

The Industrial Workers of the World and the Unemployed in Edmonton and Calgary in the Depression of 1913-1915

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Résumé de l'article

La radicalisme des Travailleurs industriels du Monde (Industrial Workers of the World, IWW) au début de siècle les situe en dehors de l'idéologie sociale dominante de l'époque. Un grand nombre de travailleurs non-qualifiés, itinérants et souvent immigrants occupaient des emplois saisonniers; leur marginalisation sociale et économique les rendait particulièrement réceptifs au radicalisme des IWW qui étaient disposés à déployer tous leurs efforts pour les organiser.

Cet article est une étude des moyens utilisés par les Travailleurs industriels pour organiser les sans-travail d'Edmonton et de Calgary pendant la dépression de 1913-1915. Ils étaient pour la plupart itinérants, sans qualifications, et arrivaient souvent des camps de construction ferroviaire où les IWW avaient organisé des grèves importantes. Dans ces luttes, les tactiques utilisées comprenaient les grandes manifestations publiques, l'invasion des églises, et le refus de payer dans les restaurants. Mais la nature spécifique du problème des sans-travail, — liée au système économique, menaçant l'intégrité des travailleurs en tant que tels, mais dont s'occupait l'État — permet une étude attentive des effets pratiques de l'idéologie des Travailleurs industriels.

Alors que d'autres villes canadiennes connurent des mouvements de protestation de sans-travail, seuls les IWW de l'Alberta demandèrent du travail au meilleur taux, soit 30 cents de l'heure pour les journaliers, et s'ils ne pouvaient l'obtenir, ils réclamaient la nourriture et le gîte gratuits. Ils tentèrent de préserver l'intégrité des hommes en tant que journaliers, en maintenant que le chômage n'était pas une expérience inévitable qu'il fallait endurer passivement, mais plutôt une conséquence néfaste du capitalisme à laquelle il fallait résister activement. Les IWW préconisèrent aussi une solidarité inter-ethnique basée sur le droit au travail "quelle que soit la race, la couleur ou la nationalité."

Il reste que les efforts des IWW demeurèrent circonscrits à l'intérieur de limites très précises: les travailleurs qu'ils représentaient avaient peu de pouvoir de négociation, et ce encore moins en période de chômage alors qu'ils dépendaient des autorités politiques municipales avec lesquelles la plupart n'avaient aucun autre lien. Leur force politique se limitait à la menace à l'ordre établi et ces hommes affamés n'étaient pas de taille à affronter les forces policières. De plus, les municipalités qui avaient peine à subvenir aux besoins de leurs propres résidents, étaient aussi responsables de l'aide accordée à ces chômeurs venus de l'extérieur. La difficulté à obtenir même des gains matériels à court terme a finalement dû décourager la plupart des travailleurs et empêcher l'organisation des Travailleurs industriels de se garantir une base stable dans ce milieu.

The Industrial Workers of the World and the Unemployed In Edmonton and Calgary in the Depression of 1913-1915

David Schulze

THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD (IWW) were remarkable among North American labour unions for two things: the radicalism of their ideology and the daring of their tactics. The ideology was stated most drastically in the preamble to the IWW's constitution adopted at its founding convention in 1905:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.¹

IWW leaders and organizers advocated tactics founded on belief in industrial rather than craft unionism, and open contempt for authority. They thus are remembered best for organizing the unorganized, for attempting to inculcate in them the spirit of revolt exemplified by Joe Hill's rousing, sardonic songs, and for an intensity of struggle that went so far as to endorse sabotage in the workplace. The result is that any consideration of the IWW's real actions must test the impact of its radical ideology on a concrete struggle, measuring its tactics not just against achieved results, but also against the political environment and the IWW's stated aims.

To the extent that the historiography of the IWW has gone beyond narrative, the major texts have judged the organization's ideology less important than its actions, which represented the extension of the benefits of trade unionism to the previously unorganized. "Notwithstanding this belief in ultimate revolution, the IWW constantly sought opportunities to improve the immediate circumstances of its members," wrote Melvyn Dubofsky. "It sought to motivate the disinherited, not to satisfy the ideologue." A. Ross McCormack summarized IWW presence in Western Canada as follows: "Its doctrine was Marxist; its syndicalism was prag-

¹Fred W. Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years, 1905-1975* (Chicago 1976), 2.

David Schulze, "The Industrial Workers of the World and the Unemployed In Edmonton and Calgary in the Depression of 1913-1915," *Labour/Le Travail*, 25 (Spring 1990), 47-75.

matic; and it flourished during industrial crisis." On the other hand, Philip Foner's history of the IWW praised its accomplishments but questioned its pragmatism: for him, its refusal to allow measures such as recognition contracts, dues check-offs, strike funds, and unemployment, sickness and death benefits were "examples of how the combination of revolutionary propaganda functions with trade union activities resulted in practices which made for instability of the I.W.W...." In a recent study focusing on Vancouver, however, Mark Leier defends the combination as a compromise between trade union opportunism and political sectarianism, and calls for new attention to the organization's revolutionary intent: "the commitment the IWW had to being a working class organization that represented workers as they were, while educating them to what they could become." He blames "government repression, employer hostility, and conflicts with other labour bodies" for preventing it from recruiting a stable membership.²

There is no doubt that the IWW's radicalism placed it outside of dominant, contemporary social ideology. It was avowedly socialist and advocated industrial, rather than parliamentary, action to achieve a new social order. In this regard, the IWW differed sharply even from Socialists and other trade unionists who were willing to work within the existing political and social confines, and whose more-conservative approach had considerable appeal to skilled urban workers.³ The historical significance of this difference, however, arises from the fact that at the same time, there was a relatively large group of unskilled, migrant, and largely immigrant workers in early 20th-century North America, employed in seasonal, labour-intensive industries, who were ignored by the craft unions and too transient to be easy converts to Socialist parliamentarianism. The social and economic marginalization of this segment of the working class was particularly well-suited to IWW radicalism, while the IWW was prepared for the radical step of attempting to organize them. The two factors intersected in Western Canada in the decade before World War I and reinforced each other.

This paper studies IWW efforts to organize the unemployed of Edmonton and Calgary during the economic depression of 1913-15: most were transient, unskilled workers, and many had just arrived from railway construction camps in the interior where the IWW had led massive strikes. The tactics used in the struggle, including large demonstrations, the invasion of churches, and refusal to pay for meals in res-

²Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago 1969), 154-5, 170; A. Ross McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Canada: 1905-1914," in W. Peter Ward and Robert A.J. McDonald, eds., *British Columbia: Historical Readings* (Vancouver 1981), 475; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 4, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1907* (New York 1965), 471; James Mark Leier, "Through the Lens of Syndicalism: Fragmentation on the Vancouver and British Columbia Left Before the Great War," M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser, 1987, 8, 9, 46. Leier makes additional points about the relation between the IWW's syndicalism and the transformation of the workplace, but his evidence on the free speech fight neither supports nor contradicts them.

³Mark Leier, "Solidarity on Occasion: The Vancouver Free Speech Fights of 1909 and 1912," *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989), 39-66, demonstrates this well.

taurants, already have attracted the attention of historians.⁴ But the special nature of the problem of unemployment — which was caused by the economic system, threatened the men's integrity as workers, but was dealt with by the State — allows a careful examination of the practical effects of IWW ideology.

Michael Goeres' analysis of unemployment relief in early 20th-century Winnipeg, astutely explains the political context:

First, unemployment relief was a response to potential or actual disorder. Second, unemployment relief confronted a problem of destitution, not unemployment; therefore its basic concern was dependency. Third, unemployment relief entailed the expenditure of public money, so it was administered within the rigid constraints of fiscal responsibility. Together, these constitute the essential nature of unemployment relief.⁵

This essay is an account of how the IWW tried to organize the threat of disorder that the single, transient unemployed men constituted to Edmonton and Calgary, in order to relieve their destitution.

