a bill prohibiting employment agents from operating boarding houses. The agency 'problem' was always at the heart of the Commission. Thus, when McBride announced in February 1911 that such a commission would be set, the critics of the employment business were well prepared.[38] Organized labour had been running a relentless campaign against the sharks since the civic bureau's demise. The BCFL was the key actor in the debate: its members brought the issue to the Commission's attention; their critique and proposed alternatives influenced the final report

---

[35]Ibid., January 24, 1912.

[36]Ibid., January 30, 1912.

[37]Ibid., December 16, 1911.

[38]On the genesis of the 1912 Commission see *Labour Gazette*, March 1912, 838-39. For the bill prohibiting agency/boarding house combinations, see *Labour Gazette*, April 1913, 1103.

profoundly.[39] So-called 'progressive' social reformers were also prepared for the Commission. Most of these voices came from eastern Canada where the agency debate took on a slightly more sophisticated—if not more sinister—character. Progressives visualized a more efficient employment market than the sharks were able to provide. Failure to bring the labour market under control, argued progressives, might lead to chaos—perhaps a revolution. Employers and workers were less concerned about the activities of employment agencies, probably because they used their services. However, the prospect of a state-coordinated labour distribution system to regularize labour supply excited some employers. Needless to say, the seven employment agents interviewed by Commissioners felt threatened by the proceedings. They blamed employers for abuses accredited to them, or lashed out at one another. By the Commission's end, the evidence presented by union officials and reformers was undeniable, the direction inescapable: private employment agents would be legislated out of existence and a state-operated system would be put in their place.

The Commission itself was primarily comprised of loyal Conservative partisans. A preliminary list of possible commissioners in early November 1912 included: H.G. Parson, a defeated Conservative member from Golden; John Jardine, a journeyman painter and Labour, then Liberal, then Conservative member whom the *Federationist* called "the greatest political contortionist known to Victoria"; J.A. McKelvie, Editor of the Conservative Vernon newspaper, *The News*; and J. H. Hawthornthwaite, a prominent Nanaimo socialist, who nevertheless had had experience wrestling with members of McBride's government. In 1912 he was out of the House working as a real estate agent.[40] With the exception of Hawthornthwaite, the BCFL was very critical of the choices. The government had originally asked the provincial organization to send in names of possible commissioners, but none of these were chosen. "Not a solitary representative of the Federation is on it," cried a disappointed *Federationist*; the job was given as a "sort of consolation prize to has-beens and want-to-be Conservative henchmen."[41] When Hawthornthwaite declined to join the Commission, the BCFL was even less impressed with the alternative 'labour' representative. R. A. Stoney, "recommended by no labor organization in BC," was president of the New Westminster Trades and Labor Council, a long-time organizer for the International Typographical Union, and a "steady member of the Royal City Conservative Party."[42] The Commission,

---

[39]The campaign against the sharks gained strength through the spring and summer of 1912. See *Federationist*, June 8 and 15, and July 6 and 27, 1912.

[40]For the formation of the Commission, see *Federationist*, November 9 and December 13, 1912, and the *Daily Colonist*, December 6, 1912.

[41]*Federationist*, December 13, 1912.

[42]*Colonist*, December 6, 1912 and *Federationist*, December 13, 1912. Also see Martin Robin, *The Rush For Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972).

then, comprised Parson, Jardine, Mckelvie, Stoney and a Vancouver man named Harper.

The final Commissioner was the least known. Andrew Harper was a thirty-five year old Vancouver lawyer and a different character from the other Commissioners. Trained at Queen's University in political economy and the classics, and once described as "interested in all matters relative to the public welfare and... a student of the times regarding political, sociological and economic conditions," Harper may be described as the lone progressive on the panel.[43] The BCFL was unsure what to make of Harper. Neither a has-been nor a Conservative hack, the *Federationist* finally admitted him "truly a student of the requirements of labor."[44] Harper's contribution to the agency debate would prove significant. More than any other Commissioner, Harper returned witnesses to the subject of employment agencies—their abuses and inefficiencies—and prompted witnesses to speak on the state alternative. The employment agency debate became Harper's pet project. In the context of its otherwise lackluster talent, the Commission's final report reflects the influence of his progressive outlook.

But it was organized labour that brought the agency issue to the Commission. The BCFL had earlier hammered out its position on agencies at its third annual meeting in mid-January. B.D. Grant of the New Westminster Trades and Labor Council introduced one of several resolutions urging the abolition of employment agencies and the establishment of state-run bureaus in their stead.[45] The BCFL sent a delegation to meet the Commission in March, led by J.H. McVety, Federation chairman, J.W. Wilkinson, past head of the Federation and CTLC delegate, John L. Martin, Victoria Trades and Labor Council chairman, and D.S. Cameron, New Westminster Trades and Labor Council vice-president. McVety and Wilkinson delivered the critique to the Commission. The two men began by outlining the traditional abuses of the sharks—their fees were too high, they sent men to non-existent jobs, and they refused to return fees and deposits. However, the loudest criticism raised by unionists was the practice of fee-splitting. The basic mechanics of fee-splitting was the same throughout North America. In his study of American agencies, Tomas Martinez cites fee-splitting as one of the most commonly-attributed abuses of employment agencies and the key criticism of agencies raised by the US Bureau of Labor in 1912. Martinez:

> Stated simply, an employment agent and an employer agree to divide the fee of an applicant, who is kept on the payroll for a limited time. In order to maximize profits, a turnover of employees is accelerated through firing. Agents are reputed to have made frequent arrangements with railroad contractors in the

---

[43]For information on Andrew Harper, see Etherbert Olaf Stuart Scholefield, *British Columbia, from the Earliest Times to the Present* (Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914), Volume 4, 450-53.

[44]*Federationist*, December 13, 1912.

[45]See the *Federationist*, January 24, 1913.

early 1900s.[46]

In BC, fee–splitting between the agent and camp foremen was presented to the commission by BCFL leaders as common practice. Wilkinson:

> The impression we have [is] that there is an understanding between the employment agent in this city and the foreman on the job. A man pays $1 or $1.50 for a job. Then he goes up to the job and it *naturally* follows that if the foreman in charge is sufficiently mean to collaborate with the agent in town, then the agent can hand him a portion of the fees of each man who comes for a job. The result is that there are three lots of men, one going to the job, one on the job and one going away from the job.[47]

According to Wilkinson, all employment agents would "naturally" decend into this "petty roguery". Fee–splitting was unavoidable. McVety claimed that if "there are three employment offices in a row, and two are following pernicious practices, the third one must do as the Romans do in order to get any business."[48] Of course, not all workers were vulnerable to the scheme. Skilled workers were "too valuable to the employer for him to be changing them continually." Rather, "the great mass of [unskilled] men are the type that can be easily replaced from the sidewalks of Vancouver."[49] McVety was less certain than Wilkinson that frequent fee–splitting explained chronic labour turnover. After all, argued McVety, the practice was counter to the interests of the employers: "Knowing something of the value of steady men on the job," he claimed, "no foreman would continue to keep discharging men for the purpose of getting new ones.... A man is not so valuable and does not produce so much labor the first day as on subsequent ones."[50] Still, the reality of high labour turnover in provincial resource camps had to be explained, in part, by the practice of splitting fees: "No foreman would change men the way they are changed on various works around this province unless for some consideration other than the mere securing of new help."[51]

Neither Wilkinson nor McVety brought concrete evidence of fee–splitting to the Commission. Wilkinson admitted having no proof at all, but maintained that the practice was commonplace. McVety claimed the BCFL sent men undercover to trap a number of foremen, but found nothing. He explained

---

[46]Tomas Martinez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies*, (New Brunswick N.J.: Transaction Books, 1976), 47–48.

[47]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 3, file 8, 169. The emphasis is mine.

[48]Ibid., Volume 3, file 9, 331.

[49]Ibid,. Volume 3, file 8, 170.

[50]Ibid., Volume 3, file 9, 329.

[51]Ibid., 330.

that the victims of fee-splitting never came forward because most were transients and the amount of money involved was so small, most thought it too much trouble to try to retrieve it. "For this reason the employment sharks get away, and every time they get away they are that much more bold."[52] Fee-splitting was a theoretical rather than an historical abuse. Accounts of the practice had acquired mythic proportions all over Canada and the United States, and was often used by labour unionists and progressive reformers to explain high labour turnover. This explanation afforded an uncritical view of the economic system; the social and economic inefficiencies of high turnover and worker transiency were blamed on a small group of shameful schemers, not on the structure of the economy itself. As with so many of the criticisms aimed at the employment business, the charge of fee-splitting served to obscure larger systemic problems.

While the charge of fee-splitting may have been something of a red-herring, the threat agencies posed to union organization, in the form of strike-breaker recruitment and organization of the unemployed, certainly was not. Control over hiring was the concealed issue upon which organized labour's critique of employment agencies turned. Yet even on the issue of strike-breaking union officials stressed humanitarian concerns rather than deeper organizational fears. McVety related the story of seven 'Hungarian' scabs Herbert Hicks sent to the Britannia Mines strike in 1912. The abuse workers took at the hands of scab-organizers like Hicks, McVety claimed, "is one of the most pernicious games in vogue in this country."[53] Cosmopolitan's Harry Welsh, who provided strike-breakers when the economy slowed in the spring of 1913, also took a beating by BCFL officials for his involvement in the Cumberland strike. Welsh sent to Cumberland fifty-seven coal miners from Durham, England, and failed to mention to them that a massive strike was in progress.[54] Later in September 1913, Welsh also violated a federal law prohibiting a fee of more than a dollar to recent immigrants—he charged a dollar and a half.[55] The combination of bad publicity and an even worse economy drove Welsh out of business in the fall of 1913. Frank Farrington of the United Mine Workers in Nanaimo told of an Edmonton agent who sent nine men out from Alberta to the Cumberland mines without telling them of the strike then in progress. To ensure that the men reached their destination, explained Farrington, the agent took the men's baggage hostage.[56] These incidents were

---

[52]Ibid., 331.

[53]Ibid., 329.

[54]See *Labour Gazette*, July 1913, 37 and August 1913, 145. Also, see Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: B. C. Federation of Labour Boag Foundation, 1967), 57. Also, see John Norris, "The Vancouver Island Coal Miners, 1912-1914: a study of an Organizational Strike," *BC Studies* 45 (1980). Norris points out that the effort to break the strike with strikebreakers was a failure—not even the likes of Welsh were able to recruit enough scabs.

[55]*Labour Gazette*, October 1913, 507.

[56]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 2, 208-10.

meant to show the employment agent's contempt for the welfare of scab workers.

The welfare of strike-breakers obscured a deeper concern over the threat employment agencies posed to union organization. The Vancouver Trades and Labor Council recently opened its magnificent new Labor Temple, and one of its purposes was to control hiring. While employment agents dealt in skilled workers only occasionally, it was enough to alert VTLC officials of the potential havoc that a commercial recruitment system might wreak on union organization. Moreover, agents formed a barrier to organizing unemployed and unskilled migrant workers. McVety, who was also head of the new Labor Temple, explained that without "a place to secure accurate information, that vast army of unemployed casual labor which is impossible to deal with in a group, but which forms a constant menace to existing wage scale and working conditions..., drift into saloons and employment sharks, and are systematically defrauded and robbed."[57] The Vancouver Labor Temple, McVety rather sentimentally explained, could better serve the function of an employment bureau than the sharks—and with more gentility:

> Take the case of a union carpenter, a stranger and possibly in a different country to where he belonged. On his arrival, he checks whatever hand luggage he may have and leaves his tool box in the possession of the transportation company until he gets located. [At the Labor Temple] his card makes his welcome complete and the secretary or business agent tells him where to locate a decent rooming house, advise him briefly as to local conditions, and introduce him to whatever members may be in the office at the time. His attention is drawn to the room in the basement where his tools can be stored without charge, and where he can file his saws or do the dozen odd jobs required.... Meanwhile, the agent has located him a job and soon he is ready for work.... On wet days, or when out of employment, instead of sitting in a small, cold, dismal office, or filling up on 'squirrel' whiskey, he can go to the Temple and read, play pool or billiards, or indulge in a game of cards for fun. [Finally,] if he is of an observing disposition, he notes the warmth, cleanliness and ventilation, and compares the result of collective effort with the conditions existing in some other of the privately-owned meeting places he has been in during his travels in search of the elusive job.[58]

The problem with the employment agent was that he 'organized' the unemployed inside and around his office. In the *shark's* den unemployed men could play cards (for real money), play pool (for more money), and drink whatever they wished.

The BCFL endorsed a state-run employment system as a compromise between the existing commercial network and McVety's vision of a union-controlled hiring system. Labour leaders who met with the Commission did not agree, however, on whether a loose municipal network or a centralized provincial system was best. Those who identified more progressive social aims in the proposal argued for

---

[57] *Federationist*, November 9, 1912.

[58] Ibid.

the provincial employment system. For instance, Wilkinson argued that a provincially-organized system would aid in a more 'intelligent' immigration policy, provide government with a better knowledge of labour supply and demand, and help to reduce unemployment-related crime and debauchery.[59] McVety argued the same case, visualizing a single office for the whole of Vancouver: "Make it large enough to handle the entire business."[60] Alexander Watchman, another member of the BCFL delegation, was slightly more ambivalent about the nature of the proposed network. He believed that favoritism might develop under municipal control. A provincial system might avoid such abuses.[61]

D.S. Cameron, vice-president of the New Westminster TLC, and John Notman, of the Nelson TLC, preferred an unconnected series of municipal exchanges. Cameron endorsed Wilkinson's view of a labour exchange to distribute immigrants; but this could be best done at the municipal level. Cameron urged "that the city take upon itself the duty of supplying these immigrants with work just as soon as they are here."[62] A municipal exchange would be less expensive and more responsive to those it served. John Notman was even more suspicious of a centralized provincial plan. Exchanges should be controlled at the municipal level, he argued. "If it is run through the municipality, any advantage that is taken of a man could be looked into on the spot," whereas, "if it is run by the provincial authorities we are in a measure left helpless." In short, a local response meant real union control: "The closer we get to this line of business to regulate it, we consider best."[63]

Udo Sautter has observed that Canadian trade unionists were generally hesitant to support province-wide state labour exchanges. Fear that such a system would reduce union control over hiring—that the state might use the system as an aid to open shop or strike-breaking employers—led the CTLC in 1914 to declare itself "opposed to the establishment of Provincial labour Exchanges."[64] The BCFL was uncertain as well. Notman and Cameron and men perhaps more closely committed to their city labour councils placed more faith in local control. They felt that pressure to increase union control over hiring should be done locally. McVety and Wilkinson, leading members of a province-wide labour organization, supported a provincial solution to the exchange debate. Both men appeared downright Beveridgian in their discussions of state agencies: social and economic efficiency married to humanitarian

---

[59]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 3, file 8, 171.