As in many other cases, IWW rhetoric on this subject can be deceptive. For instance, IWW general organizer, W.D. "Big Bill" Haywood, told the 1914 convention:

Food, clothing, shelter, are essential to life. Let the message of the I.W.W. be GET THEM! If you have to take pickaxes and crowbars and go to the granaries and warehouses and help yourselves. Rather than congregate around City Halls, Capitols and empty squares, go to the market places and waterfronts where food is abundant. If food is being shipped, confiscate it, if you have the power.

Where houses are vacant occupy them. If machinery is idle use it, if practical to your purpose.

Results can only be achieved through organized effort. Banded together and cooperating for mutual welfare the unemployed will get by the hard winter.⁶

This was Haywood's "practical program" for the unemployed, subsequently adopted by all seventeen delegates present, but hardly followed by the locals, though the previous year had seen them organize the unemployed in cities across the continent. What, then, was the sense of the IWW's agitation?

The union's newspaper, *Solidarity*, reviewed the unemployed movement in March 1915 and discerned two of its important contributions:

⁴McCormack, "Industrial Workers," 488-9; Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 440-1. One definite source for this essay was not seen: *The Wooden Shoe*, an IWW weekly in Los Angeles carried articles on the agitation in Edmonton (cited by Foner, *Ibid.*, 588), but the relevant issues have been lost by the New York Public Library. According to the contemporary index, federal Department of Immigration files on unemployment in Edmonton and Calgary for 1914-18 existed, but they are not in the National Archives of Canada, Records Group 76. The Finnish and Ukrainian Socialist newspapers, *Moukari* in Edmonton and *Robochyi narod* in Winnipeg, were not consulted because of their language.

⁵Michael Goeres, "Disorder, Dependency and Fiscal Responsibility: Unemployment Relief in Winnipeg, 1907-1942," MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1981, 2-3.

⁶Cited in "Tactics of the Unemployed," *International Socialist Review*, 15 (November 1914), 267.

First, it is anti-scab; the unemployed in other words, are being taught to uphold present wage standards, and not to break them down. Second, it is anti-submissive; it is teaching the unemployed to refuse to submit to charity and to capitalist conditions, and to rebel against them instead. This tends to preserve the prevailing standards of decency and self-respect, the decline of which makes any advance in society impossible.⁷

This is the real key to the IWW's goals in organizing the unemployed. Other Canadian cities saw protests by the unemployed, but spontaneous demonstrations in Winnipeg and Vancouver settled for simple relief, while under Social Democratic leadership the unemployed in Montreal asked for their own gardens to cultivate.⁸ But the IWW in Alberta asked for work at the best going rate for general labour, 30 cents an hour, and if they could not get that they demanded free food and accommodation. They tried to preserve the men's integrity as labourers, in the belief that unemployment was not an inevitable experience to be endured passively, but a nefarious consequence of capitalism to be resisted actively.

However, the IWW's efforts also took place within very narrow limits: the workers they represented had little economic bargaining power, and less still in a time of unemployment, when they were dependent on urban political authorities to whom most had no other connection. The daring of their tactics may have won adherents quickly, or served to catalyze existing fervour, but it also attracted government repression. In the end, the difficulty of achieving even short-term material gains must have discouraged most workers and doomed the organization to instability.

JAMES ROWAN ARRIVED in Edmonton in summer 1913. Thirty-four years old, Rowan was a native of Ireland and a granite-cutter by trade, but since crossing into British Columbia from the United States a year earlier he had worked as a construction labourer. In Wobbly terms, he was a "footloose rebel," arriving in Edmonton "with all his money spent and health partially broken" after nine months spent organizing Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) and Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) construction camps for the IWW.⁹

⁷*Solidarity*, 20 March 1915, cited in Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 461.

⁸Patricia Roy, "Vancouver: 'The Mecca of the Unemployed,' 1907-1929," in Alan Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina 1981), 400-2; *The Voice*, 5 June 1914; Goeres, "Disorder, Dependency and Fiscal Responsibility," 39; Claude Larivière, *Albert Saint-Martin, militant d'avant-garde (1865-1947)* (Laval 1979), 109-18. Bryan Palmer suggests the IWW was active among the unemployed in Hamilton in 1914, but seems to have relied too heavily on a single newspaper report, rumouring its imminent arrival: Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979), 232; *Hamilton Daily Times*, 17 and 18 April 1914. For an interesting comparison, see Alan J. Kidd, "The Social Democratic Federation and Popular Agitation amongst the Unemployed in Edwardian Manchester," *International Review of Social History*, 29 (1984), 336-58.

⁹Biographical information from Provincial Archives of Alberta (hereafter, PAA), Documents of the Provincial Gaol at Fort Saskatchewan, Acc. 68.29, Item 13, Description Book 1914, 58; also from

The construction of the two new transcontinental railways was the final achievement of the long boom the Canadian economy experienced between 1896 and 1914, particularly in the West. The railways were the preeminent Western Canadian employers of unskilled, largely immigrant labour, and their widespread use of subcontracting made working conditions particularly bad. The IWW had begun to organize railway construction workers in British Columbia in summer 1911; CNR-line walk-outs began in March 1912, quickly escalating to a general strike by some 8,000 workers along 400 miles.¹⁰ The IWW tried to maintain what it called a "thousand-mile picket line" by picketing employment offices in cities from San Francisco, through Calgary, to Minneapolis. But at the end of April, police raided the workers' camps and strikers either were arrested, driven out of the area, or driven back to work.¹¹ In mid-July, between 2,000 and 3,000 workers on the rival GTP line struck for similar demands, but by the end of August both strikes were over and construction resumed, the workers having made few gains.¹²

For the strikers, their eviction from the camps would have been a particularly violent incident in the ongoing movement of labour between the cities where the hiring for largely seasonal work occurred, and the remote areas where this work was done. Even during boom years, some local or short-term problems of unemployment rapidly became a political problem. For instance, the celebrated Vancouver free speech fight began during a local recession in late 1911, when Socialists and the IWW organized demonstrations of the unemployed to win increased relief benefits.¹³ The fight itself ended when city council stopped having police break up outdoor meetings; as spring approached and the labour market improved, the agitation ended as well. With some condescension, the *British Columbia Federationist* remarked: "The moment [the unemployed] can provide for their needs, even though the wage be small and the employment but temporary, they at once become quiet and patiently await the turning of the tide of their fortunes by the coming of summer, which usually marks somewhat of a betterment of industrial conditions as compared with the winter season."¹⁴

National Archives of Canada (hereafter, NAC), RCMP Records, RG 18, Vol. 3256, file 1914 HQ-681-K-7 Vol. 1, statement by James Rowan at Athabasca, 8 July 1914; description in *Voice of the People*, 20 August 1914.

¹⁰Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 228-9.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 229; Jack Scott, *Plunderbund and Proletariat: A History of the IWW in B.C.* (Vancouver 1975), 128-9; McCormack, "Industrial Workers," 485-7; Donald Avery, "Dangerous Foreigners": *European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979), 55. The "thousand-mile picket" seems to have marked the IWW's first venture into Calgary.

¹²*Ibid.*, 55. The GTP strike launched the IWW in Edmonton in late August the newly-founded local posted notices asking workers not to go on construction of the GTP line; *Edmonton Capital*, 20 August 1912.

¹³Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1967), 55; *British Columbia Federationist*, 20 January 1912; Roy, "Vancouver," 395-6; Diane L. Matters, "Public Welfare Vancouver Style, 1910-1920," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 14 (Spring 1979), 5.

¹⁴Scott, *Plunderbund*, 41-50; Roy, "Vancouver," 396-7; *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 February 1912.

The difference in late 1913, however, was that construction of the GTP and CNR lines was near completion, while a worldwide financial crisis choked off capital for further expansion of the labour-intensive industries, largely based on resource extraction, which had led the boom in the Canadian economy. Bryce Stewart, hired by the federal government in September 1914 to devise a national system of employment offices, wrote in 1923:

There was much hardship in the winter of 1913-14 and it is doubtful if the volume of unemployment during the following winter has ever been exceeded in the history of the country. The spring absorption of labour was insignificant and in 1915 city dwellers were confronted with the unusual spectacle of long queues of men waiting for relief in midsummer at the civic charity departments. Delegation after delegation contended that the Dominion must accept some responsibility for the unemployment arising from the completion of its railroad building program and for the thousands of unemployed immigrants admitted by the Federal Department of Immigration.¹⁵

For Alberta's cities, the depression's consequences were severe. In 1915 the editor of the *Labour Gazette* told the Ontario Commission on Unemployment that Edmonton was one of "the five great reservoirs of labour in Canada, the cities to which the unemployed chiefly gravitate," along with Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.¹⁶ Employment conditions had been bad in Edmonton and Calgary since at least the spring of 1913. In August, both cities subsidized the railway transportation of harvest hands; 926 left Edmonton under the plan and roughly 2,500 left Calgary. By November, they were back in the cities, "vainly seeking employment."¹⁷ Edmonton IWW Local 339's press committee described the harvest workers' experience:

...Most of the men who take in the harvest find themselves broke or nearly broke after weeks of working 14 or 16 hours a day, sleeping in straw stacks.

[...] Many of the farmers are as poor as Lazarus and up to their eyes in debt; the same applies to the threshing outfits, and it is about as easy to get blood out of a stone as to get wages out of these people. After the harvest is over these men drift into the different towns and what little money they have is soon spent and they soon find themselves broke with no prospect of a job and with a long cold winter ahead of them.

For December, the *Labour Gazette* reported that in Edmonton, "there were more unemployed men than at any previous time in the history of the city."¹⁸

¹⁵Bryce M. Stewart, "Unemployment and Organization of the Labour Market," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 57 (May 1923), 286. On the 1913-15 depression in Canada treatments see: James Struthers, *No 'Fault of Their Own': Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto 1983), 12-6; Donald Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners', 65, 68; John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto 1978), 45-9, 56-9. For local studies, see: Matters, "Vancouver Style," 3-15; Goeres, "Disorder," Ch.1; Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Classes in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa 1979), Ch.3.

¹⁶Ontario, *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment* (1916), 210.

¹⁷*Labour Gazette*, 14 (July 1913), 34-5, (November 1913) 549; John C. Weaver, "Edmonton's Perilous Course, 1904-1929," *Urban History Review*, 2 (October 1977), 31.

¹⁸*Voice of the People*, 5 September 1914; *Labour Gazette*, 14 (January 1914), 784. It should be noted

The IWW, too, was entering a recessionary period: the failed strikes on the GTP and CNR lines in British Columbia were matched — after a single, brilliant success in the Lawrence, Massachusetts textile mills in 1912 — by a series of defeats after the union was invited to lead several spontaneous strike movements against large industrial concerns in the eastern United States. During 1913-15, the organization fell back on its string of “mixed” locals in the West: “a number of permanent members who lived in a town — known as ‘hall cats’ — and groups of ‘footloose rebels’ who drifted from job to job. The group was united not by links to any particular job, shop or industry but rather by their common interest in the I.W.W.”¹⁹

James Rowan, one such footloose rebel, became the secretary of an Edmonton mixed local. It was at this local’s hall that the Edmonton Unemployed League was formed, after a discussion of unemployment on 21 December 1914. Those present organized a special meeting for the unemployed the next night, when a committee was elected and a set of demands drafted.²⁰ The civic relief officer later wrote that beginning around 23 December, “the un-employed [sic] rough labour element assumed menacing features through organization inspired by leaders of the I.W.W.” Thomas Turnbull estimated their parades at “1,000 strong” while conservatively estimating 4,000 men to be unemployed in the city as a whole. “In the bitter cold weather intense feeling was created by public demonstrations and marches through the streets of the un-employed, their numbers daily increasing.” The men marched along Jasper Avenue, the main thoroughfare, carrying banners displaying such slogans as “We Want Work and Food” and “Midst Christmas Cheer Unemployed Men Are Starving.”²¹

The League had the advantage of appearing at a tumultuous time in Edmonton politics. The December 1913 election shifted power from men like incumbent

the unemployment discussed here is exclusively male, both because the workers organized by the IWW were men and because of the sources. The *Gazette* had no women’s labour correspondents in Alberta, and in the course of the research for this essay few references were found to women’s unemployment. In the spring of 1914, the Calgary Trades and Labor Council mounted an unsuccessful campaign for a provincially-legislated minimum wage for women because, while some firms had dismissed large numbers of them, others had simply cut their wages by one-third to one-half. *Calgary Albertan*, 18 April 1914. The Edmonton Local Council of Women estimated female unemployment there at about 900 women at the end of summer, “largely... domestics, stenographers and shop girls.” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 September 1914.

¹⁹Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 283-93; Foner, *History*, 4, 134. For a description of the role of the IWW hall, which he called an institution “unique in the unskilled workers’ history,” see Carleton H. Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (New York 1920), 115-6.

²⁰*Voice of the People*, 5 February 1914. Shortly after its founding in the fall of 1912, members of the IWW’s Edmonton local were invited to represent immigrant, unskilled labourers who had gone on strike against the city, but that role seems to have been temporary; Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto 1979), 48-51.

²¹Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, NAC MG 26, G, vol. 695, reel C-908, item 190622, undated letter by Turnbull; City of Edmonton, *Ninth Annual Financial and Departmental Report for 14 months ended December 31st, 1913*, 262; *Edmonton Journal*, 31 December 1913; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 25 December 1913.

TABLE 1

Estimates of Male Unemployment Edmonton and Calgary, 1914-1915

Calgary (1916: 20,257 males 15 years of age and over*)		
1914	16 January	2,000-3,000 unskilled labourers; 1,500-2,000 skilled (1)
	1 July	4,500-5,000 (1)
	28 July	4,500 (1)
	29 August	3,000 (1)
	15 September	7,000 (2)
	30 September	3,000 (1)
	17 October	6,000 (1)
1915	15 January	3,061 (2), with 6,122 dependents (3): 648 Canadians; 1,650 from Britain; 106 from the British Empire; 149 Americans; 382 Continental Europeans; 85 Chinese; 41 unspecified (2)
	1 May	3,500 (1)
	15 May	5,700 (2)
	15 November-1 December	700: 150 skilled laborers; 400 unskilled, 150 clerical (2)
Edmonton (1916: 18,701 males 15 years of age and over*)		
1914	15 January	1,500: 60 per cent skilled labourers; 40 per cent unskilled (1)
	late May	2,500: 1,500 city residents; 1,000 estimated to be "floaters," railway construction workers (2)
	1 July	3,000 (2)
	28 July	1,800 (1)
	29 August	3,500 (1)
	15 September	4,000 (2)
1914	30 September	3,500 (1)
	15 October	4,000 (2)
	15 November	4,000 (2)
	15 December	5,200 (2)

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1915	15 January	4,500 (2)
	15 February	4,200: 2,200 single men; 2,000 married (2)
	15 March	3,800: 1,900 single; 1,900 married (2)
	15 April	3,500: 1,700 single; 1,800 married (2)
	1 May	3,500 (4)
	15 May	3,500 (2)
	15 June	3,900 (2)
	15 July	3,500 (2)
	15 September	1,200-1,500 (2)
	15 November-1 December	1,100: 400 skilled labourers, 300 unskilled, 400 clerical (2)
	15 December	1,600 (2)

Sources:

* Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of the Prairie Provinces (1916) Table XIII*.