[60]Ibid., Volume 3, file 9, 331.

[61]Ibid., Volume 3, file 8, 193.

[62]Ibid., Volume 1, 153.

[63]Ibid., Volume 6, file 11, 235.

[64]Udo Sautter, "The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada, 1900-1920," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 6, 1980, 95-96.

justice could be accomplished only through a centralized, manipulative system. As the BCFL continued to grow in influence, it might exert control over the provincial system. Thus, as with previous labour exchange proposals in 1907 and 1911, those presented to the Commission in 1913 reflected the narrow and varying interests of labour organizations. Still, while labour delegates disagreed on how and at what level to exert power over the exchange system, all believed that a state-run operation would be easy to co-opt. The threat of commercial agencies could be eliminated and, at the same time, union organization enhanced through a maleable state-operated system.

Those progressive social reformers who contacted the Commission on the agency debate reinforced the general views of organized labour, but strongly advocated a national system. Mrs. E. St. John Wileman, a vigorous supporter of a national—if not Imperial—employment system, brought her Beveridgian road-show to the Commission in the spring of 1913. Wileman reiterated the economic and humanitarian objectives of her proposed system, emphasizing that there was "nothing in the nature of charity in the working of the Bureaux": according to Wileman, the system was intended to improve the economy, not deal with the victims of it.[65] Indeed, one of the benefits of the system would be to separate the "industrious Labourer from the shiftless, drunkard and degenerate." The latter would be dealt with by existing charities. Also, Wileman clarified how such a system would enhance immigration policy. Information generated through the employment system could be used to check incoming surplus labour, pinpoint needed labour migrations, or specify the kinds of occupations needed in certain areas.

Reverend William Stevenson, Secretary of the Victoria Social Service Commission, recommended the abolition of private employment agencies and the creation of a provincial system as the first, most important step in combatting seasonal and cyclical unemployment.[66] A devotee of William Beveridge and other 'scientists' of labour market management, Stevenson urged state action against unemployment for reasons of economic efficiency and humanitarianism: "I make this suggestion [of a state-run employment market] because there is a tremendous amount of labour power being lost. It is a loss of wealth to the country. It is a loss of life and cannot but be degrading to the worker."[67] To Stevenson's suggestion of state-run employment bureaus was joined a number of other reforms, including a minimum wage, counter-cyclical and seasonal public works projects and unemployment insurance.[68] Stevenson also urged the creation of a provincial 'Department of Human Welfare'. This new department would operate the provincial labour exchange system, which, in time, would join a national employment network. The

---

[65]Labor Commission testimony, Incoming Correspondence.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid., Box 3, file 4, 512-16.

reasons he gave for the department's necessity reveal a pre-occupation with social control:

> The time is ripe for such a department.... There is the alienation of workers from the governing classes as well as from the employers of labour. There is a growing distrust of what is called justice under the present economic conditions. Workingmen in large numbers are losing all faith in the fairness of persons in power when they come to deal with the workers as a class. This is a dangerous condition of things. But the remedy is not far to seek if only we had a department with trained experts in control whose duty it would be to study social conditions and the needs of the people with a view to producing the best results in the community.[69]

To organized labour's detailed humanitarian critique of existing methods of employment, progressives like Stevenson added a sense of urgency. State labour bureaus were necessary, not only to relieve the plight of workingmen and increase economic production, but to fend off possible social upheaval as well.

Very few workers or employers spoke to the Commission on the issue of commercial agencies and state exchanges. All the workers who spoke were delivered there by BCFL officials. Even so, their views on employment agents differed embarrassingly from the testimony of union leaders. For instance, A. Gill, a striking miner at Britannia Beach, recommended the abolition of agencies because of strike-breaking; but Gill recognized that a state system could never alone drive the more popular private agencies out of business: "My recommendation is to cut out [ie. outlaw] these employment agents, if you allow him to compete with a civic employment bureau he will get the trade."[70] Hugh McMullen, a lather and shingler, gave testimony that must have floored BCFL officials. McMullen asked that employment agencies be abolished and a state system be run by the police department; the police, then, could "get acquainted with the men and place them in positions where their services would be appreciated more."[71] McMullen admitted never having any trouble with employment agents since he had come to the province. Gavin Buchanan, a railway construction camp cook, delivered bizzarre testimony on the topic of fee-splitting that had guest inquisitor McVety frustrated. Buchanan began by claiming to have solid proof of the practice. However, even under McVety's leading questions, Buchanan and his proof crumbled. He had only heard of fee-splitting from a friend, not in his camp, but at another. He had no idea of who the foreman or the agent was or when the event occurred. In fact, the BCFL was unable to find any victims of fee-splitting, save one, James Lodge. Yet even Lodge's testimony was vague and failed to mention any specifics at all.

---

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., Volume 4, file 2, 157.

[71]Ibid., Volume 5, file 6, 104.

In the end, worker's testimony to the Commission undermined the BCFL's critique of employment agencies. The absence of working class comment on agencies to the Commission or elsewhere suggests a gulf between the workers' experience with employment agents and the criticisms raised on their behalf. In fact, there is little evidence that workers were chronically abused by Vancouver's employment agents. Workers were silent, not silenced; the agency problem was never theirs.

The employers or management men interviewed by the Commission were ambivalent about the merits of commercial employment agencies. Sautter notes that eastern Canadian manufacturers in the pre-war period welcomed controls on commercial agencies as a way to reduce waste and redundancy; yet they were hestitant to endorse a state-run system because of their dedication to a laissez-faire economy. Sautter does point out that business leaders often jettisoned principles for profits—as their fight in Ontario for state control of utilities shows.[72] Too few BC employers spoke to the Commission on the subject of employment agencies to draw many firm conclusions on their attitudes. However, there was a tendency for small employers and managers to support existing commercial agencies, while larger employers comdemned them as inefficient and asked Commissioners to consider a provincial system. For instance, E.R. Ennis, manager for a small railroad sub-contractor out of Golden, had no criticisms with the Fernie and Cranbrook agents he had used. Ennis explained that fee-splitting was impossible at his camp or any other sub-contractor's in the area because foremen did not do the hiring.[73] Robert Armstrong, another sub-contractor on bridgework out of Ashcroft, sent to Vancouver frequently for carpenters. He felt commercial agencies always made efforts to get men with the right skills and explain the kind of work they could expect.[74] Arthur Schacht, a Kettle Valley Railway sub-contractor, frankly attributed high labour turnover to his camp's bad food, not the practice of fee-splitting. His experience with employment agents was also positive: "Any time I need a large bunch [of men] I go to the employment office. It's a sort of centre.... From our point of view, we would like to centre the labour market. We would not care who operated it as long as we could get in touch with the men."[75] None of the small employers or managers interviewed by the Commission had encountered any of the agency abuses outlined by organized labour and progressives. They used employment agencies because the agencies delivered—because the agencies knew the work and the workers as well as the employer. Fee-splitting, said small employers, did not exist. Labour turnover was the fault of camp conditions or based on the whim of workers.

---

[72]Sautter, 97.

[73]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 6, file 9, 23.

[74]Ibid., Volume 4, file 3, 291.

[75]Ibid., Volume 5, file 5, 92.

Larger employers or their representitives told a slightly different story to the Commission. Charles Lindmark, General Superintendent of Dominion Sawmills, was typical. Lindmark claimed employment agencies were wasteful, inefficient and out-of-touch with the "real needs" of workers and employers. "The employment agent is very unsatisfactory to deal with," said Lindmark, "they don't understand the men themselves. For instance, if they have an order for so many sawyers or stumpers, they put up a notice and everybody out of work is a sawyer or a stumper, and the employment agent doesn't know."[76] Lindmark suggested that a government labour exchange would deliver the "right kind of worker" to employers; a provincial system would take the trouble to weed out inefficient workers. William Slavin, Secretary of the Kamloops Board of Trade, felt that a state-run exchange system would help to keep "undesirables" out of the workforce.[77] These employers argued that a better organized, more regular, more efficient and, therefore, more profitable labour market was achievable through a government-operated exchange system. They also intimated that unwanted, possibly hostile workers could be weeded out of industry through such a system. These goals appeared more attractive to large employers. And, as always, those with the closest contact with commercial employment agencies—workers and small employers—had the fewest complaints of them. In fact, the agency "problem" was never theirs.

The eight employment agents called to appear in front of the Commission felt threatened by the proceedings—which is not surprising, since they were under attack. The Commissioners accused all eight of fee-splitting; all eight denied it. Guest Commissioners from the BCFL accused two of the agents of dealing in strike-breakers; the two (Welsh and Hicks) admitted to doing it. The agents reacted to the Commissioners' other accusations by blaming the employer. For instance, the agents argued that the employers' practice of duplicating single orders over a number of agencies was responsible for the problem of non-existent jobs. If duplication was stopped the problem would disappear. "If an employer wanted 25 men and wanted to do business with five employment agents," Welsh offered as an example, "he should give them each five men.... The man who goes looking for the job and doesn't get it, it isn't my fault. It's the fault of the employer."[78] Tom Robley, an employment agent in Nelson, blamed employer "dishonesty" for problems surrounding job misrepresentation. The employment agent, Robley clearly saw, "is made the buffer between the employer and the employee."[79] The sharks asked the Commission to control the actions of employers.

---

[76]Ibid., Volume 1, 327. For more on Lindmark's business activities, see Henry J. Boam, *British Columbia: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources* (London: Sells, 1912), 372-73.

[77]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 1, file 3, 231.

[78]Labor Commission testimony, Volume 6, file 1, 78.

[79]Ibid., Volume 6, file 11, 267.

The final *Report* of the Royal Commission on Labor strongly condemned the activities of private employment agencies—especially the allegedly chronic practice of fee-splitting—but stopped short of recommending their abolition entirely. In the future, however, the whole business of employment, said the *Report*, should be "taken entirely from the hands of private agencies."[80] In the meantime, they were unfortunately necessary. The *Report* supported the establishment of free municipal labour bureaus in cities over a population of ten thousand, with an eye to bringing these into a provincial, then national, system. Implied in the *Report* was the belief that regulation of private employment agencies until a national system was installed would push the former out of business. After all, such an abusive industry could never survive tight controls. The recommendation of a national system was a victory for the progressives. Seen from their point of view, an efficiently-organized regional labour market demanded regulatory structures national in scope. The creation of co-ordinated municipal agencies was the first step in this larger project.

***

In fact, tight regulations did not drive employment "sharks" out of business. That was done by the economic depression which began, for them, in the spring of 1913. Regulations did have an effect, but not until after the war when the business was curtailed. The disappearance of the sharks must have been mourned by their critics: the employment shark had proven to be such a convenient foil. To the leaders of organized labour, the shark blocked the organization of unemployed, unskilled workers. To the progressive reformer, the shark represented a barrier to a more organized and efficient—if less diverse—world. To the large, 'modern' employer, the shark represented an old, inefficient and uncritical method of organizing labour power. To be sure, the decline of the employment agent signalled the rise of a state-assisted employment market better suited to the needs of monopoly capitalism. But as an agent of abuse, the shark was a red herring.

---

[80]See British Columbia *Sessional Papers* 1914, 4. Geo.5, M 4-5.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES & DOMESTIC SERVICE

Employment agencies for women reflected the segregation of women's and men's work. Employers contributed to and profited by this division by encouraging the recruitment of low wage women workers into socially-defined women's jobs. Women workers typically earned, on average, between one-half and two-thirds of men's earnings. The average weekly wage for women in Vancouver was 63 per cent of that for men in 1911.[1] Segregation was bound, however, not simply by employer avarice but by an ideology of gender that stressed the domestic role for women as proper, natural and subordinate to the male experience.[2] As a result, women's wage labour confirmed women's role as primary domestic workers dependent on men—women were not expected or encouraged to be breadwinners. Feminist scholars suggest that this ideology has been an essential aid to capitalist accumulation: women's maintenance of the home has allowed for the growth of male wage labour; domestic ideology has served to legitimize this split.[3] Thus, areas of paid work deemed appropriate for women before the war were in domestic or servile occupations, including household help, service work in stores, restaurants, hotels and hospitals and, increasingly, clerical-professional jobs as stenographers, typists and teachers.[4] Women working outside these areas were exceptional. Women's employment agencies, most run by women, made money out of the segregated labour market by bringing working women and appropriate jobs together. Yet, within the

---

[1]See Gillian Creese, "Race, Gender and Socialism in British Columbia," Unpublished Paper, 1988, 7-8.

[2]Ibid.

[3]See Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 36-40. In addition, Veronica Strong-Boag writes that "domestic labour of all kinds lies at the core of human relationships and is crucial to the functions of the political economy of societies at every stage of development." Veronica Strong-Boag, "Keeping House in God's Country: Canadian Women at Work in the Home," *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*, Craig Heron and Robert Storey (eds.) (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), 125. The result, she argues, has been a distorted perception of the home as marginal; the allocation of attention and funds to the home has been entirely inadequate to its central importance in society. Also see Cohen, 25.

[4]*Census of Canada* 1911, Volume VI, Table 5. Also, see Star Rosenthal, "Union Maids: Organized Women Workers in Vancouver, 1900-1915," *BC Studies* 41 (Spring), 39-41, Creese, 124 and Cohen, 135-51. Cohen reminds us that the majority of women worked without pay in the home before 1950.

confines of proper women's work was a changing women's labour force. At the turn of the century, a majority of women previously employed as household workers were moving into new service occupations outside the home.[5] Women's agencies reflected this transition, as the jobs offered women by agents kept pace with labour market changes.

While women's occupations expanded slowly within socially-defined limits, a mainstay of employment continued to be paid household labour. For this reason, as well as the temporary character of paid domestic work itself, household labour placement dominated Vancouver's employment business for women before World War One. Women wage workers made up a minority of the city's total workforce, but their employment agencies took a disproportionately large share of the city's employment business. In 1910, only one out of eight workers living in Vancouver was a woman. However, in 1912, employment agencies dedicated to women's work comprised one-third of all active agencies.[6] During the severe 1913-15 depression when most men's agents were hibernating, women's employment agencies were very active indeed. As we have seen, employment agencies in general were attracted to areas of casual and seasonal labour where turnover was high. Paid household labour was particularly transient, and the nature of domestic work helps explains this. Thus, this chapter looks at domestic work generally: its importance to women's work before World War One, the often-difficult employer-servant relationship, the nature of household work itself, and how these influences contributed to the high turnover of Vancouver's domestic servants. We should remember that the expansion of women's agencies was also due to changes in women's work. Commercial agents were quick to profit from qualitative changes in the labour markets they served. The following chapter looks specifically at the placement activities of Vancouver's commercial agencies and the local YWCA. The YWCA actively recruited and distributed household servants in the period. However, the charity's motives and approaches to placement were very different from that of commercial agencies. If commercial agencies were motivated by profits, the YWCA was meant to satisfy a myriad of ideological and material aims—including the preservation of feminine respectability and employers' demands for more and better-trained servants.

In the nineteenth century working women and paid household work were strongly linked. Domestic service dominated women's wage work in England, the United States and Canada, and began to decline

---

[5]The trend away from from paid household labour continued in the twentieth century, with temporary reversals during poor economic periods when women used domestic service as "the unemployment insurance of the poor". See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1988), 50-56.

[6]*Census of Canada* 1911, Volume VI, Table 6. Of the 50,628 working people over ten years of age listed in the census, 6,452 were women. For comparative agency totals, see Chapter 3, Table 3.

only near the end of the century.[7] In the United States, for instance, over half of all women wage earners in 1870 were categorized as "household workers". By 1910, this had fallen to twenty-five per cent, and by 1920, with women's entry into the war economy, domestic service fell to sixteen per cent of all women wage earners.[8] This decline was mirrored in Canada as well. In 1891 (the first reliable census figures on domestics), 41 per cent of paid women workers were household servants; that fell to 27 per cent in 1911, and 18 per cent in 1921.[9] Notwithstanding this decline, domestic wage-work remained the largest single occupation for women workers in Canada before World War One.[10] As well as employing a majority of British, American and Canadian women wage earners for most of a century, domestic service was dominated—and increasingly so—by women. The feminization of household service was coincidental with the rise in numbers and importance of the middle class. Previously, paid household work had not been the preserve of any sex—master and servant were divided along class rather than sexual lines. But the new

---

[7]General histories important to this study of domestic service include works from all three countries. For the English experience, see Pamela Horn, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975) and Theresa M. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1820-1920* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1976). For domestics in the United States, see David M. Katzman, *Seven Days A Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Daniel E. Sutherland, *Americans and their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); and Donna L. Van Raaphorst, *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870-1940* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988). Less has been written on the experience of paid domestic workers in Canada. See Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, eds. (Toronto: Women's Press, 1974); Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," *Ontario History* 62:3 (September 1980), 148-72; Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "'I Won't Be a Slave!'—Finnish Domestics in Canada, 1911-30," *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, Robert Harney and Jim Albert (eds.) (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985); Claudette Lacelle, *Urban Domestic Servants in 19th-Century Canada* (Ottawa: Environment Canada—Parks, 1987); and Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled...*, 54-55. For discussions of the nature of unpaid housework, see Strong-Boag, "Keeping House in...", 124-51 and *The New Day Recalled...*, 113-144; and Cohen, 118-51.

[8]Katzman, 53, and Sutherland, 45.

[9]Leslie, 72. For the occupational structure of women in the interwar period, see Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled...*, 50-56.

[10]See Cohen, 136. Cohen argues that, in Ontario at least, domestic service declined in importance for women from the 1850s onwards because of expanding wage opportunities elsewhere. Thus, writes Cohen, paid domestic work was never as important in Ontario as it was in Britain. "The vast majority of households did not employ domestic servants at any time during the nineteenth century, and only a small proportion of women would have worked as domestics at any point in their lives."

middle-class demand for domestic help was met, for material and ideological reasons, by women. By 1900, virtually all domestic workers in Britain, the United States and Canada were women.[11]

Of course, there were North American regional differences in the composition of the household worker contingent. On the Pacific slope where there was a shortage of women and of women willing to be servants, male Chinese servants were commonplace—in the 1880s a majority of domestics in California and Washington State were male.[12] The percentage of males in domestic service in British Columbia was consistently higher than the Canadian average. As late as 1911, for instance, almost one-quarter of all paid household workers were men. Victoria, very much a city of the nineteenth century in this regard, had a majority of male domestics (51 per cent) in 1911. That the majority of these were born outside Canada would suggest Asian males dominated service in that city.[13] However, the image of the Chinese servant provides a misleading picture of domestic service on the Pacific coast in Canada and the United States. After the 1880s, Chinese migration to the coastal States slowed to a trickle and the number of women servants increased dramatically to fill urban demand and replace Chinese menservants.[14] Most Chinese household workers in the United States after 1880 were employed as launderers, whereas Irish, German and Scandinavian women were preferred as live-in domestics.[15] This joint 'de-Orientalization' and feminization of domestic service occurred in British Columbia as well. In contrast to Victoria, women in Vancouver made up eighty per cent of the city's domestics in 1911. The fact that only 19 per cent of Vancouver's male domestic population was foreign-born suggests that male Asian household servants were a less significant element, at least in 1911.[16] Yet the feminization of domestic service in British Columbia did not necessarily mean the direct replacement of Asian males by white women—although this probably occurred, particularly with the growing concern at the turn of the century over contacts between Chinese men and white children.[17] Rather, new women domestics entered the province to fill new demands,

---

[11]In nineteenth-century England, writes Pamela Horn, "the numbers of those able to afford resident domestic staff rose sharply, and it was in these years that domestic service reached its peak. By 1901 it was not only the major employer of women in the country...[;] female servants were numerically predominent." Horn, 13. Women dominated household service in North America was well. Reliable figures are always difficult to divine from ever-changing census structures; however, David Katzman suggests that women made up no less than 85 per cent of domestic servants in the United States after 1870. Katzman, 45.

[12]Katzman, 55.

[13]*Census of Canada* 1911, Volume VI, Table 5.

[14]Katzman, 55-56.

[15]Sutherland, 56-57.

[16]*Census of Canada* 1911, Volume VI, Table 5.

[17]See Patricia Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians, 1900-1950," *Histoire sociale/Social*

especially in the new city of Vancouver whose population doubled in the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, new jobs in domestic service were typically filled by women after 1900—domestic service in Vancouver, like Britain, the United States and eastern Canada, was women's work.

Household workers presented tremendous opportunities to employment agents because of high labour turnover in domestic service. Turnover is explained by the difficult character of the work itself. The nature of paid domestic work—working relationships, working conditions, hours and wages—has been explored extensively by British and American writers. While less has been written on household work in Canada, these few sources raise the same issues. First, histories of domestic work have underlined the importance of the employer-servant relationship in determining the nature of domestic service. This relationship increased the potential for the exploitation of an undefended and atomized workforce, and helped contribute to the decline and chronic shortages of women willing to take up paid household work. "Household work," argues David M. Katzman, "was basically a non-industrial occupation, rooted in servitude and not far removed from slavery."[18] Paid household work ran counter to regulatory trends outside the home, remaining a highly personalized, unspecialized and unregulated job at a time when society was moving towards de-personalized work relationships. To be sure, the domestic relationship was unpredictable. Some domestics were dedicated to the families they worked for; others, especially on farms, were treated more as helpers than as wage workers by their employers. A few tried to control their workplace and were successful. Ethel Wilson's Myrtle, in her novella *Tuesday and Wednesday*, shows us how one-sided the domestic relationship could be. Myrtle's employer, Mrs H. X. Lemoyne, was dominated by her housekeeper:

> Myrtle 'gave' Mrs H. X. Lemoyne three days a week, and Mrs Lemoyne, who was not very strong, cossetted Myrtle and apologized to her in way that annoyed Mr H. X. Lemoyne whose money Myrtle received. 'Oh, there you are!' cried Mrs H. X. Lemoyne, who was still in her dressing gown and anxious to please. 'What a beautiful day!' She was terrified by Myrtle's eyelids, and could be disciplined any minute that Myrtle chose.[19]

In particular, Finnish domestics were vigorously proud of their work and themselves. According to Varpu Lindstrom-Best, they "took pride in their honesty, initiative and ability to work hard 'to do what

---

[17](cont'd) *History*, XIII, 25 (May 1980), 161-72, 163. Advertisements for domestic help in Vancouver from the late 1890s onwards never specifically asked for Orientals. In fact, after 1900 many employers felt it necessary to mention in their ads whether or not they employed Asian males in and around the house. "Chinaman kept" became a common caveat in this period.

[18]Katzman, 146.

[19]Ethel Wilson, *The Equations of Love: Tuesday and Wednesday & Lilly's Story* (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1952), 9-10.

previously had taken two women.' ... They worked hard to gain the trust of their employers, and then they boasted, 'If I said the sky was green, then the sky was green.'"[20] Lacelle's study also underlines the employers' frequent failure to tame their servants: "From the outset, the terms 'attitude' and 'relationship' have been confused [by those writing on the history of domestics]. Some masters may indeed have wanted to adopt a paternalistic attitude, but that in no way guaranteed a servant's response."[21] This small measure of power notwithstanding, enough bad relationships developed to drive servants out of households frequently and in great numbers. The atomized workplace inhibited collective action by domestics to improve such conditions. One recourse to abuse was changing households, another was to leave domestic service entirely.

The difficulty of performing housework itself also helps to explain high labour turnover in domestic service. Most domestics were hired because they were necessary. The Victorian stereotype (now the prisoner of public television) of a large domestic staff waiting hand and foot on an idle family of endless means is an inaccurate portrait of domestic service in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The majority of servants in both the United States and Canada were employed as single "generals" in modest middle-class urban households.[22] Generals performed a wide range of domestic skills made necessary by the demands of keeping a house before World War One. This work required tremendous effort and great skill. Cleaning under the ravages of coal or oil stoves and open fireplaces was a full time job in itself. Yet, add to cleaning the demands of cooking without most now-indispensable prepared foods, sewing much of a family's wardrobe and caring for children of all ages, and housekeeping became overwhelming without help. Not surprisingly, then, household work involved gruelling hours. "Whether working in the city or country," writes Daniel Sutherland, "many servants labored from sunrise to sunset. Before 1870 most servants worked well over twelve hours each day, six or seven days a week.... [But] more than a few servants continued to work twelve- to fourteen-hour days as late as 1917."[23] Vancouver's *News Advertiser* agreed: "Few women have the physical strength for the washing, heavy ironing, and scrubbing, and usually in those things are done by an outsider. The housewife does the cooking and someone is paid to do the rest."[24] Also, because of irregular and long hours, domestics could hope for little leisure time. Claudette Lacelle's study of nineteenth-century household workers in eastern Canada found that most domestics were allowed an evening or half-day off once a week or every second week. By 1900, most

---

[20]Lindstrom-Best, 39-40.

[21]Lacelle, 133.

[22]See Sutherland, 94-97 and Leslie, 74-76.

[23]Sutherland, 98.

[24]*News Advertiser* June 30, 1907, 13.

urban domestics in Canada and the United States received a full day off.[25] While seldom considered so by male contemporaries, domestic workers were a highly skilled, versatile portion of the labour force. In a single day, a general might have to be a chef, seamstress, chemist, nurse and teacher. Mistress and servant together worked hard to maintain the household. Their efforts and considerable skills, today as then, were seldom appreciated.[26]

For these reasons, domestic service was chronically plagued by labour shortages and high turnover. Many used domestic service as an initial work entrance before taking up other work; others left domestic service to get married. The labour market for domestics was therefore unbalanced: supply seldom met demand. Here again regional differences were important. Supply of domestics was always higher in the east than the west: with European immigrants filling the domestic ranks, disembarking ports such as Halifax and Montreal had a supply advantage over western cities. And the wider gap between supply and demand was reflected in higher wage-rates received by domestics on the west coast.[27] The severe shortage of domestic help overwelmed most middle-class women in Vancouver before the first World War. In 1907, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) held its annual meeting in Vancouver and local women used the opportunity to vent their domestic concerns in an emotional resolution: "That in view of the present difficulties surrounding domestic life in Canada, the impossibility of procurring women to help in housekeeping, causing a situation that threatens to entirely annihilate our homes, the National Council appoint a Committee" to increase the numbers of domestic workers.[28] Domestic labour turnover was stimulated for status and work-related reasons as well. Women's groups keenly recognized the connection between status and supply, and tried to raise the profile of household work by introducing the element of professionalization offered by domestic science or training. The NCWC's 1907 *Annual Report* claimed that importing servants from "all over the world" would not solve the servant shortage; rather, "things will not be right until our Canadian Women learn to glory in homemaking instead of despising it."[29] Vancouver's women's council was less convinced of the merits of domestic training, fearing that proper

---

[25]Lacelle, 100.

[26]For discussions on domestic duties and skills, see Katzman, 117-24, Sutherland, 88-97, Leslie, 77-84, and Lacelle, 91-98. On efforts in British Columbia to improve domestic skills through domestic science training, see Barbara Riley, "Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science vs. the Home in British Columbia, 1900-1930," in *Not Just Pin Money*, Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (eds.) (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 159-81.

[27]For American evidence, see Katzman, 56. Canadian historians have largely neglected regional differences in domestic service.

[28]National Council of Women of Canada, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1907), 66.

[29]Ibid., 68.

training would only raise already "exorbitant" domestic wages.[30]

The domestic's awareness of constant servant shortages probably contributed more to high turnover than anything else. As Lacelle notes, quitting was the most frequent method used by household workers to express job dissatisfaction: "[p]eople in service," she writes, "had a sovereign remedy when ill-treated—they changed employers."[31] With the knowledge of a labour market tipped in their favour, domestics might change jobs four or five times a year.[32] Jean Scott, writing in the 1890s, observed that "the majority of servants do not stop long in one place," when "a girl knows that she can get a place at any time."[33]

High turnover and publicized domestic shortages drew employment agents into the domestic placement business. This was as true for Vancouver as it was for New York. However, we know very little about Vancouver's labour market for paid household servants before the First World War. Was there, for instance, something particular about domestic work or any other women's work in Vancouver that contributed to the success of women's employment agencies? In an effort to answer this question, a survey was made of some 1500 newspaper want ads for women workers over three years, 1911-1913 (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2 at the end of this chapter). These years were chosen for a number of reasons. First, they include both boom and depression years and thus provide a fuller view of domestic service's changing demands through good and bad economic times. Secondly, these years reflect changes in the wider labour market for women, as clerical, retail and industrial work increased its share of women's employment at domestic service's expense. Of course, the pre-war depression, which made itself felt in the women's employment market by the summer of 1913, reversed this trend until the war economy geared up in 1916; unemployed clerical, retail and industrial women workers threw themselves into the domestic labour market, creating, it would appear for the first time, a surplus of household servants.[34] This survey is

---

[30]Ibid., 77. Middle-class women in Vancouver believed they were paying inflated wages for incompetent domestic help. To remedy this situation, a petition was circulated in the spring of 1907 to reduce the Chinese head tax and, thus, increase the supply of household servants. Advocates warned of the dangers of the servant shortage: "Women, unable to pay the preposterous wages now demanded, are giving up their homes and crowding into hotels, flats and boardinghouses; men of means are refusing to bring their wives and daughters to live in a servantless city, and the unfortunate mistresses are loosing health, temper and happiness in the struggle." Even in the face of a declining homelife, however, the head tax was not rescinded.