(1) NAC, *Department of Labour records, RG 27, vol. 3134, file 151, various reports on unemployment by Dominion Immigration agents.*

(2) NAC, RG 27, Vol. 3134, file 151, "Unemployment and the Distribution of Labour."

(3) *Labour Gazette*, 15 (February 1915), 915.

(4) NAC, RG 27, vol. 3134, file 152, "Note on Unemployment," a memo whose estimates were "believed to be conservative."

Mayor William Short, K.C. (lawyer for both the CNR and GTP) to a coalition of independent businessmen, trade unionists and populists (epitomized by lawyer Joe Clarke, independent Liberal and committed Single Tax supporter), which also included carpenter James Kinney, the first city alderman nominated and sponsored by the Trades and Labor Council.²² This reformist administration was elected just in time to preside over economic collapse, but their initial response to the Unemployed League was favourable. On 26 December, a delegation including Mayor McNamara and Turnbull met with the unemployed at the IWW hall. The League had presented demands:

That the city furnish work for all unemployed regardless of race, color or nationality, and regardless of whether married or single. That a wage of not less than 30 cents per hour be paid. That enough work be furnished to each man to bring in at least \$9.00 per week. That during the time the men are waiting to go to work the city furnish three 25 cents meal tickets per each man out of work. That these meal tickets be redeemable at any restaurant in the city.²³

²²John Day, "Edmonton Civic Politics, 1891-1914," *Urban History Review*, 3 (February 1978), 65-8; "Edmonton Endorses Democracy," *Grain Grower's Guide*, 21 January 1914. The McNamara administration is remembered chiefly for corruption, but it proposed an extremely progressive city charter (never adopted, but described in the *Bulletin*, 6 May 1914). Its election was largely due to the tenant franchise, introduced in 1911, which gave the working-class vote greater importance in Edmonton than most cities.

²³*Voice of the People*, 5 February 1914.

McNamara told the men he sympathized with them, and announced that 60 to 70 men would go to work the next day clearing streets five hours a day at 30 cents an hour, and that the exhibition grounds' dining hall would be opened to provide a place to sleep and meals for the unemployed.

McNamara added: "...I can rest assured that you will form a strong committee and place it in charge of the building to see that it is unharmed." Turnbull took a different line, warning he would turn over men who drank or did not do their work for arrest, and would not stand for "Russians I know, who would come with the story that they are poor, but who are comparatively wealthy...." He said: "We are prepared to help you now, but do not think that with assistance you are going to lie back and take things easy."²⁴

For the moment, however, the members of the Unemployed League were satisfied. "To their credit..., the city authorities took a reasonable view of the matter and handled the situation with judgement and ability," the Edmonton IWW press committee wrote.

At this place [the exhibition grounds], all who are in need are furnished with two substantial meals by day, and a place to sleep, also light and heat. Although the accommodations are somewhat rough, an air of satisfaction seems to reign over the place.

However, the Wobblies correctly calculated they owed their good treatment in part to the city's fear of a "wave of crime" by hungry men: Turnbull later wrote that the Relief Department had provided meals and beds "to avoid outbreaks of lawlessness...."²⁵

Calgary response to "lawlessness" took a rather different form. To begin with, the city council elected there for 1914 was fiscally conservative. "The first thing private business concerns do in quiet times is to reduce expenses and the city will have to do the same," declared Mayor H.A. Sinott, who fired 20 municipal employees during his first month in office.²⁶

Relief in Calgary was under the direction of Reverend C.A. McKillop, secretary of the Associated Charities, to which the city made an annual grant. This organization ran a bunkhouse for single men, but in order to sleep there and receive two meals a day, men were subjected to a labour test of four hours unpaid work daily in the woodyard. Asked McKillop: "Why should Calgary look after all the homeless and moneyless men who drift in here from all parts of the province and who, in nine cases out of ten, have only themselves to blame for their poverty stricken condition?" Although on 26 December he reported "2,000 men out of work in Calgary to his knowledge and probably more," a week later only 16 single men were staying at the bunkhouse.²⁷

²⁴ *Journal*, 27 December 1913; *Edmonton Capital*, 27 December 1913.

²⁵ *Voice of the People*, 5 February 1914; NAC MG 26, G, vol. 695, reel C-908, item 190622, undated letter by Turnbull.

²⁶ *Albertan*, 31 January 1914.

²⁷ Glenbow (GAI) Calgary City Clerk Papers, BE.33, .C151 P, file 702, K. McNichol to C.A. McKillop, 5 January 1914; *Albertan*, 11, 26 December 1913; *News-Telegram*, 3 January 1914.

On the evening of 30 December, a crowd of more than 200 filled the IWW hall for a meeting to organize the Calgary Unemployed League. The men, "workers from every nation," were addressed in Italian and Ukrainian, and in English by Alf Budden, a local Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) activist. The men gathered again the next morning at a vacant lot, but cut the meeting short because they were so poorly dressed for the cold. They marched on city hall, carrying banners that read "We Want Work Not Charity" and "Calgary, the City of Opportunity." (The *Herald* reported 1,000 marchers while the *News-Telegram* estimated 250.) At the door, they found police Chief Alfred Cuddy, five detectives and a crowd of policemen. Nevertheless, a delegation was allowed to enter and present their demands to aldermen: at least 30 hours of work per week at 30 cents an hour for all the unemployed, "regardless whether they are married or single and regardless of color, race and nationality," failing which three 25-cent meal tickets a day and a clean place to sleep (in sum, the relief conditions granted in Edmonton).²⁸ City council later decided more relief work should be provided, but only to bona-fide citizens of Calgary, and without taking any responsibility for transients.²⁹

On the Friday morning, 2 January, about 200 men gathered again at the vacant lot. Police estimated almost half of them were "galicians [sic] and other foreigners." With banners in hand (one read, "Work, Starve or Steal Which Shall It Be?"), they listened to a speech by William S. McConnell, IWW local secretary. As recorded from memory three days later by police detective Thomas B. Turner, McConnell said:

I am not one of the unemployed. I have been asked to come here to give you what assistance I can. We want work at 30¢ per hour or three twenty-five cent meals a day and a place to sleep. We will now march to the city hall and make our demands known to the Mayor and Officials and if they do not give us what we ask surely to Christ you will take what you want yourselves. Do not take it from some poor chinaman [sic] who is working hard running a restaurant for a living, but go where there is plenty and be sure and take plenty. We will now form up and march to the city hall.

Turner later testified he was so frightened when the crowd applauded these remarks, that he "ran to the city hall by the nearest way and told them that they were going to take what they wanted by force." Chief Cuddy merely posted policemen around city hall, and when the demonstration arrived, "told them they would have to make an appointment... if they wanted to see the Mayor and commissioners and I told them the Mayor was not in and I told them they need not

²⁸ *News-Telegram*, 2 January 1914; *Herald*, 31 December 1913. According to a *News-Telegram* reporter, writing in an American socialist magazine, "the parades of the unemployed have been everywhere underestimated by several hundred percent" in western Canadian daily newspapers; W.E. Hardenburg, "Canada's Economic Conditions," *The New Review*, 2 (1914), 130; biographical information from *Henderson's Calgary Directory*, 1914.