[31]Lacelle, 131.

[32]Ibid., 98.

[33]Leslie, 90.

[34]For a review of labour market conditions for women from boom to bust, see the bi-monthly reports on Vancouver's women's employment conditions in *Labour Gazette*, July

impressionistic and not meant to back up any quantitative conclusions as to the total numbers of participants in this or that occupational group. The survey is a measure of needs, not people. Still, this sample mirrors the shape of employer demand and that, it is argued here, is largely responsible for defining the occupational structure of paid household work in the city. What the sample tells of domestic service in Vancouver is surprising.[35]

Of the 1483 advertisements for female workers recorded between January 1911 and December 1913, 685 (or 46 per cent) asked for domestic servants of one form or another (see Table 6.1). Of these 685 requests, 437 (or 64 per cent) gave no information other than a "servant" or "help" was required and the address or telephone of the employer. The remaining 248 ads, however, specified duties and these were separated into seven types: general, general/nanny, nanny/nurse, mother's help, cook, cook/general and washerwoman (laundress). Those types related to children—178 (or 26 per cent) of all jobs—made up the largest specified group. The second largest grouping—cooks and cook/generals—was specified fifty-five times, and washerwomen were asked for only fourteen times. Other than outlining duties, over two hundred of the ads contained specific requests or discrete bits of information meant either as inducements or as warnings to applicants (see Table 6.2). For instance, thirty-seven ads asked specifically for "live-out" servants. Twenty-six wanted half-day workers, twenty-four asked for half-week duties or less, and seven wanted to hire full-time domestics for a specific but temporary length of time—from one week to a couple of months. Other key requests were for specific ethnic (20) or religious (6) preferences, that no washing (21) or care of children (20) was required, or warnings that the employers were single men (19). The most frequent information offered, however, was the admission of a "small family". Whether this was meant as an inducement or as a warning against children is unclear.

This survey of employer requests underlines many of the conclusions drawn elsewhere about domestic service. For instance, that less than half (46 per cent) of the 'Help Wanted' ads were for paid domestic workers reflects the growth of retail, manufacturing and clerical jobs for women; a similar browse

---

[34](cont'd) 1913 to March 1914. Interestingly, the Department of Labour depended for its labour market data on reports from local private employment agencies and charity organizations involved in job placement.

[35]The data for the survey was collected from the Vancouver Daily *World*. The *World* always stressed its 'Help Wanted' service as practical proof of its Lib-Lab bent. As a result, the *World's* 'Help Wanted' section was the largest of any in the city. Data were collected to emphasize representativeness. Information was taken from the first day of every month; I found that, contrary to common sense, employers usually waited until the first of the new month (rather than the end of the old month) to place ads in the newspaper. Spot-checks were made throughout the collection to make sure patterns of large dismissals and hirings were not developing outside the net. They were not. In total, then, 36 'Help Wanted' columns were collected, and a total of 1483 separate entries were recorded. In each column, a number of 'crank' ads (blanket sales ads from the eastern American or local retail and service companies advertising goods or services) were excluded from the data.

through classified ads at the turn of the century reveals a women's employment market dominated by paid household work.[36] That so many employers specifically asked for "live-out" workers, rather than resident servants, mirrors the change found elsewhere from live-in to outside help—a change symbolized by the semantic shift from the live-in "servant" to the live-out "housekeeper".[37] Vancouver, though, might have always had a higher proportion of live-out domestic help: a good deal of the requests came from areas of the city—east and South Vancouver—where houses were less suited for live-in help. Thirty-nine ads, for instance, were placed by apartment dwellers. The oft-made request for a "young girl" or a "middle aged woman" might have reflected more than a concern over wages, susceptibility to training or steadiness: both might have had homes to return to in the evening. Finally, the low number of laundresses requested, coupled with the frequent inducement of "no washing", is a testament to the growth of steam laundries in the city.

Above all, employer requests show the extent to which domestic service in Vancouver was linked to the birth and care of children. And the service's dependence on child-care encouraged labour turnover. Nurses, nannies and mother's helps made up the overwelming majority of specified ads (72 per cent) and a significant percentage of the total domestics requested (26 per cent). Undoubtedly, a healthy portion of the 437 unspecified requests would have been child-related as well. The fact that some ads took space to inform applicants that "no children" were in the home emphasizes, in a backhanded way, the extent to which child-care dominated paid household work. Most of the child-related requests appear to have been meant as half-time or temporary positions. Many, for instance, required help only mornings, evenings or a couple days a week. "Nursegirls" were often requested for a "maternity period" only—as were some nannies. Some child-related positions were meant to be long term, but most were not.

Edward Starkins' reconstruction of the 1924 murder of Scottish-born Vancouver nanny Janet Smith in 1924 offers us a glimpse into one domestic's working experience.[38] Employed by a considerably better-heeled family than most domestic servants, Smith was hired to care for the Baker baby's every need. Smith was on duty whenever the child was awake, and was expected to handle the baby's laundry and mending as well. When weather permitted, her daily pattern included long walks with the pram; her diary tells us that she and other Shaughnessy Heights nursemaids met regularly in local parks where they exchanged gossip about employers, other domestics and male friends. The nannies were irreverent about the families they worked for and the children under their care. Park rendezvous often sounded like informal union grievance sessions; the group's acknowledged leader, Cissie Jones, usually led them with

---

[36]The vast majority of newspaper help wanted ads for women in 1899-1902 were for domestic servants.

[37]See Katzman, 87-94.

[38]Edward Starkins, *Who Killed Janet Smith* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984).

"disdainful talk" about employers: "Cissie did not consider it much of a privilege to be employed by the 'folks'; she was always going on about better hours, more money, and the respect that servants should be given."[39] It was these nannies' hope to give up their positions to be employed as housekeepers in even more wealthy homes.[40] The Bakers agreed to pay for Janet's trip back to England when her services were no longer needed. Smith's tenure was temporary.[41]

The experience of one Vancouver domestic employer also reveals patterns possibly common to many household workers. Robert Martin and his wife (whose name we may never know) came to Vancouver in 1895. Robert Martin was a well-to-do commission merchant (Martin and Robinson Ltd.) whose house in the West End witnessed a parade of some thirteen servants through its doors between 1896 and 1907.[42] After a "general" was hired in 1895, the Martins next requested a "nursegirl" in July 1896. By March 1897, a "nanny" was required, and in November of that year another "nursegirl" was needed—perhaps to help out with another pregnancy. In January 1899, another "nursegirl" was advertised for. Between 1900 and 1904, the Martins requested a "general" (1901), "lady help" (1902), "washerwoman" (1903), another "general" (1904) and "servant" (1904). In March 1905, another "nursegirl" was needed; and by June 1906 yet another "nanny" was required in the household. The Martins left Vancouver in 1908 for London, England. One can interpret the family's hiring record any number of ways. Chronic illness, for instance, could explain the turnover of nursegirls; equally, the Martins may have been impossible to work for—this would explain requests made within a few months of each other. More likely, though, the hiring record reflects patterns of child-care in the Martin home: as many as seven temporary servants were needed during two periods, 1896-99 and 1905-07.

Thus, Vancouver's job market for domestic workers was active because of the nature of household work. Perhaps half of all domestic workers were employed to serve half-time, short-term, often child-related demands in middle-class homes. This encouraged turnover, not simply because jobs were task-specific, but because children were difficult to cope with. The frequency within the sample of the warnings "small family" and "no children" testifies to an overt tension between domestics and employers' children. How many servants quit their jobs because of the trials of child-care, though, is unknown.

---

[39]Ibid., 13.

[40]Janet Smith earned $30 per month. This was less than most nannies made in the early 1920s. See Ibid., 32.

[41]Ibid., 38.

[42]Data for the Martin home's hiring record was stumbled upon while recording advertisements for women's private employment agencies from the *World* and the *News Advertiser*. Their address, 1149 Melville, was one of several that frequently appeared. Advertisement data were correlated with background searches in city directories to reconstruct this brief family history.

Finally, domestic service, like logging and railroad construction, had its own seasonal patterns. These yearly expansions and contractions were perceptible in Vancouver's employment market and helped to increase turnover. In the three-year period covered by the want ad survey, employment opportunities for household workers were strongest in the spring (a traditional period of housecleaning), declined in the summer and fell even further in the fall to a low usually in November.[43] Bi-monthly reports on labour market conditions reported by the Department of Labour reinforce this conclusion.[44] As well as following yearly rhythms, domestic employment expanded during seasonal highpoints, such as Christmas, Easter and summer outings, when temporary help was engaged. For instance, ads for household help reached yearly lows in November and early December, but by the middle of December requests would double. Many of these Christmas requests were for cooks and "dining room girls" in larger West End homes. Thus, along with the very nature of domestic work, yearly rhythmic patterns and seasonal highpoints helped to stimulate even further the turnover of paid household servants. The result was a domestic labour market full of motion, and, needless to say, an irresistible lure to employment middlemen—or in this case, middlewomen.

---

[43]The average number of jobs offered household workers at the beginning of every month between 1911 and 1913 represented a falling curve from a high in February of 30, down to 18 in June and 11 in November. Each year followed the same declining pattern. Out of interest, I investigated the relationship between domestic and total jobs offered women on a per month basis. I found that, as a proportion of all jobs offered, domestic work's share of the employment market mirrored the pattern of household work on its own. Thus, domestic jobs represented 59 per cent of all jobs offered in February, 47 per cent in June and 33 per cent in October. I then went on to look at the pattern of non-domestic jobs as well. I found a more stable employment market from January to September (from an average of 24 jobs in January to 21 in September), but then a sharp decline in the fall (an average of 10 non-domestic jobs in December). It would therefore seem that the employment market for domestics was slightly more volatile, but all job markets for women followed a roughly similar pattern: a strong spring and a weak fall.

[44]See *Labour Gazette*, 1913-14.

TABLE 6.1

Female "Help Wanted" Survey—1911-1913
Domestic Type Requested

Type	1911	1912	1913	Total
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Non- Domestic	*259*	*301*	*238*	*798*
Domestic	*260*	*216*	*209*	*685*
General	163	140	134	437
Nanny/Nurse	27	23	14	64
Nanny/Gen.	29	15	22	66
Mothershelp	13	17	18	48
Cook	5	1	5	11
Cook/Gen.	14	17	14	45
Laundress	9	3	2	14

Source: Vancouver Daily *World*, Classified Ads.

TABLE 6.2

Female "Help Wanted" Survey—1911-1913
Comments and Special Requests

Comments	1911	1912	1913	Total
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
Small Family	28	22	21	71
Live-Out	16	12	9	37
Half Day	9	11	6	26
Half Week	10	10	4	24
No Washing	10	7	4	21
No Children	7	8	5	20
Pref. Ethnic	7	8	5	20
Male Employer	8	9	3	19
Pref. Age	2	5	10	17
Temporary	2	3	2	7

Source: Vancouver Daily *World*, Classified Ads.

CHAPTER VII
WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES & THE YWCA

We do not know how most domestics in Vancouver found work. Many probably found jobs through informal means—through friends, relatives or word-of-mouth. Edward Starkins tells us that Janet Smith came from Britain to Vancouver with her employer. But her many domestic friendships probably ensured her of at least a couple of alternative placements.[1] The survey of Vancouver domestic "Help Wanted" advertisements discussed in Chapter 6 also indicate the importance of direct contacts between mistress and servant through newspapers. Lilly Waller, the single-minded and some-time domestic in Ethel Wilson's *Lilly's Story*, used newspaper want ads to find specific jobs and to get an overall sense of the labour market for women workers.[2] Yet the atomized domestic workplace meant that the job market for women domestic workers was managed by commercial and philanthropic agencies to an extent unmatched by any other form of men's or women's work. High labour turnover drew self-interested agents into the domestic employment business, while chronic labour shortages and a paternalistic ideology of social control over women invited in the YWCA and other middle-class organizations. In one sense, the voluntary and commercial forces never competed for the patronage of workers or employers. The YWCA helped to promote and receive single immigrant women into the city, provide them with secure lodging, a morally-uplifting environment and, eventually, place them in an employer's home. After this initial introduction to the local domestic market, though, the role of the YWCA declined and that of the commercial agency increased for women who needed intermediaries to find employment. Commercial agents offered a wider range of jobs, in and out of domestic service, and did so without overt moral purposes or the same degree of employer influence.

In another sense, the YWCA and commercial agencies were incompatible. Commercial agencies, argued middle-class protectors of young women, could not be expected to shield working women from these "emissaries of evil".[3] Employment agencies were widely-held to be uncritical exploiters of young women at best and, at worst, fronts for prostitution and white-slavery. In particular, women's agents and

---

[1]Edward Starkins, *Who Killed Janet Smith?* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1984), 61.

[2]Ethel Wilson, *The Equations of Love: Tuesday and Wednesday & Lilly's Story* (London: MacMillan and Company Limited, 1952), 196.

[3]From a speech delivered by Vancouver YWCA President Mrs. R.J. Skinner in 1909. See *News Advertiser* June 15, 1909.

white slavers were deemed synonomous. "Many of the female employment agencies in the United States are but agencies for the recruiting of the white slave traffic," declared the *Western Clarion* in 1912; "in Vancouver similar agencies have been established."[4] Fraudulent job advertisements placed by "bogus agencies" were the greatest danger, according to the National Council of Women of Canada. "The insertion in newspapers of misleading and criminal advertisements which lure young girls, looking for honourable employment, into lives of sin and shame, should be suppressed," demanded the NCWC Committee on the White Slave Traffic in 1907.[5] The NCWC joined the YWCA in 1911 to combat white slavery by placing articles in local newspapers warning women against using employment agencies and/or replying to their want ads.[6] The greatest failure of commercial agencies may have been more material, however: agents were blamed by their middle-class critics for contributing to the domestic labour shortage by mediating the employer-employee relationship to the benefit of workers and by offering an occupational escape for women seeking work outside homes. For these moral and material reasons, the YWCA was the first choice of many employers looking for household help. The YWCA was unable to fill these needs adequately, however. And this huge demand, coupled with the structure of domestic service already mentioned, contributed to the dramatic growth of women's commercial agencies after 1909. The YWCA was more dedicated to the interests of employers than were commercial agents; like men's, women's employment agents were dedicated to none but themselves.

The YWCA was Vancouver's most active charity organization dedicated to the recruitment and distribution of women household workers. The Vancouver chapter's activities were generally the same as elsewhere—and these emphasized safe housing and secure souls. YWCAs throughout Canada, writes Wendy Mitchinson, "were founded to respond to a secular need—to help working women by providing them with a cheap and respectable place to live."[7] In addition to its secular concerns, the YWCA's religious avocation was always important. The Y aligned itself early with local evangelical churches as a means,

---

[4]*Western Clarion* March 16, 1912, 1.

[5]NCWC, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1907), 83-84.

[6]NCWC, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1911), 28. For more Vancouver comment on women's agencies and white slavery, see Dr. Emma Drake's speech, *News Advertiser* March 26, 1912. While agencies were seen as the main white slave procurers, they were not the only ones. According to Asa Gordon of the Ottawa Women's Council, young women were advised to avoid any contact with "the foreign stage, the night cafe, living statuary, and certain teachers of massage." NCWC, *Annual Report* (Toronto, 1911), 28.

[7]Wendy Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform: Prelude to the Welfare State," *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*, Allan Moscovitch (ed.) (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1987). Also see Mitchinson's, "The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 12:24 (November 1979), 368-84.

Figure 7.1: Employment agencies for women were commonly thought to be involved in the white slave traffic. Source: *World*, June 3, 1912.

in part, of raising funds and membership.[8] Covering its members in a cloak of common Christianity, it was thought, ensured collective spiritual and moral strength. Weekly prayer meetings and bible classes were held in YWCAs across the country.[9] Diana Pedersen has stressed the positive institutional role the Y played in forwarding women-centered urban reform in Canada. According to Pedersen, the YWCA annex represented "a female refuge from an inhospitable male environment and a base from which they could attempt to modify that environment in the interests of women."[10] Ultimately, however, the organization was forced to compromise its values in order to gain financial support from local business communities. She also argues that the Y was a window of vocational opportunity for working women: evening libraries, night classes in stenography and business skills, and even university courses were offered at Y annexes.[11] Pedersen's sympathetic view of the YWCA may apply to other Canadian cities or to Vancouver in a later period, but is an inaccurate depiction of the Vancouver organization before World War One.[12] Vancouver's Y offered a truncated range of domestic education classes; by 1909, the organization offered only evening cooking classes, sewing and child-care talks. Significantly, the local Y did not promote job education outside domestic skills.[13] Domestic training was deemed essential, not only to expand the domestic supply and women's job opportunities within acceptable service roles, but also for the domestic's future roles of wife and mother. "Thus, if women were going to work," writes Mitchinson, "they would be encouraged by the YWCA to do so in a way that least challenged sexual stereotypes." [14]

From the time of the YWCA's arrival in Vancouver in 1897, the organization wedded its traditional material and spiritual concerns with the housekeeping demands of the city's middle-class women. Most pressing of these was the shortage of good, reliable domestic help. Thus, many of the local Y's efforts

---

[8]Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations...", 81.

[9]The Vancouver YWCA held its bible classes on Sunday afternoons. See *News Advertiser* March 16, 1909.

[10]Diana Pedersen, "'Building Today for the Womanhood of Tomorrow': Businessmen Boosters, and the YWCA, 1890-1930," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine,* Volume 15, No. 3, 1987, 227. Also see Pedersen, "The Photographic Record of the Canadian YWCA, 1890-1930: A Visual Source for Women's History," *Archivaria* 24, (Summer) 1987.

[11]Pedersen, 228. Also see Mitchinson, "YWCA and Reform...", 378 and Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations...", 83.

[12]Pedersen's work does not distinguish between periods or regions—the motives and accomplishments of Vancouver's 1908 YWCA are deemed identical to its Toronto counterpart in 1929. But the thrust of Pederson's argument, that the Y was an effective refuge from male violence and a visible symbol of women's protest against such actions, clearly transends time or place.

[13]See YWCA advertisement, *News Advertiser* March 16, 1909.

[14]Mitchinson "YWCA and Reform...", 378.

were taken up with channelling newly-arrived women immigrants into local homes. In 1899, the organization opened the city's first employment bureau to deal exclusively in women domestic servants.[15] The bureau promised employers "competent, reliable and trustworthy" servants, and set about recruiting "efficient, desireable help" from abroad.[16] The organization worked closely in its immigration efforts with the British Women's Emigration Association (BWEA) to bring out parties of young women under matron's care. The BWEA was created to solve the sexual imbalance in Britain and its colonies by encouraging British working women to emigrate. The British organization would sponsor groups only if the entire route was fully escorted and the travellers were housed in secure hostels at their final destination.[17] The Vancouver chapter of the YWCA satisfied these BWEA demands. In fact, the two organizations were joined in Vancouver: local Y President Mrs R.J. Skinner was also the long-time regional Secretary of the BWEA.[18] Just how many women entered Vancouver under joint BWEA-YWCA sponsorship is unknown; in 1907 three hundred young women arrived from overseas, and Skinner alludes to hundreds of young "girls from the overcrowded cities of the Old Land" in her 1909 Presidential address.[19]

The Vancouver YWCA was also allied with the Traveller's Aid Society, another British women's organization out of London. "The object of this work," Skinner spoke of the Society, "is to guard young women, when travelling alone, whether in search of employment or otherwise, from the dangers to which young girls are exposed."[20] The local YWCA sent, on behalf of the Traveller's Aid Society, two uniformed women to meet every incoming train. From there, both sponsored and unexpected travellers, "young and attractive and utterly unconscious of any danger", were scurried off to the YWCA annex where it was "impossible for any evil influence to lead them astray." [21] In 1908, the second year of the service, the YWCA assisted over six hundred travellers; in 1909, close to two thousand women were cared for by the

---

[15]*News Advertiser* August 1, 1899.

[16]On the central importance of domestic placement activities in Vancouver's YWCA work, see *World* February 5, 1901, 2, February 21, 1908, 7 and *News Advertiser* February 1, 1912.

[17]For information on specific schemes to bring out British domestic workers to Ontario, see Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes," *Ontario History*, Volume 62 (September 1980), Number 3, 154-158. For a wider view of assisted emigration to Canada of British "surplus" populations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Desmond Glynn, "'Exporting Outcast London': Assisted Emigration to Canada, 1886-1914," *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 15:29 (May 1982), 209-38.

[18]*News Advertiser* February 23, 1910.

[19]*World* February 21, 1908 and *News Advertiser* June 15, 1909.

[20]*News Advertiser* June 15, 1909.

[21]Ibid., February 23, 1910.

Society.[22]

Whether immigrants or travellers, the women housed at the YWCA annex were encouraged to seek work through the Y's domestic employment service. The bureau was under some pressure by employers to perform its placement function. Part of this was financial. A portion of the bureau's operating budget was paid for out of a civic grant for the purpose of securing household help from abroad; the organization's success or failure was often measured in placement terms.[23] Reports and speeches by YWCA officials always stressed the importance of its employment bureau. In her year-end address in February 1908, Skinner considered their domestic placement work "the most useful to the province at large, because the need of every kind of women's help is steadily increasing."[24] Women were sometimes talked out of jobs they had secured on their own and persuaded to take up more "respectable" work in Vancouver homes.[25] Channelling women through the bureau into domestic work was coloured in moral terms. Skinner explained:

> There are so many openings for the woman with a large and loving heart. Many of those who come to us to be placed in their first situation here are refined and educated women.... [A]nd now scattered throughout the Province you will find our girls in some of the mining towns, or on ranches by the inland lakes. Taking with them the truest refinement and culture; they are one of the greatest civilizing powers in our Province today, for there is no greater civilizing influence than that which a truly good woman possesses.[26]

The implication was clear: the YWCA was doing much more than simply delivering servants—it was performing a public service. The organization also saw itself as a screen through which only the most respectable domestic help could pass. Like some enormous character processor, the YWCA took raw recruits off the train platform or boat docks and converted them into dedicated, hardworking, Christian servants. The message was clear here as well: domestic workers placed by the YWCA were morally superior to those found elsewhere. Elsewhere, warned Skinner, were "evil influences and the emissaries of evil... to deny that they exist is absurd."[27]

---

[22]Ibid. In 1907 the local Traveller's Aid Society helped five hundred women. See *World* February 21, 1908.

[23]See reports on civic grants, *News Advertiser* March 13, 1906. The Y also received a small yearly grant from the provincial government. See *World* February 21, 1909.

[24]*World* Ibid.

[25]See *News Advertiser* February 23, 1910.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., June 15, 1909.

Figure 7.2: Two domestics arrive from points east to find shelter and jobs through the Vancouver YWCA. Source: *Province*, March 29, 1909.

The Vancouver YWCA was unable to satisfy either employers' needs for paid household help or working women's demands for employment. In 1907, the Y took in 1045 employer requests and less than 300 were filled. Two years later, 2983 applications from employers were received and only 764 of these were filled. Most positions were taken by newly-arrived immigrants.[28] The YWCA was somewhat embarrassed by this failure to live up to its mandate—a twenty-five per cent placement rate was difficult to defend. Skinner blamed other cities—Seattle and San Fransisco—for luring potential help away from her city. But the YWCA also failed to find work for most applicants who applied off the street. In 1909, 1141 women registered with the bureau for work, but only 566 of these accepted positions. Skinner was frank in explaining this failure: women were simply turning down the domestic work offered by the YWCA.[29] By 1909 alternatives to paid household labour were drawing women out of domestic service.

We will never know the numbers involved, but it appears that after 1909 women workers and domestic employers abandoned the YWCA as all but a distribution centre for newly-arrived immigrant domestic workers. This had always been the YWCA's primary function in Vancouver, but its inability to satisfy demand for household help forced employers to look elsewhere. Desperate employers, as it turned out, were willing to apply to the "emissaries of evil" for help with child-care and housework. Workers were increasingly ill-served by the YWCA's labour distribution function as well. Part of this failure was ideological. The high moral tone, class condescension and simple interference in the worker's personal life were likely stifling for many women workers. When Janet Smith became homesick, an employer suggested she visit one of the counselors at the YWCA; when Janet expressed her fear of a Chinese co-worker, the counselor at the Girl's Friendly Society listened, but did not suggest changing employers or occupations.[30] Newly-arrived women under YWCA care had little choice but to accept Y control; the veterans of the domestic wars, however, were more apt to exercise their independence. And, apparently, they did. Women workers were also ill-served by the YWCA in a vocational sense. Vancouver's YWCA training courses and job referrals pointed towards paid household work at a time when working women were rejecting domestic service for ideological and material reasons. That only half of those women who applied to the YWCA bureau accepted the work it offered underlined the shortcomings of available domestic work. As women's work changed before World War One, the YWCA was slow to follow—Skinner, in particular, remained devoted to the promotion of domestic service. But commercial agencies were more pragmatic.

The story of women's commercial agencies is the history of changing women's work in Vancouver. Agencies reflected the expansions and contractions of acceptable vocational roles for women. Elsewhere,

---

[28]See *World* February 21, 1908 and *News Advertiser* February 23, 1910.

[29]*News Advertiser* Ibid.

[30]Starkins, 82-83.

especially in large eastern American cities, women's agencies acquired a loathsome reputation for raising the cost and lowering the efficiency of help, for encouraging labour turnover and shortages, and for being fronts for prostitution and white slavery.[31] Whatever reputation preceded agents, it was ignored by employers and women workers in Vancouver. After the 1907–8 recession, women's agencies grew rapidly in response to the rising demand for women workers. Most offered a wide range of then-acceptable vocations and were very sensitive to their change. Unlike the YWCA, commercial agencies for women were less concerned with their client's respectability. Also, the extreme imbalance between the demand for domestic workers and their supply meant that women's agencies supported their worker-clients even more than men's agencies did. And finally, commercial agencies offered working women a measure of independence that the YWCA did not. If the YWCA was interested in converting working women into loyal, hardworking Christian servants, the "emissaries of evil" simply wanted to increase their own profits—and this often depended on the freedom of working women to choose.

Women's agencies were slow to develop in Vancouver in part because of the early influence the YWCA had on the recruitment and distribution of domestic servants. An early attempt, The Ladies' Exchange, opened and closed its doors in 1898. Men's agencies would, from time to time, advertise for domestics, but these east-end agents were badly situated to attract employers. The first agency to specialize in domestics was the Elite Intelligence Bureau, which began business in 1904. The Elite was located on the west side to serve middle-class employers, and dealt almost exclusively in household workers. Women ran the majority of women's agencies: Sadie Stone ran the Elite. The shortage of domestic help hurt the agency, as Stone was always in need of women to fill positions. In 1905, she began to advertise for Chinese male household help in order to satisfy demand, but this was short-lived. Stone also advertised to fill non-household jobs, all of which were service occupations in restaurants and hotels.[32]

For reasons which are still unclear, the women's employment business mushroomed after 1908. Of the twenty-one women's agencies listed in Appendix 1, seventeen opened in 1909 or later. These agencies opened to meet the demand for household workers but advertised non-domestic work as well. Some even became specialists in certain types of new women's work. For instance, The Germaine Agency (1912) and The Dominion Employment Bureau (1911–12) dealt in hotel and restaurant help exclusively. Germaine's

---

[31]For an historical discussion of the debate over American women's agencies, see Tomas Martinez, *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), 25–31. The classic study of women's agencies in the United States is Frances A. Kellor's *Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies, their Treatment of the Unemployed and their Influence upon Homes and Business* (New York: Knickerbocker Press), 1905. Kellor's work has coloured comment on the activities of agencies since its publication in 1905. For more on Kellor, see this study, 2–4.