²⁹ *News-Telegram*, 3 January 1914; *Herald*, 6 January 1914. Ald. W.G. Hunt said he "doubted very much if there were any legitimate citizens of Calgary who were actually in need of food and were not receiving attention." *Herald*, 2 January 1914.

come back with banners of this kind." The crowd then dispersed.³⁰

McConnell next day led a similar crowd back to city hall for a third demonstration, only to be met by Cuddy and ten mounted policemen. Cuddy told the parade to move on. When McConnell stopped to argue, Cuddy grabbed him; he and Frank Molan, a demonstrator who tried to take the banner McConnell was carrying, were arrested. Three more men who refused to move along were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly. McConnell was tried for sedition (in connection with his speech of 2 January), and Molan for assault on Chief Cuddy.³¹

Other people were arrested the following Monday, after attempts to hold outdoor meetings. The Unemployed League was reduced to asking city council's permission to hold meetings in Victoria Park, or in vacant lots with the owners' consent.³² During the next week, the League continued to hold meetings, attended by 250 people on average. Allan McDonald and E. Webster, formerly of the Edmonton League's executive, livened up these meetings with bitter denunciations of McKillop. Webster later claimed that League agitation at least had resulted in "rabbit stew of a questionable character and a few potatoes" replacing soup at the Associated Charities bunkhouse.³³

The gatherings culminated in another meeting between aldermen and a League delegation made up by Socialist Party organizer James H. Fisher, McDonald, and Webster. They demanded food and shelter, relief work at union wages, and that the city ask the province for a program of public works. Delegates outraged aldermen by insisting on union wages. "We refuse to be 'blacklegs,'" said Fisher. "We would not have the support of the labor council if we did." The politicians were even more incensed to discover the three delegates were not Calgary residents, but had arrived from Edmonton during the past two weeks; they also feared that the city's generosity would attract a flood of Alberta's unemployed. The aldermen simply voted to leave the matter of dealing with unemployment in McKillop's hands. A week later, the Unemployed League suffered a further setback when a Trades and Labor Council committee, appointed to investigate McKillop's Associated Charities work, reported at the annual meeting that it was "completely satisfactory."³⁴

³⁰PAA, Criminal case files from the Supreme Court of Alberta in Calgary, Acc. 79.285, reel 5, Suit no. 278, Statement of the Accused and evidence taken before the police magistrate, 6 January 1914.

³¹*Albertan*, 5 January 1914; *Herald*, 28 January 1914. McConnell was given a two-year suspended sentence in what the *Albertan* claimed was the first sedition trial in Canadian history and Molan was sentenced to six weeks' hard labour; *Albertan*, 19 February 1914; *Voice of the People*, 12 March 1914; *Herald*, 2 February 1914. The legal definition of sedition includes the promotion of "feelings of ill-will and hostility between different classes of Her Majesty's subjects" according to Peter MacKinnon, "Conspiracy and Sedition as Canadian Political Crimes," *McGill Law Journal*, 23 (1977), 625-6, which mentions no cases before World War I.

³²*News-Telegram*, 7 January 1914; *Albertan*, 6 January 1914.

³³*Albertan*, 8, 9, 12 January 1914.

³⁴*Albertan*, 15 January 1914; *Herald*, 15 January 1914; GAI, Calgary Labour Council Papers, M 4743, file 2, Minutes of the meeting of 23 January 1914; *Calgary Albertan*, 27 January 1914; *Calgary Herald*, 26 January 1914.

By early March, the IWW and McKillop seem to have arrived at similar views of the political situation. The minister told a reporter: "I feel that the stand I took in refusing to receive any of the unemployed who waited on me except individually, as I receive all other applicants for aid, saved me a lot of trouble and perhaps considerable money."³⁵ In a Wobbly newspaper, John Ternill, the Calgary IWW local's new secretary, wrote:

The situation in this "Christ-ridden land" remains about the same. The slaves who are down and out seem to be satisfied with the usual mission garbage in return for four hours hard labor.³⁶

Faced by Calgary relief officials' complete refusal to deal with the organized unemployed workers as a group, the League could achieve no improvement in their condition. It collapsed amid mutual recriminations between the IWW and the Socialists, though the Wobblies continued their soapbox oratory on street corners in the hope "the unemployed may get tired of slaving four hours for the munificent enumeration [sic] of two meals and a flop and things may get moving again."³⁷

By March, the Edmonton local of the IWW was not much more active than Calgary's, but the decline of its influence had been much steeper. While the Calgary Unemployed League was suppressed by the police and ignored by city council, the Edmonton League was able to exert some control over the administration of relief benefits, until it exceeded the authorities' tolerance.

Almost 400 men were sheltered free of charge at the exhibition grounds from 27 December to 6 January. They received two meals a day and slept on straw mattresses spread on the floor. Most spent their days in town looking for work, although they also were expected to do chores. Table II demonstrates the extent to which the unemployed had drifted into the city. At the exhibition grounds, there was only one person who had lived in Edmonton five years or more, while 148 out of 382 men had come directly from railway construction camps. The men were evenly split between continental European immigrants, on the one hand, and British, Canadians and Americans, on the other, but they were overwhelmingly unskilled workers.

The men at the exhibition grounds were organized into 16 companies, led by captains elected with a show of hands, and participated in regular, orderly general meetings. James Rowan described the camp in a letter to W.S. McConnell:

There are about 400 men out there now, and they are going to stay there until work is furnished at 30¢ per hour. We are making them [the city] come through with good grub and gave them directly to understand that we would not stand to be fed on soup and would have no police around the place.... I think we may call this a complete victory.³⁸

³⁵ *Albertan*, 7 March 1914.

³⁶ *Voice of the People*, 12 March 1914.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; *Solidarity*, 14 March 1914.

³⁸ *Bulletin*, 7 January 1914 (the letter was seized and published after McConnell's arrest).

TABLE 2
 Trades and Origins of Unemployed Men Housed at Edmonton Exhibition Grounds
 6 January 1914

<i>Nationality</i>		<i>Trade</i>	
North American:		unskilled:	
Canadian	20	labourer	253
French Canadian	3	farm labourer	13
Newfoundland	2	76%	266
United States	44		
18.5%	69		
		skilled:	
British:		miner	12
		cook	11
English	75	fireman	11
Scots	35	carpenter	8
Manx (Britain)	2	teamster	5
Irish	18	clerk	4
Welsh	1	cook's assistant	4
35.1%	131	wireman	4
		bushman	3
Australian	1	bricklayer	3
		machinist	3
		painter	2
Continental European:		stone cutter	2
		engineer	2
Austrian	65	tie maker	2
Russian	63	bridgeman	1
Swedes	11	dentist	1
German	9	cigarmaker	1
Norwegian	8	cabinet maker	1
Italian	5	electrician	1
Finnish	4	fitter	1
Danish	3	iron worker	1
Hollanders	2	planing millhand	
Swiss	2	plumber's helper	1
Hungarian	1	plasterer	1
46.1%	172	steam fitter	1
		sawyer	1
		shingler	1
		24%	84

Immediate origin

Construction		Other	
GTP British Columbia	62	Western Canada:	
CNR Alberta	19		
CNR British Columbia	19	Vancouver	5
GTP Alberta	17	five or years in city	1
Edmonton & B.C. Railway	17	Calgary	19
CPR Alberta	15	"small places" in Alberta	13
Bassano Irrigation work	4	Saskatchewan	16
CPR British Columbia	3	Manitoba	20
48.1%	156	22.8%	74
		Eastern Canada:	
		Ontario	25
		Quebec	4
		Maritimes	2
		9.6%	31
		United States:	
		Pacific	25
		East of Rockies	4
		8.9%	29
		Europe:	
		Continental Europe	25
		British Isles	9
		10.5%	34

Note: totals for each category vary.

Source: Edmonton *Bulletin*, 7 January 1914.

However, the relief program was expensive. By 5 January, the work given married, resident men and the accommodations at the exhibition grounds had consumed \$5,000 of the \$25,000 budgeted for relief that year. As a result, city council decided to require the men at the exhibition grounds to work 3.5 hours a day at 30 cents an hour, and pay 75 cents a day room and board; the cost of room and board already received would be deducted from wages.³⁹ The Unemployed League executive countered that it had saved the city the cost of arresting and jailing men for theft, but at a general assembly the men reluctantly agreed to the terms after a speech by Clarke. In two days, the population at the grounds dropped from 404 to 260. Of those remaining, ten were ill, and many did not have enough clothing for outdoor work.⁴⁰

City officials already had indicated their intention to close the camp when a struggle for control between civic relief officials and the Unemployed League

³⁹ *Bulletin*, 6 and 9 January 1914.

⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, 9 and 12 January 1914.

executive forced the hand of council's Health and Safety Committee.⁴¹ The executive seems to have taken seriously McNamara's request to take charge of the facilities. One account claimed that the League even demanded to know the quantities of meat and bread delivered to the dining hall.⁴²

On 14 January, the executive was outraged by the promotion of one member to foreman. It demanded that the city-appointed camp superintendents reverse the decision. When refused, the executive reportedly told the men to treat the new foreman "as a country would a traitor." It also appealed to Ald. Clarke, but he sided with the superintendents.⁴³ The next day, the Health and Safety Committee decided to break up the camp immediately. The men would still receive \$1.00 daily for three hours and twenty minutes of work, but they would have to find their own room and board.⁴⁴ The Committee informed the League of its decision. Executive member Albert Prashner agreed the terms were satisfactory, though these were a good deal less than the League's original demand of at least \$9.00-worth of work a week.

In any case, the city was running out of work and money. During the week after the camp's closing, 900 of the men were employed by the city. But by the following Monday (26 January), the streets superintendent laid off 800 of them, because there was no clearing and brushing work left to do, and Premier Sifton already had announced he would not commit the province to a public works program.⁴⁵ The unmarried transients were reduced to sleeping on the IWW hall's floors and benches. Prashner, after unsuccessfully leading 120 men to the civic relief office to demand the blankets they had used at the exhibition grounds, warned that the unemployed would force the city to give them food and lodging, in jail if necessary.⁴⁶

Two days later, Ald. Kinney persuaded the city council to give the men 20-cent meal tickets.⁴⁷ But this meant only one meal a day for men who were, the Unemployed League declared, "absolutely without money and [mostly] have not got sufficient clothing[,] many of them being without underclothes."

These men are hungry and are becoming more hungry each day.... Add to this a temperature many degrees below zero in which men have to sleep on bare boards and without blankets and you have a slight conception of the hardships which these men are undergoing....

⁴¹ *Capital*, 12 January 1914.

⁴² *Journal*, 14 January 1914. In desperation, Turnbull wrote to the commissioners asking for a ruling on who was in charge at the grounds: "However useful the executive to the unemployed has been it has not vested in it a governing power so far as the city is concerned. To all of which they [the executive] have replied that they are in control of the work out there and that they will do just as they please about any order sent;" *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Bulletin*, 15 January 1914; Allie St. Clair letter *Bulletin*, 31 January 1914.

⁴⁴ *Journal*, 16 January 1914.

⁴⁵ Rowan in *Capital*, 19 January 1914; *Journal*, 21 January 1914; *Bulletin*, 27 January 1914; *Herald*, 20 January 1914.

⁴⁶ *Journal*, 27 January 1914; *Bulletin*, 27 January 1914.

⁴⁷ *Journal*, 28 January 1914.

When a man spends a few days and nights during which he is constantly tortured by cold, hunger and vermin, then, the inside of a jail begins to look good to him. The convicted lawbreaker at least has food and shelter.⁴⁸

Next Sunday morning, the men at the IWW hall marched to the First Presbyterian Church and asked to speak from the pulpit. Though the minister refused, the men stayed until the end of the service. In the evening, they marched into McDougall Methodist Church services and demanded a place to sleep for the night, and an opportunity to address the congregation. The minister put them up in the auditorium, and sent for Turnbull, who found places to sleep for 230 men, averting their threat to stay at the church.⁴⁹

The city administration's wealthy opponents had criticized its generous treatment of the unemployed, and also feared that the newly-appointed health and safety commissioner, W.S. Booth (responsible for police), might tolerate the "social evil" of prostitution. Now that the unemployed had invaded the churches of Edmonton's élite (each the largest of its denomination and situated downtown), the new commissioners had an opportunity to show a commitment to order. Booth told reporters that the police would be asked to intervene in any further "stampedes such as the one last night." He and Turnbull announced that henceforth the unemployed would be dealt with only as individuals.⁵⁰ When a crowd of unemployed men appeared at Turnbull's office that afternoon demanding meals and accommodation, he had the police turn them out, then let them back in one at a time and provided beds for 330 of them. The following day, Tuesday, three League executive members were arrested for instructing men at the IWW hall not to respond to a questionnaire by Turnbull; all three were released after promising to take jobs immediately in the street superintendent's department.⁵¹

The final confrontation between city officials and the Unemployed League took place Wednesday night, 4 February. Booth, accompanied by Turnbull, three aldermen, the city medical officer, the new police chief A.C. Lancey and his deputy, as well as two police detectives, arrived at the IWW hall. Booth informed the almost 200 men present that after an inspection of sanitary conditions in the hall, the medical officer had decided that no more than 95 men could sleep there, and all "in excess of that number" must leave. In fact, the report concluded that the hall could accommodate 95 if properly ventilated. It was not: the *Bulletin* reporter described the stench as "indescribable."⁵²

Booth mounted the platform and asked those with a home and those with enough money to pay for a bed to raise their hands. Thirty did so, according to the *Capital*; the *Bulletin*, however, counted only 18. Booth told the men they were "all pretty healthy looking" and the city would only feed and shelter those in need.

⁴⁸Statement of the Unemployed League press committee, *Capital*, 31 January 1914.

⁴⁹*Capital*, 2 February 1914.

⁵⁰*Capital*, 2 February 1914; James H. Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Toronto 1973), 137.

⁵¹*Capital*, 3 February 1914; *Bulletin*, 4 February 1914.

⁵²Sanitary inspector's report cited in the *Bulletin*, 4 February 1914; *Ibid.*, 5 February 1914.

Commissioner Booth then asked IWW leaders to pick 95 men to sleep on the hall's floor. James Rowan pointed out that the floor was not sanitary, and if disease broke out the IWW would be blamed. It would be better if all the men left.

The men were marched to the Salvation Army hall, where a policeman searched them for money. His search turned up a total of \$4.30 among 134 men, according to the *Bulletin*. Fifty men left the hall on hearing they would be searched, only "a few" did so, according to the *Capital*. The majority had little clothing and no overcoats. One alderman told the *Capital* "he did not know that so much poverty existed in Edmonton and that if he had not seen the picture of misery and poverty himself he could not have believed it."

The men were given beds for the night and told to report to Turnbull the next morning for work, meal tickets and donated clothing. They were warned they would be arrested if they were found again at the IWW hall. "We have been playing with these men up to the present and it is high time that we break up the unemployed league and treat the men as individuals, not as a herd led by a bunch of I.W.W.'s," declared Booth. "As long as we give them something to eat and a place to sleep they will live on the city indefinitely." Somewhat belatedly, Edmonton relief officials had learned the wisdom of McKillop's method in Calgary: the single, transient unemployed, once individualized and subjected to tests, searches and questioning, could be kept peaceable, given limited amounts of relief, then referred to employers — no matter what the working conditions.⁵³

Edmonton's generosity to the unemployed and cooperation with the IWW had been so unusual that the mayor of Saskatoon, and Calgary aldermen, criticized it publicly. Even J.S. Woodsworth, then director of the Canadian Welfare League, deplored the lack of cooperation between the new administration and the city's "leading citizens."⁵⁴ But while Mayor McNamara had accused the Edmonton Welfare Association in January of being unsupportive and called its president, A.T. Cushing, "a millionaire... willing to take the presidency of the Welfare Association but... not willing to give any money to feed the unemployed," the city finally handed over to the Association responsibility for the single, transient unemployed. By March, the Welfare Association was saving the city an estimated \$500 a month by extending hospitality to a small number of men: an average of 50 men daily worked in its woodyard in return for three meals and a place to sleep.⁵⁵

The IWW's efforts among the unemployed during January-March 1914 elsewhere had been no more successful. A thousand unemployed workers had been shot and clubbed by the police in the Los Angeles Plaza, 26 December 1913, as

⁵³ *Capital*, 5 February 1914; *Bulletin*, 5 February 1914.