[32]See *News Advertiser* November 15, 1904 and May 16, 1905.

claim, that it was "not here for the short term, but expect to make Vancouver home for a good many years," was not enough to ensure a sustained trade; the agency closed the same year it opened. Other offices specialized in what would replace domestic service as the mainstay of women's wage work—clerical and office jobs. Most of these agencies were office equipment companies that ran employment offices on the side. Clarke and Stuart was an early example: in 1904 the typewriter sales and service company promised to furnish women stenographers without charge.[33] After 1908 a handful of other typewriter firms opened employment offices. The Remington Typewriter Company foreshadowed the modern 'temp' agencies in the summer of 1911 when it claimed it "pays to do substitute stenographic work during the vacation season."[34] A year later, United Typewriter and The Vancouver Typewriter Company both opened employment bureaus. None of these companies charged employers for the service (it is unclear whether the stenographers paid fees), all promised to "screen" applicants, and all probably offered the employment service as a way to sell more typewriters. For this, The Remington Typewriter Company called itself a "public service company".[35] Commercial colleges in American cities are known to have placed their graduates in clerical positions. The only example of this in Vancouver before World War One was Vogel Commercial College which ran such ads between 1902 and 1904.[36]

The most active, numerous and enduring women's employment agencies were not specialists, outside of their dependence on domestic workers. Twelve such companies operated between 1909 and 1915. Eight of these were run by women, as were all of the most durable—six were open for three years or more. Little is known about these agencies. The owners' backgrounds, for instance, are unclear, but we do know that the proprietors tended to be widowed, divorced (separated) or single, and that many came from working-class families. The majority lived on the city's poorer east side. Also, like the owners of white male agencies, most women agents were newcomers to the city. Even so, some became so well known that their own names preceded that of the company's in promotional advertisements: Alberta Crawford, Bertha Kirk, Sadie Stone, Emma Smith and Emily Brown. Women's agents were working class women like their working clients.

The placement and fee system used by women's agencies is also rather sketchy. We do know from advertisements that it differed from the procedures commonly used by men's agencies. Rather than relying on the casual use of daily bulletin boards, women's offices employed a registration system, where both employer and domestic paid a fee to place their names on the agent's books. When an appropriate

---

[33] *News Advertiser* December 1, 1904.

[34] Ibid., July 15, 1911.

[35] Ibid.

[36] For instance, see *News Advertiser* October 18, 1903.

match developed, employer and domestic met for an interview at the agent's office. Many temporary household workers in Vancouver probably skipped the interview process and simply turned up at the employer's door. Kellor's 1905 study of eastern American agencies found the employer's registration fee about double that of the domestic's. While the fee structure of most of Vancouver's agencies remain a mystery, some offices appear not to have charged fees to domestic workers at all—the employer paid the entire fee. The West End Employment Agency, for instance, boasted a "free Registry" for domestics throughout 1912 as a means of enticing scarce domestics away from other offices.[37] Emily Brown's Dominion Employment waived its fees to workers in the summer of 1912 as well.[38] No agency other than the typewriter sales companies advertised a free registry to employers. Obviously the unbalanced labour market for household workers helped domestics in this respect. The fact that employers' fees made up the bulk of the office's earnings suited the agent just fine: the employer often combined desperation and a large pocketbook to the agent's great advantage.

One of the most successful of these owners was Katherine Maloney of the Universal Female Employment Office. Maloney's activities tell us about the changing nature of women's work, how those changes were accommodated by the employment agents, and to what extent agents served the interests of women wage earners or employers. The Universal bureau was one of the most enduring employment agencies—men's or women's—in the city's early history: Maloney began business in 1910 and closed in 1919. In between, she moved her office only twice; the Universal was a fixture in Vancouver's employment scene.[39] Maloney arrived in Vancouver in 1909 with her husband John H. Maloney (a machinist who died the following year) and her son who worked as a janitor at Sam Sell's Canadian Pacific Employment Agency. Universal was located adjacent to the financial district for the comfort of middle-class employers and women applicants. In 1912, perhaps bouyant times or ill-health forced Maloney to take on a clerk, Alberta Crawford, and a year later Crawford left Universal to set up her own agency, Central Female Employment. From then on, Maloney ran the office alone until she retired in 1919.

Because Maloney regularly advertised in newpapers, we can begin to chart the long-range patterns of her business. Universal began in 1910-11 by placing domestics, then expanded its business beyond household help in 1912-13 and, with the depression of 1913, returned to the domestic trade until Maloney's retirement. In effect, Maloney's business roughly mirrored the changing labour market for women until the wartime economy accelerated in 1916. The domestic jobs Maloney offered in 1910-11 were often related to children, and many required temporary—either daily or weekly—rather than

---

[37] *News Advertiser* June 14, 1912.

[38] Ibid., October 1, 1912.

[39] Henderson's and Wrigley's Directories.

permanent help to reflect the structures of household work.[40] During the 1912–13 period, Universal expanded to place non-household workers: waitresses, dishwashers and restaurant cooks, hotel chambermaids and hospital workers, seamstresses and tailoresses, and stenographers, bookkeepers and office help.[41] Maloney's business was not limited to Vancouver during this expansive period. She sent restaurant cooks to Victoria, cannery workers up the coast and, on one occasion, teachers to Australia.[42] Maloney's business clearly profited by this apparent expansion of women's work.

By the fall of 1913, Universal's diversification ended. The depression squeezed Maloney's business and forced her to take some desperate measures. In August 1913 she experimented with commissioned salesmen roaming the city to drum up new employers. At the beginning of September Maloney tried placing men, and changed her name to reflect this new venture. This was unsuccessful. The Universal's advertisements began to reflect desperation: "AT ONCE," read a September entry, "Thanking my numerous patrons for past favors—hope for the continuance of same."[43] Domestic service was the only work available for women after the summer of 1913, and Maloney slowly realized this. In October she abandoned the scheme to place men and changed her name to Universal *Domestic* Employment Office.[44] Virtually all of Maloney's itemized advertisements after October 1913 were for household workers.

We may never know how women workers or employers were treated by Katherine Maloney, Alberta Crawford, Emma Smith or the other owners of Vancouver's women's employment offices. There are no records of their correspondence, few comments were made by them or about them in the press, and they were totally ignored by the 1912 BC Commission on Labor—the same body that had investigated at length the activities of male employment agencies.[45] What records we do have of these agents suggest they performed a needed service for women workers and, because profits and not morality motivated them, they did so without the degree of paternalism that characterized charity agencies such as the YWCA. That these agencies provided a needed service is unquestionable. Domestics looking for new homes and better positions found a welcome seat in Maloney's waiting room: while the YWCA stressed permanence, Maloney and the other agents thrived on turnover—agent and domestic both gained from the servant's

---

[40]See *News Advertiser* May 7, 1911.

[41]For instance, see Ibid., October 16, 1912, November 15, 1912 and February 1, 1913.

[42]Ibid., June 17, 1913.

[43]Ibid., September 2, 1913.

[44]The emphasis is mine.

[45]An effort was made to track down relatives of a number of employment agents, including Katherine Maloney and Sam Sells (see Chapter 4), through the mails. This process is ongoing, but as yet unfruitful.

drive for improvement. As well, women wanting to escape the trials of domestic service could never do so at charity agencies. New employment choices, however, did exist at the Universal as long as those jobs were offered in the labour market. The employment office provided a glimpse of change for domestic workers seeking non-domestic work.

Evidence also suggests that Maloney and the other women's agents were more apt to support their worker-clients than the employers who entered their offices. Certainly American employers thought so. Historian Carol Lasser stresses the positive role of the employment agency in the domestic's manipulation of the labour market in nineteenth-century Boston. Employers were increasingly resentful of being at the mercy of the seller's market for servants; women's agencies, argued employers, conspired against "domestic peace" and the "unity of interest between mistress and maid".[46] Domestic agencies in 1880s New York City were blamed for recirculating women unfit for employment: the independent, poor, unhealthy, aged, dishonest or inefficient. One angry employer complained to the *New York Times*:

> Several times I saw in these offices servants whom I know had been discharged for theft, intemperance, inefficiency from their last places, and heard the persons in charge of the office testifying to their possessing the opposite valuable qualities. When remonstrated with, the agent replied: 'The girl must live and if we don't find her a situation some other office will do so.'"[47]

American employers also believed that agencies persuaded applicants to demand high wages in an attempt to gain better commissions from employers. "Increasing profits," writes Tomas Martinez, "often involved coaxing the applicant to require as large a salary as the employer market would tolerate."[48]

Canadian evidence, while sketchy, supports this favourable view of women's agencies as well. Finnish domestic agencies in eastern Canada, argues Lindstrom-Best, "were the key to the domestic's flexibility. They were quick to advise the women not to accept intolerable conditions... [and] they kept close watch on the 'greenhorns' who were most vulnerable to exploitation."[49] While Vancouver's domestic-agent relationship lacked the ethnic connections and motives of the Finnish women's community, there is reason to believe, given labour market conditions, that Vancouver's agencies were also supportive of their worker-clients as long as their pocketbook and the economy would allow. For instance, when the

---

[46]Carol Lasser, "The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations Between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England," *Labor History*, Volume 28 (Winter 1987), no. 1, 17-20.

[47]Cited in Martinez, 27.

[48]Ibid. 30.

[49]Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "'I Won't be a Slave!'—Finnish Domestics in Canada, 1911-1930," *Gathering Places: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, Robert Harney and Jim Albert (eds.) (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985), 44-45.

labour market for women reversed itself in the fall of 1913, some commercial agencies were forced to drum up business for themselves and their domestic clients. In mid-December 1913 the Universal urged employers to take on temporary help: "Mrs Maloney," ran the ad, "will furnish on short notice reliable women to keep house where parties going to theater or otherwise require house and children taken care of. Employers call me up for Christmas catering, cooking, waiting and dinner parties."[50] Another agency asked homeowners to hire part-time help after the Christmas season. Of course, domestic agencies were not selfless in these efforts—profits and service sometimes merged in the worker-agent relationship. Significantly, the YWCA bureau was silenced by the 1913 depression. The glutted market for domestics aptly demonstrated the extent to which the YWCA was employer-controlled; the Y's employment bureau advertisements for help—now unnecessary—were pulled in the fall of 1913. Nonetheless, the YWCA and women's employment agencies could not create work for the unemployed. To be sure, both proved useless to working women during bad economic times.

In March 1913, the Home and Domestic Employee's Union (HDEU) was formed in Vancouver "with the object of raising the standard of domestic work and bringing it in line with other kinds of employment."[51] The HDEU, composed entirely of women, asked for basic wage increases, hour reductions and recognition as an industrial union. Like men's unions, the HDEU also hoped to gain control over hiring for obvious organizational reasons. Given the long hours and isolated workplaces, union recruitment was very difficult; recruitment at the point of hiring was the best solution to these critical barriers.[52] The HDEU hoped to establish its own employment bureau "whereby the girls [could] deal directly with the women to whom they hire."[53] The domestic's union also hoped to monitor employers and workers by recording all hirings and firings.

The HDEU admitted that commercial agents controlled domestic hiring, but was never critical of agents directly.[54] Rather, the HDEU and its President Lillian Coote reserved its criticism for charity organizations, such as the YWCA and the Salvation Army, for attempting to flood the local domestic labour market in order to depress wages. "Vancouver is fortunate in possessing public-spirited women,"

---

[50] *News Advertiser* December 15, 1913.

[51] *Labour Gazette* March 1914, 1070. For information on the HDEU, see Star Rosenthal, "Union Maids: Organizing Women Workers in Vancouver, 1900-1915," *BC Studies*, 41 (Spring 198?), 36-55.

[52] The HDEU also talked of starting a "walking bureau" (house to house registration scheme) similar to earlier efforts in Toronto. It is not clear, however, if this was actually tried. See Rosenthal, 50 -51.

[53] *BC Federationist* March 28, 1913, 1.

[54] A 1913 *BC Federationist* article on the HDEU does characterize the women's employment office as "conducted by some old battle-axe in petticoats". The article was unsigned.

wrote Coote of charity ladies in 1913, but these "many philanthropically inclined women... fall short when it is a question of touching their own pockets."[55] The HDEU was uncritical of commercial agents simply because Maloney and the others were more difficult to criticize. But they did stand in the way of an effective union drive to organize domestic workers. The agents' success at organizing household workers and serving their immediate needs helped to make HDEU recruitment an impossible job; the union died in 1915. Thus, commercial agencies were a difficult target to hit. The HDEU could attack the agents only as barriers to organization; but that argument lacked the public appeal of nightmare stories of degradation and abuse. That the greatest attacts on domestic agencies came from employers, and not workers at all, only hurt the HDEU's cause further.

***

Women's employment agencies provided a needed service to women workers before the First World War. At times the agent's drive for profits inadvertantly complemented the worker's need for security and occupational flexibility. This service, however, only proceeded as far as society or the economy would allow. An expansion, change or redefinition of women's occupational roles could be facilitated but never initiated by women's agents. Commercial agents were interested in money, not reform. This was not true of organizations like the local YWCA, which actively manipulated working women for specific moral and material reasons. And because women's agencies did not actively serve the interests of employers, most were condemned by the YWCA.

[55]Ibid., April 11, 1913, 2. Other labour organizations were less restrained in their critiques of domestic immigration schemes promoted by charities. "Such barefaced vulgar traffic in human flesh and blood should be cut out," the *Federationist* wrote on a Salvation Army plan to bring out 117,000 servants from Britain. See, *BC Federationist* September 28, 1912, 1.

CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

The quotation by ESC director R.A. Rigg which opened this study is an accurate appraisal of attitudes towards employment agencies before the First World War. The "sins of commission" and "spirit of venality" combined with economic inefficiency to cast employment agents as the arch miscreants of the progressive era. This study has hoped to shed some new light on these villains by looking closely at one community during its employment business heyday. The structure of Vancouver's agencies, the motives of its agents and the demands placed on them complicate the prevailing and simple image of the omnipotent employment "shark". The effort here has not been to resurrect the reputation of job agents: Sam Sells and his cohorts will not be missed. Rather, the effort has been to show the gap between the experience of employment agencies and the criticisms raised against them. Instead of a direct connection between experience and criticism, the relationship between agency activities and their critique was convoluted and dictated by unrelated, narrow group, and sometimes personal, self-interest.

The international labour exchange movement entered the local debate on commercial agencies before and during World War One in an exemplary way. The movement offered a 'scientific' alternative to commercial agencies, a language of criticism and an impressive cadre of international experts to carry the message. These exchange advocates—mostly social reformers, progressive intellectuals and new government bureaucrats—called for a centrally-organized and state-controlled labour market in order to meet three related goals: economic growth through an improved hiring/labour distribution system; prevention of unemployment, under-employment and abusive employment practices; and social harmony through employment control, particularly during wartime. While labour exchange theorists and their followers innovatively recognized unemployment as a necessary feature of the capitalist system, the labour exchange was never meant to interfere with industry; rather, the exchange system was a preventative overlay which was meant to assist industry and workers, while preserving, to varying degrees, ideals of self-initiative and personal responsibility. Commercial agencies, North American relics of an unorganized and inefficient world of competitive capitalism, stood in the way of the labour exchange movement and were therefore attacked by American and Canadian reformers after 1910.

While labour exchange theorists and their followers shaped local opinion on commercial agencies by providing a weighty vision of the state alternative, opposition to agencies in Vancouver grew out of more parochial concerns. Organized labour raised the issue of the employment "shark" because of the threat

men's agencies posed to union organization. Labour officials, particularly in the new British Columbia Federation of Labor, hoped to end the male employment agent's control over the hiring of labourers, the agent's incursion into placing tradesmen and the actions of a few agents in recruiting strikebreakers. But these deeper organizational concerns were never articulated. Instead, labour officials constructed a largely unfounded moral argument against commercial agencies, accusing them of abuses and trickery which owed more to legend than fact. Outside of organized labour there was very little local concern over male employment agencies. A few social reformers with big ears bent to loud voices in the progressive east echoed the exchange movement's appropriate 'scientific' concern for economic efficiency, human waste and social control. Some larger employers responded favourably to the labour exchange system's promises of less labour turnover, 'quality' control over workers and streamlined labour distribution. When male workers commented on commercial agencies at all, it was to condemn Asian agencies for their successful placing of 'undesirables'; when workers collectively demanded a labour exchange it was meant to remove Asians from the workforce. In 1913, when workers and employers should have expressed their concern over commercial agencies, there was silence. The agency problem was never theirs.

The critique of women's agencies was less obvious, far less amplified, but no less self-serving. These agencies had grown in response to the nature of women's work, particularly domestic service where turnover was stimulated by the grueling nature of housework, the often difficult employer-servant relationship, low wages, long hours and—in Vancouver at least—the importance of temporary child-care in the field. Women's agencies also grew because their profit structure served the needs of working women—those who desired a new household and those who wished to escape household labour entirely. Rather than recognize the role women's agencies played in placing working women in domestic and non-domestic jobs, charities like the YWCA criticized agents for delivering women into white slavery. But as with the critique of male agencies, the YWCA's indictment of the female employment agent was self-serving: the Vancouver YWCA was itself in the business of domestic placement, part of its civic grant was tied to the success of that service, and the commercial agent's offerings of new non-domestic jobs went against the Y's social and economic commitment to domestic labour and its employers.

The 'truth' about Vancouver's employment agencies is that they were small, marginal, delicate businesses which operated in an intensely competitive environment, only during periods of labour shortages, and whose operators emerged from and, often, returned to the same social background as their working clients. The employment business was not lucrative, but because it demanded no special skills and few start-up costs, the business attracted those hoping to escape wage labour. Most eventually failed. In the meantime, chronic labour shortages, competition and geographic proximity forced agents to cultivate a reasonable relationship with workers, the success of which was demonstrated to civic labour exchange officials on a number of occasions. When employment agents did step beyond limits acceptable to workers, retribution was quick—few agents could survive a bad reputation for long. Fewer agents could

survive an economic depression like that in 1913, and fewer still could survive the regulatory assualts against agencies in the post-war period.

The existence of petty employment agencies reflects the chaos of small-scale competitive capitalism before the war. Chaos was a double-edged sword for workers. In one sense it meant degradation, as the absence of regulations contributed to enormous material and psychological hardships for working and unemployed people. But chaos also meant possibility in good times, as the absence of controls offered workers a degree of power and freedom of action that would have been difficult in the organized society. Petty businesses, like employment agencies, bar rooms, cafes, poolhalls, second hand stores and boarding houses, were manifestations of this unpredictable but sometimes-friendly side of petty, competitive capitalism. One wonders if workers and petty business owners shared more with each other than either did with the newly-emerging large-scale corporate businesses of the new century. If we were to explore this view further, we might find that simple scale and physical contact profoundly separated the workers' and petty business owners' world from that of large-scale corporate and bureaucratic organizations: a shared material experience based on tangible day-to-day relations between mutually-dependent groups, whose power and influence was limited to a locality, created bridges between the working class and small business that could never have been built by corporate business or the state. Local influence and authority were murdered in the twentieth century by corporate capitalism and the state structures raised to regulate and serve its growth. The death of a potent local experience, I believe, has contributed to our alienation from our economic means and has left most of us politically powerless. The fight against Vancouver's employment agents and the attempts to construct an organized labour market after the first World War was one modest step in this process.

***

This study is incomplete without a brief look at the changed structure of the post-war employment market. While the labour market was never fully organized (most people continued to find their own jobs) important changes did occur. Ironically, these changes are reflected in the kinds of jobs that were offered newly-out-of-work employment agents in the "New Era". First, those agents that survived depression and regulation could tough it out in the commercial employment business by charging fees to employers or by masking charges to workers under other guises. Only Asian agents were able to do this to any effect. The Provincial Employment Service was not friendly to Orientals—authorities were unconcerned about the real or imagined abuse of Asian workers. The Service made no effort to accommodate the cultural demands of Asians; no Asians were employed in the Service. As a result, the bulk of surviving agencies in Vancouver were for Asians—little is known about them.

Another option for agents was to work as salaried agents for employers. Large employers took the opportunity in the 1920s to regulate the hiring process more closely in order to control their workforce. For large manufacturing, retail or other service-related companies, this meant creating personnel departments in the plant or store itself. In British Columbia resource companies, where the job site and labour pool were separated by great distances, employment agents were hired to round up gangs of men. One well-known example of an agent who made this transition is Herbert Hicks.[1] Loggers were traditionally recruited by private agents in the bars and haunts of Vancouver's east end. However, after the war, a consorted effort was made by the Loggers' Association (representing a number of forest companies) to take hold of recruitment as an adjunct to its open shop campaign. The Association opened its office in the fall of 1919 and Hicks was put in charge.[2] Because of the central job registry, most workers had to appear in front of Hicks to get a job. The Association created for Hicks a blacklisting system to keep labour activists and potential trouble-makers out of their camps: workers filled out job history forms, while camp managers sent Hicks report cards on each discharged employee describing the reasons why the man quit, his working abilities and his conduct. Suspicions of union sympathies were always recorded.[3] The role of Hicks and the Loggers' Agency was crucial to the company's war on labour. "The Loggers' Agency was the cornerstone of the employer's attack on the union in the years after 1919," writes historian Gordon Hak: "[n]ot only did complete control over hiring destroy the LWIU, it also allowed operators to maintain the open shop through the 1920s."[4] If Hicks had been a buffer between labour and capital before World War One, he was firmly in the employers' camp in the changed employment market of the post-war period.

A third choice for Vancouver employment agents in the post-war period was to work within the Provincial Employment Service. Agents were experts in the business of hiring and their expertise was needed early on, as a few pre-war agents emerged as government administrators after the war. Louise Neily, who ran the Best Colonial women's agency in 1910-13, became an assistant manager of the local women's branch of the Provincial Employment Service.[5] Marion Eadie opened the BC Female agency in 1910 as an extension of her father's real estate firm, and operated the agency into the war. Eadie

---

[1]For the activities of Herbert Hicks and the Vancouver Loggers' Agency, see Gordon Hugh Hak, "On the Fringes: Capital and Labour in the Forest Economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George Districts, British Columbia, 1910-1939" (PhD Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1986), 185-190.

[2]Ibid., 185.

[3]Ibid., 187.

[4]Ibid., 189.

[5]See Vancouver City Directory, 1919-1924.

resurfaced in the 1940s as the "Women's Division Supervisor" of Ontario's Employment and Selective Service Office in Toronto.[6] Women were more likely to get into the state service than male agents were, perhaps because of the bureaucracy's unfamiliarity in placing women workers; it was also important that women officials handled women job-seekers—women's agents were obvious candidates. There is no evidence that male agents made the transition to government placement work. It is likely the so-called *sharks* would have been rejected because the local labour union leaders often turned up as managers and officials in the new provincial Service. For instance, when the first men's branch of the Provincial Employment Service opened in Vancouver in July 1918, R. H. Young of the electrician's union was made assistant manager. Another city branch was opened in February 1919 and a boilermaker's union official, Charles Johnson, was put in charge.[7] James McVety, who had served as head of Vancouver's Labor Temple and had been the most outspoken critic of commercial agencies in the province, was made Superintendent of the Provincial Employment Service in 1920.

The final options for commercial agents were to quit the business or move away. The vast majority of pre-war agents did one of these. Fred Lilyman moved to Seattle where regulations governing commercial agencies were less strict; Alexander Calder moved to Calgary and dropped out of sight; Sam Sells became a labourer after the war and died (or moved on) in 1930. Katherine Maloney continued to live in the city after the war, working as a waitress, then as a boarding house keeper in the east end until she disappeared in 1929.

---

[6]See Ruth Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Labour Force in World War II," Canadian Historical Association *Historical Papers*, 1976, 142-71. Also see Ruth Pierson, *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

[7]See British Columbia, *Journal* of the Legislative Assembly, March 20, 1919, 203.

APPENDIX 1

White Male Labour Suppliers

Anti-Asiatic Employment Bureau (1907)
British American Employment Agency (1912–15)
B.C. Employment Agency (1910–13)
B.C. Employment Bureau (1902–04)
B.C. Industrial and General Agency (1891–94)
Canadian Employment Agency (1911)
Canadian Northern Employment Agency (1911–15)
Central Agency (1906)
Central Employment Agency (1906–20)
Christie Brothers (1913)
City Employment Agency (1908–10)
Coast Labor Agents (1909–13)
Colonial Exchange (1905)
Cosmopolitan Labor Supply Company (1909–13)
Davis, G.G. and Company (1915)
Dominion Employment Agency (1909–10)
Evans and Vayer (1907)
Fidelity Scandinavian Employment Agency (1911)
Forsberg, Charles Employment Agent (1892)
Fryer, George E. (1906)
Great Northern Employment Agency (1906–07)
Green, R.E. (1890)
Gubbins, Thomas H. (1908)
Hicks, Herbert and Company (1910–18)
International Employment Agency (1910–16)
Italian Central Agency (1917–20)
Johnson and McPhail Employment (1899)
Joy, Oliver H. (1912–23)
Knight's Reliable Labor Agency (1907–11)
La Brosse and Blais (1908)
Labor Exchange Ltd (1907–16)
Lilyman Fred (1911–15)
Lumberman's Employment Office (1912)
Mitchell and Ferris (1906)
Outlook Labor Supply (1910)
Pacific Coast Employment Agency (1909–11)
Pacific Labor Bureau (1902–08)
Phillips, Alexander (1896–1907)
Puzey and Carte (1912)
Railway and Loggers' Employment Agency (1911)

Robbins and Robbins (1909–14)
Ross, A.C. (1899–1907)
Scandinavian–Canadian Employment Agency (1911)
Sells, Samuel George (1907–22)
Shields, John and Company (1910–17)
Sinnott and Hodgson's Employment (1906–08)
Social Employment Office (1907)
Standard Employment Agency (1915)
Standard Labor Agents (1912)
Vancouver Central Employment Agency (1902)
Vancouver Employment Agency (1908–14)
Vancouver Labor Exchange (1917)
Wallace, Alexander (1906–07)
Wallace, Clarence (1909–10)
White and Bishoprick (1908)
Willcox, Henry (1913)
Wolstenholme, Harold R. (1909–12)
Young, Walter S. (1900–05)

Oriental Labour Suppliers

Aoki, Y (1903–05)
Canadian Nippon Supply Company (1906–09; 1918–1924+)
Canadian Nippon Brokerage Company (1910–11)
Chinese Employment Agency (1901–06)
Feong Shing and Company (1910–12)
Fook Chui Yuen and Company (1903–10)
Fukunaga, K.Z. and Company (1910–16)
Hayakawa, Ichio (1906–09)
Hindoo General Employment Agency (1906–07)
Hop Wo (1912–24+)
Japanese Brokerage and Labor Society (1921–24+)
Japanese Labor Supply and Contract Company (1907–10)
Kwong Fat Yuen and Company (1903–05)
Kwong Tai Lung Company (1906)
Kwong Wo Chung Company (1902)
Nagao, T.I. (1900–05)
Nippon General Agency (1909)
Nittoh Company (1907–08)
Oriental Contract Company (1909–14)
Oriental Employment Agency (1913)
Oriental Labor Association (1917–19)
Oriental Realty Company (1911)

Qung Lee (1910)
Suey Fong and Company (1908–12)
Tai Sing and Company (1899–1920)
Takahashi, H.K. (1894–08)
Taketsugu and Shikawa (1900)
Tanaka, J. (1906–07)
Tateishi, Henry (1910–11)
Tauneshi, D. (1902–04)
Ting Hong and Company (1908–10)
Togo Employment Agency (1907–10)
Vancouver Japanese Employment Agency (1914)
Wing On and Company (1905–07)
Yamazaki, Yashushi (1907–24+)
Yoshida, T.K. (1906–09)
Yushinsha Japanese Employment and Real Estate (1906)

Women's Labour Suppliers

Best Colonial Employment Bureau (1913–16)
Black Cat Employment (1912)
B.C. Female Employment Office (1910–11)
B.C. Hotels Employment Bureau (1911)
Central Female Employment Agency (1913–18)
City Employment Bureau (1910)
Clerical Employment Bureau (1911–12)
Dominion Hotels Employment Bureau (1911–12)
Edwards (1895)
Elite Employment Bureau (1904–09)
Excelsior Employment Bureau (1912)
Germain Hotel Brokerage Company (1912)
Ladies' Exchange (1898–99)
Lady Labor System (1909)
Merchants Reference Agency (1909)
Smith, Emma (1915–1917)
Universal Female Employment Office (1910–18)
West End Employment (1912–13)
Westside Business Ladies' Employment Bureau (1909)
Vancouver Employment Agency (1899–1901)
Vancouver Employment Agency (1912)

Real Estate Agents/Labour Suppliers

Abbott Realty and Employment (1906)
Acorn, A.B. Real Estate and Employment (1892)
B.C. Employment and Real Estate Bureau (1907)
B.C. Real Estate and Employment Agency (1908)
Carlton, W. Real Estate and Employment (1906–07)
Central Employment and Realty Agency (1906)
Dominion Labor and Estate Agency (1904)
Eclipse Realty and Employment Agency (1910)
Farrell, W.T. (1902)
Globe Realty and Employment Agency (1907–08)
Mason, J. (1889–92)
National Realty and Employment Agency (1906–07)
Pacific Realty and Employment Agency (1906)
Phoenix Realty and Employment Agency (1907)
Vancouver Realty and Employment Agency (1906–07)