⁵⁴ *Journal*, 3 February 1914; *Winnipeg The Voice*, 20 February 1914.

⁵⁵ *Capital*, 19 January 1914; *Journal*, 6 February 1914; statement by the Welfare Association, *Bulletin*, 24 and 25 March 1914; PAA, Legislature Library Vertical Files, Acc. 75.583, file 574, Edmonton Welfare Association, minutes of the meeting of 14 April 1914. Nevertheless, McNamara retained a certain respect for the IWW, telling a Unitarian Church banquet: "Misguided as are many of the I.W.W. leaders, we received more help from them than we did from the clergymen and orthodox church people of the city": *Capital*, 23 April 1914.

were 8,000 workers at a Detroit demonstration in February 1914. In late February and early March, New York City IWW locals copied Edmonton's tactics and led crowds of 500-1,000 unemployed into New York's finest churches, where they received food and lodging. But when the police arrested a crowd of 190, they turned to organizing a more-conventional Unemployed Union. An Unemployed League in Portland, Oregon received blankets and the use of a building from the city council, kept its own order, and got donations of food with the help of the Oregon Civic League, but disbanded in April 1914. In early March, *Solidarity* editorialized that "very little relief results from the demonstrations of the unemployed on the street corners." Instead, the editorial proposed "revolutionary agitation among the unemployed" to keep them from taking jobs at low wages, while One Big Union taught the employed to share available work with the jobless by reducing the speed of output and the length of the workday.⁵⁶

Spring 1914 was notable for the fact that, unlike previous years, the season brought no improvement in economic conditions. No new, large construction projects were begun. In Calgary, the ever-frugal civic administration announced very few men would be hired for city work that spring, although even most tradesmen by then were unemployed.⁵⁷ Secretary John Terrill of the Calgary IWW reported that migratory labourers' vain search for employment led them to the city growing numbers, though the "employment sharks" (agents) had little to offer. Soon Calgary would "be ripe for another unemployed agitation."⁵⁸

On 6 May, IWW Calgary told a street-corner meeting that plans were being "contemplated" for a march to Ottawa to demand work. Terrill said if the march received the approval of the other western locals, it would begin "shortly," and he expected tens of thousands of men to join by the time the march reached the Lakehead, appealing to the authorities for food in every city they passed through.⁵⁹ But within a week, an IWW member redefined the march as unemployed men searching for work, "band[ing] up in such numbers as to make the arresting of them [for vagrancy] impracticable." It never took place and instead, Calgary police took up the habit of arresting unemployed men for vagrancy when they arrived in the city by boxcar.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Edmonton received a new wave of unemployed men after Vancouver newspapers reported railway construction would soon begin nearby and require 5,000 men. "These reports had some appearance of having been given out with the intention of keeping the men at hand until needed and of attracting others," an official reported to the federal labour department.⁶¹ Economic conditions

⁵⁶Foner, *History*, 4, 436-49; *Solidarity*, 7 March 1914. It is impossible to say whether New York Wobblies knew of Edmonton's example.

⁵⁷*Labour Gazette*, 14 (April 1914), 1152; *Ibid.*, (May 1914), 1278.

⁵⁸*Voice of the People*, 16 April 1914.

⁵⁹*Albertan*, 7 May 1914; *News-Telegram*, 8 May 1914.

⁶⁰Letter by "An 'I.W.W.'" to the *News-Telegram*, 13 May 1914; *Albertan*, 9 May 1914; *News-Telegram*, 9 May 1914.

⁶¹*Labour Gazette*, 14 (June 1914), 1402; Department of Labour Records, NAC RG 27, vol. 3134, file 151, undated manuscript "Unemployment and the Distribution of Labour."

already provided ample cheap labour. Unemployment had driven construction workers' hourly wages as low as 17.5 cents from 30 cents two years earlier, while due to falling international wheat prices, small farmers drifted to cities in search of work.⁶²

On the morning of Monday, 11 May, 300 "foreigners" gathered at the IWW hall. "It was a spontaneous movement," James Rowan later explained. The men voted unanimously to form an organization of the unemployed. After an address by Rowan, speeches were made in Polish, Ukrainian, and other languages; Russian revolutionary and labour hymns were sung. The *Capital* reported: "Many of these men are said to be without means and are at the present time ripe for almost anything."

That evening some 600 men gathered in Edmonton's Market Square for more speeches, then paraded four-deep around the downtown area, carrying banners that read: "Do You Believe in Long Hours and Short Wages?," "Unemployed Get in Line," and "This is May in Sunny Alberta." The *Bulletin* estimated 80 per cent of the demonstrators were "foreign-speaking Russians, Ruthenians, Poles and Galicians. [...] For the most part they appeared sober and orderly, but their boots and clothes were shabby and unserviceable." Rowan told them their predicament was the fault of the railroads, real-estate sharks and governments who had "permitted the most reckless advertisements, attracted men to this country on false pretenses." All three levels of government could solve unemployment by funding works programs. The city could begin by reducing their labourers to a six-hour day.⁶³

The following afternoon, 600 unemployed gathered again in Market Square and marched to city hall to see the mayor. McNamara told them he would bring their concerns before council, but that the city could not solve what was a national problem. Any attempt to do so would only bring more of the unemployed to Edmonton; free food and accommodation at the exhibition grounds were now out of the question.⁶⁴

The demands to council Tuesday evening were the same as those of the Unemployed League in December (work "at a rate of not less than 30 cents per hour," or "clean comfortable sleeping quarters" and three 25-cent meal tickets daily), with the addition of a reduced working day for city labourers. Ensuing discussion permitted a fair amount of oratory by the jobless, but gave them little satisfaction. J. Bradshaw, a nine-year resident and taxpayer, "stated that the relief officer had refused to help the men; that they were starving; that they had no place to sleep; that they were hungry and desperate and that soon they would die from starvation unless relief was found." A Polish man spoke next:

⁶²*Ibid.*; Thompson, *Harvests*, 60; W.E. Hardenburg, "Canadian Economic Conditions," *The New Review*, 2 (1914), 131.

⁶³*Bulletin*, 13 May 1914; *Capital*, 12 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 12 May 1914.

⁶⁴*Bulletin*, 13 May 1914; *Capital*, 12 May 1914.

He was more fluent, and dealt with political economy as a bricklayer uses his trowel. He stated that he had come to Canada wanting to become a good Canadian citizen. He had some work, but as soon as work was discontinued, and he and others were idle, the police pinched them. When questioned he stated that he had been in the city for two weeks; he had come from Tofield where he had worked in a coal mine during the winter, and that he had a homestead, but no money.⁶⁵

Ald. Kinney summed up the discussion when he declared: "We might as well tell them now we can do nothing for them." The aldermen agreed there were enough unemployed residents to do all the city's work. Only a few days earlier, Clarke had disagreed openly with Mayor McNamara's proposal to cancel most of the city's paving program. Clarke spoke up for his constituents: "skilled mechanics" reduced to working in sewer trenches, "railway operators...taking to the pick and shovel."⁶⁶ Finally, council voted to petition senior governments for relief, and to establish a free municipal employment bureau.⁶⁷

The next day, the *Capital's* banner headline warned that if the IWW did not get what it wanted from a meeting with the mayor in the afternoon, they intended to parade at midnight "through the 'aristocratic' section in the west end." But the IWW had called off the parade, "because their plans became known to the police and the leaders were somewhat dubious as to the outcome if it was held." The *Bulletin* published reports about a "fanatical looking Russian, who...stated that the city would be blown up if they did not receive help," and that the men had firearms they were ready to use.⁶⁸

IWW leaders now threatened to call to Edmonton every unemployed man in Alberta. Ten thousand would descend on the city. Rowan said the Calgary IWW's idea of a march to Ottawa might yet be realized. He warned:

...We are trying to do things in a proper way first. I am not inciting men to steal. But you know what hungry men are and if the worst comes to the worst, and they cannot get jobs, I am not prepared to say what they will do eventually.⁶⁹

Rowan and his closest colleague, Allan McDonald, might no longer have been entirely in control of events. According to the *Capital*, they already had expelled some "troublemakers," and while the movement was still attracting hundreds of men to its meetings, it was divided:

⁶⁵*Capital*, 13 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 13 May 1914.