APPENDIX 2

British American Employment 1912–15	Miscellaneous 1912: Hugh McDonald 1913: Lester O. Way
BC Employment 1910–13	Miscellaneous 1910: Brown & Downing 1911: F. Bullen & R.A. Hudson 1912: James Madison
Canadian Northern Employment 1911–15	Railways and mines 1911: D.C. Hanley & J.G. McDonald 1914: J.W. Hanley & J.G. McDonald
Canadian Pacific Employment 1907–15	Logging and sawmills 1907: Samuel G. Sells 1908: Samuel G. Sells & Fred Olson 1913: Samuel G. Sells
Central Employment 1906–20	Miscellaneous 1906: E.E. Gagnon & G.D. Lamont 1908: E.E. Gagnon & F.G. Robbins 1909: E.E. Gagnon 1912: E.E. Gagnon & G.D. Lamont 1913: G.D. Lamont & J.W. Hanley 1914: G.D. Lamont
Coast Labor Agents 1909–13	Logging and sawmills 1909: Godfrey J. Sykes 1911: A.P. Bryden 1912: Godfrey J. Sykes
Cosmopolitan Labor Supply 1909–13	Railways and mines 1909: J.H. Welsh
Hicks, Herbert & Company 1910–18	Miscellaneous 1910: Herbert Hicks
International Employment 1910–16	Railways and logging 1910: William Waine 1915: Samuel G. Sells 1916: Samuel G. Sells & F.H. Gallagher

Labor Exchange Ltd 1907–16	Miscellaneous 1907: John L. Adams 1909: D.W. Robb & F.H. Gallagher 1910: Lester O. Way 1912: H.M. Marriott & J.R. Burke 1913: H.M. Marriott, J.R. Burke & Oliver Joy 1915: J.R. Burke
Lilyman, Fred & Company 1911–15	Railways 1911: Fred Lilyman & Travers 1912: Fred Lilyman 1914: Fred Lilyman & Ferree
Reliable Labor 1905–11	Railways 1905: Charles Knight
Shields, John & Company 1910–17	Logging and sawmills 1910: John Shields & McLean 1911: John Shields 1912: John Shields & Albert Toogood 1913: John Shields
Vancouver Employment 1909–14	Miscellaneous 1909: Eugene Gillis 1910: A. Ballie 1911: Alfred Sykes & Harry Meaker 1912: Harry Meaker & F.W. Eldred 1913: Harry Meaker
Wolstenholme, Harold R. 1909–12	Miscellaneous 1909: Harry Wolstenholme

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

A. Government Documents

British Columbia. Royal Commission on Labor. Testimony and Correspondence, 1913. Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

Canada. "Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration." *Sessional Papers*, 1902.

————— *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to come to Canada.* Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1908.

Ontario. Commission on Unemployment Report. Ontario *Sessional Papers*, 1916.

B. Newspapers

Federationist. Various Issues, 1911–1913 and 1913–1919.

Western Clarion. Various Issues, 1903–1913.

News Advertiser. Various Issues, 1886–1917.

Province. Various Issues, 1898–1925.

Daily World. Various Issues, 1890–1925.

C. Directories

City of Vancouver Directory. Vancouver: Henderson Publishing Company Ltd., 1901–1910.

Greater Vancouver Directory. Vancouver: Henderson Directory Company Ltd., 1911–1923.

British Columbia Directory. Vancouver: Wrigley Directories Ltd., 1918–1935.

Adachi, Ken. *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

Andrews, John B. "A Practical Program for the Prevention of Unemployment." *American Labor Legislation Review*: 5 (1915), 173-193.

————"Organization to Combat Unemployment." *American Labor Legislation Review.* 4 (1914), 209-217.

Andrews, Ralph W. *Timber: Toil and Trouble in the Big Woods.* Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1968.

Avery, Donald. "Canadian Immigration Policy and the 'Foreign' Navvy, 1896-1914." Canadian Historical Association. *Historical Papers*, 1972, 135-156.

————*Dangerous Foreigners.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.

Barber, Marilyn. "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930." *Ontario History*, 62, 3 (1980), 148-172.

Bartlett, Eleanor A. "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929." *BC Studies*, 51 (Autumn 1981), 3-62.

Beveridge, William. *Unemployment: A Problem of Industry.* London: Longmans and Company, 1909.

Boam, Henry J. *British Columbia: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources.* London: Sells, 1912.

Bradwin, Edmund. *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903- 1914.* New York: AMS Press Reprint, 1968.

Chan, Anthony B. *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World.* Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983.

Cohen, Marjorie Griffin. *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth- Century Ontario.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Conley, James Robert. "Class Conflict and Collective Action in the Working Class of Vancouver, British Columbia, 1900-1919." PhD Dissertation, Carleton University, 1986.

————"Relations of Production and Collective Action in the Salmon Fishery, 1900-1925." *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers.* Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, Eds. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988.

————"'More theory, less fact'? Social Reproduction and Class Conflict in a Sociological Approach to Working-Class History." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13, 1-2 (1988), 73-102.

Creese, Gillian. "Class, Ethnicity, and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1880-1923." *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers.* Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, Eds. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988.

————"Race, Gender and Socialism in British Columbia." Unpublished Paper presented at BC Studies Conference, 1988.

Dudden, Faye E. *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

Eisner, J. Michael. *William Morris Leiserson, A Biography.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

Ferguson, Barry Glen. "The New Political Economy and Canadian Liberal Democratic Thought: Queen's University, 1890-1925." PhD Dissertation, York University, 1982.

Fric, Lawrence. *Commercial Employment Agencies: Their Role in the Canadian Labour Market.* Ottawa: Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1975.

Garraty, John. *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978.

Glynn, Desmond. "'Exporting Outcast London': Assisted Emigration to Canada, 1886–1914." *Histoire Sociale/Social History,* 15, 29 (1982), 209–238.

Gould, Ed. *Logging: British Columbia's Logging History.* Victoria: Hancock House Publishers, 1975.

Grainger, Martin Allerdale. *Woodsmen of the West.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964.

Granatstein, J. L. *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935–1957.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Guest, Dennis. *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980.

Haber, Samuel. *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Hak, Gordon Hugh. "On the Fringes: Capital and Labour in the Forest Economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George Districts, British Columbia, 1910–1939." PhD Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1986.

Harney, Robert. " The Commerce of Migration." *Canadian Ethnic Studies,* 9 (1977), 42–53.

Harris, Jose. *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy, 1886–1914.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

Hays, Samuel P. "The New Organizational Society." *Building the Organizational Society.* Jerry Israel, Ed. New York: The Free Press, 1972.

Horn, Pamela. *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975.

Ichioka, Yuji. *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1924.* New York: Free Press, 198?.

————"Japanese Immigrant Labor Contractors and the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railroad Companies, 1898–1907." *Labor History,* 21, 3 (1980), 325–350.

Ito, Kazuo. *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America.* Translators: Shinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard.

Katzman, David M. *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Kellor, Francis. *Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies, Their Treatment of the Unemployed and Their Influence upon Homes and Business.* New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1905.

Lacelle, Claudette. *Urban Domestic Servants in 19th Century Canada.* Ottawa: Environment Canada/Parks, 1987.

Lamb, Bessie. "The Origin and Development of Newspapers in Vancouver." MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942.

Lasser, Carol. "The domestic Balance of Power: Relations between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England." *Labor History,* 28, 1 (1987), 17–29.

Leier, James Mark. "Through the Lense of Syndicalism: Fragmentation on the Vancouver and British Columbia Left before the Great War." MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1987.

Leiserson, William M. "The Theory of Public Employment Offices and the Principles of their Administration." *Political Science Quarterly,* 29 (1914), 28–46.

————"The Problem of Unemployment Today." *Political Science Quarterly.* 31, 1 (1916), 1–24.

————*Adjusting Immigrant to Industry.* New York: Harper and Bros., 1924.

Leslie, Genevieve. "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880–1920." *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850–1930.* Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard, Eds., Toronto: Women's Press, 1974.

Li, Peter. *The Chinese in Canada.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Lindstrom-Best, Varpu. "'I Won't be a Slave!'—Finnish Domestics in Canada, 1911-30." *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834- 1945.* Robert Harney and Jim Albert, Eds., Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985.

Lubove, Roy. *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900- 1935.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

Mackay, Donald. *The Lumberjacks.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978.

Martinez, Tomas. *The Human Marketplace: An Examination of Private Employment Agencies.* New Brunswick N. J.: Transaction Books, 1976.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy.* Volume 1. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, Trans. New York: International Publishers, 1967.

Masson, Jack and Donald Guimary. "Asian Labor Contractors in the Alaskan Canned Salmon Industry: 1880-1937." *Labor History,* 22, 33 (1981), 377-397.

McBride, Theresa M. *The Domestic Revolution: The Modernization of Household Service in England and France, 1820- 1920.* London: Croom Helm Limited, 1976.

McCormack, Ross. "Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada, 1900-1914." *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume II, After Confederation.* J. M. Bumsted, Ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986.

McDonald, R.A.J. "Business Leaders in Early Vancouver, 1886-1914." PhD Dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1978.

————"Working Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanization and Class in British Columbia." *BC Studies,* 69-70 (1986), 33-69.

Miller, John Ormsey. Ed. *The New Era in Canada.* London: Dent, 1917.

Mitchinson, Wendy. "The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire Sociale- Social History,* 12, 24 (1979), 368-384.

————"Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform: Prelude to the Welfare State." *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada.* Allan Moscovtch, Ed., Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987.

Morton, James. *In the Sea of Sterile Mountains: The Chinese in British Columbia.* Vancouver: J. J. Douglas Limited, 1974.

Nelson, Daniel. *Unemployment Insurance: The American Experience, 1915- 1935.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

Norris, John. "The Vancouver Island Coal Miners, 1912-1914: A Study of an Organizational Strike." *BC Studies,* 45 (1980), 56-72.

Pedersen, Diana. "'Building Today for the Womanhood of Tomorrow': Businessmen, Boosters and the YWCA, 1890-1930." *Urban History Review/ Revue d'Histoire Urbaine,* 15, 3 (1987), 225-242.

————"The Photographic Record of the Canadian YWCA, 1890-1930: A Visual Source for Women's History." *Archivaria,* 24 (Summer 1987), 10-35.

Pierson, Ruth. "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Labour Force in World War II." *Historical Papers.* Canadian Historical Association, 1976.

————*'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986.

Piva, Michael J. *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto: 1900- 1921.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979.

Phillips, Paul A. *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia.* Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour/Boag Foundation, 1967.

Radforth, Ian. *Bush Workers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900- 1980.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

Ramirez, Bruno and Michael Del Balso. *The Italians of Montreal: From Sojourning to Settlement, 1900-1921.* Montreal: Editions Du Courant, 1980.

Rigg, R. A. "Canada's Experience with Private Employment Offices." *Labour Gazette*, April 1926, 331-335.

Riley, Barbara. "Six Saucepans to One: Domestic Science VS. the Home in British Columbia, 1900-1930." *Not Just Pin Money.* Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, Eds., Victoria: Camosun College, 1984.

Rosenthal, Star. "Union Maids: Organized Women Workers in Vancouver, 1900-1915." *BC Studies*, 41 (Spring 1979), 36-55.

Roy, Patricia E. *Vancouver: An Illustrated History.* Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980.

————"Progress, Prosperity and Politics: The Railway Policies of Richard McBride." *BC Studies*, 47 (Autumn 1980), 3-28.

————"Vancouver: 'The Mecca of the Unemployed,' 1907-1929." *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development.* Alan F. J. Artibise, Ed., Regina: University of Regina, 1981.

Sautter, Udo. "The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada, 1900-1920." *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (Autumn 1980), 89-112.

————"North American Government Labor Agencies before World War One: A Cure for Unemployment?" *Labor History*, 24 (1983), 366-393.

————"Workmen and the Labour Market: An Aspect of Early Industrial Civilization in North America." Unpublished Paper, 1986.

Scholefield, Etherbert Olaf Stuart. *British Columbia, From the Earliest Times to the Present.* Vancouver: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1914.

Seager, Henry R. "Introductory Address." Proceedings of the 1914 National Conference on Unemployment. *American Labor Legislation Review.* 4 (1914), 311-313.

Seixas, Peter Carr. "'Shifting Sands Beneath the State': Unemployment, the Labor Market, and the Local Community." PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988.

Starkins, Edward. *Who Killed Janet Smith?.* Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984.

Stevens, G. R. *Canadian National Railways.* Toronto: Clark, Irwin and Company, 1962.

Stewart, Bryce M. "The Housing of Our Immigrant Workers." Political Science Association. *Papers and Proceedings I*, 1913, 137-154.

————*Report of a Preliminary and General Social Survey of Port Arthur.* Methodist Church of Canada, 1913.

————"Distribution of Labour in Canada." *Labour Gazette*, March 1915.

————"Public Employment Bureaus and Unemployment." *Canadian Municipal Journal*, October 1916, 522-523.

————"The Employment Service of Canada." *Queen's Quarterly.* 27, 1 (July 1919), 37-61.

————"The Problem of Unemployment." *Social Welfare*, March 1921, 44-65.

————"Unemployment and Organization of the Labour Market." American Academy of Political and Social Science. *Annals*, CVII (1923), 101-121.

————*Unemployment Benefits in the United States: The Plans and Their Settings.* New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1930.

————*Statistical Proceedure of Public Employment Offices.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1933.

————"Administration of the Public Employment Service in Canada." *Administration of Public Employment Offices and Unemployment Insurance.* Bryce Stewart, Ed. New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1935.

Strong-Boag, Veronica. "Keeping House in God's Country: Canadian Women at Work in the Home." *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada.* Craig Heron and Robert Storey, Eds., Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986.

————*The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.* Markham Ont.: Penguin Books, 1988.

Struthers, James. "Prelude to Depression: The Federal Government and Unemployment, 1918-29." *Canadian Historical Review*, 57, 3 (1977), 277-293.

————*No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

Sutherland, Daniel E. *Americans and their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Thompson, John Herd. "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929." *Canadian Historical Review.* 59, 4 (1978), 467-489.

Van Raaphorst, Donna L. *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870-1940.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988.

Ward, Peter, W. *White Canada Forever.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978.

————*The Japanese in Canada.* Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, Immigration Booklet Number 3, 1983.

Wilson, Ethel. *The Equations of Love: Tuesday and Wednesday & Lilly's Story.* London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1952.