⁶⁶*Bulletin*, 8 May 1914.

⁶⁷*Bulletin*, 13 May 1914; City of Edmonton Archives (hereafter, EA), City Clerks, Commissioners Reports, microfilm 14, Safety and Health Commissioner's Report 335, 16 May 1914; *Labour Gazette*, 14 (August 1914), 181. Most major cities in Canada and the United States established municipal labour exchanges during the depression and federal labour minister T.W. Crothers, hinted at the creation of a Dominion service. Udo Sautter, "Origins," 100-2; Leah H. Feder, *Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression: A Study of Measures Adopted in Certain American Cities, 1857 through 1922* (New York 1936), 275-8.

⁶⁸*Capital*, 13, 14 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 14 May 1914.

⁶⁹*Capital*, 14 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 14 May 1914.

There appears to be two factions among them, the one party advocating radical measures and the other arbitration for the settlement of their grievances.

[...] Among the unemployed are to be found... practically a representative of every revolutionary society in existence. When a plan is advocated by one party another thinks that some of its rights have been neglected.⁷⁰

Rowan's sometimes-contradictory rhetoric might have been an attempt to maintain internal consensus.

On Thursday, 14 May, the unemployed marched to the legislature to present their demands. City Council members who preceded the IWW there were told by acting premier Charles Stewart: "You are now suffering from your action of generosity in dealing with these people last winter." Stewart only would commit the government to subsidize the telephone costs involved in a plan for the United Farmers of Alberta to canvass its members to see who would hire unemployed workers. At noon, 600 men followed Rowan and McDonald to the legislature, but despite lengthy discussion, Stewart was unwilling to promise them anything more.⁷¹

IWW leaders met several times with health and safety commissioner Booth, still holding out the threat of an 'invasion.' Booth offered only room and board for men willing to work at the prison farm. He seemed unimpressed by the threats of invasion, though this aroused a few others. The enterprising owner of a detective agency claimed he had enrolled 50 people, mostly merchants, in a citizens' vigilance committee "to back up the city police should trouble arise."⁷²

The men had little to show for their week of demonstrations. It is doubtful IWW leaders believed in their own threatened invasion of the city by 10,000 jobless people. In January 1914, a Kansas City Wobbly local, led by Frank Little of the IWW General Executive Board, had undertaken one of the union's last important free speech fights, but an appeal for reinforcements by Wobblies elsewhere "failed to produce an invasion of the city." Once an effective tactic, such out-of-town recruiting for localized battles had become extremely difficult, even in a central location.⁷³

The Edmonton unemployed now devised a new tactic. On Monday they told a reporter of plans to go to restaurants and eat their fill, but leave without paying. If they were arrested, others would adopt the tactic. Once the jail cells were full, more men would be recruited from outside the city to do the same until police gave up. Late Tuesday afternoon, 13 men left the IWW hall for three restaurants, where they ordered meals, ate them, and remained seated after refusing to pay. All were

⁷⁰*Capital*, 14 May 1914. If anything, however, the unemployed movement in Edmonton was more organized than elsewhere. In Winnipeg in late May, a group of Eastern European workers gathered expecting work from the city and began a spontaneous demonstration (broken up by the police) when they got nothing. The Social Democratic Party became involved only afterwards. *Voice*, 29 May 1914.

⁷¹*Capital*, 14 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 15 May 1914.

⁷²*Capital*, 14, 15, and 16 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 16 May 1914. Richard Stafford's occupation from *Henderson's Edmonton Directory*, 1914.

⁷³Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 209-10.

arrested; all were central European labourers who reportedly spoke little English and were new to the city. The longest jail sentences went to two men who had had money: "over two dollars" and \$1.45 respectively, according to the *Capital* — "more than enough to pay for the meals which they had eaten."⁷⁴

IWW leaders refused to discuss the matter with reporters. The *Bulletin* blamed the incident on "some members of the I.W.W. who wished to precipitate trouble, and who did not themselves care to make a close study of the police cells." But the fact newspapers attributed the idea to "members" and not to Rowan or McDonald suggests the leaders' were uninvolved.⁷⁵ The Wobbly press neither published appeals for funds to defend the men, who went to jail because they could not pay \$20-fines, nor denounced the injustice of their arrest and conviction. The *Voice of the People* published a report from Calgary of 21 May which telegraphically advised: "Hell has broken loose in Edmonton, Canada. Have no details at time of writing. We shall move up there if necessary." But, Rowan's next report made no reference to the trouble.⁷⁶

The arrests seem to have ended agitation by the unemployed. Further parades and demonstrations were announced two days in a row, but none were reported by the newspapers. The *Bulletin* described an IWW street meeting Thursday evening:

...Speakers... urged the unemployed to turn out [for parades next day] in full strength.

The meeting was a quiet one, there being no enthusiasm at any time; although all the speakers dwelt with considerable fervour on what had been accomplished in Edmonton, and urged the crowd to keep the work up and more could be expected. Several attempts to sing their battle songs fell flat, only a few joining in.⁷⁷

In late June, McDonald left on an unsuccessful mission to start an IWW local in Saskatoon, while Rowan resigned as secretary travelled north with one Barrett to visit the Lac la Biche-district homestead run by a Wobbly named Johnson.⁷⁸ Rowan and Barrett, arrived at the homesteader's shack only to find the murdered Johnson's

⁷⁴*Capital*, 20 May 1914; *Bulletin*, 20 May 1914.

⁷⁵*Ibid.* There is no doubt Rowan was an advocate of outright sabotage on the job and while on strike and he served time in jail for assaulting a time-keeper at a GTP construction camp, while a sub-contractor on the GTP also accused him of eating meals in his camp without paying. However, his closeness to the civic administration (described below) makes me doubt he would adopt this tactic in Edmonton; McCormack, "Industrial Workers," 488; *Voice of the People*, 30 June 1914; RCMP Records, NAC RG 18, vol. 3256, file 1914 HQ 681-K-7 (vol. 1), Crime Report, 9 August 1914.

⁷⁶The Seattle IWW local did send the unemployed to take restaurant meals without paying, in December 1914, and invited unemployed Wobblies in other cities to join them in practicing "this form of direct action until it brings results," but leaders in New York did not favour the tactic; Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 454.

⁷⁷*Bulletin*, 22 May 1914.

⁷⁸NAC RG 18, vol. 487, file 348, copy of G.J. Gavell (sic) to Frank Johnson, 2 July 1914, in report, 4 August 1914. Rowan later said he resigned as Edmonton secretary because he "got tired of it." Since the man he was visiting had agitated for the IWW while working on the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway construction near his homestead, it is possible Rowan wanted to return to organizing construction workers; *Ibid.*, copy of H.F. Johnson to James Rowan, 22 May 1914, in Crime Report, 2 November 1914; *Ibid.*, statement by James Rowan, 8 July 1914.

TABLE 3

Men arrested for obtaining food by fraud Edmonton, 19 May 1914 (tried 20 May)

Name	Occupation	Birth place	Marital status	Commitment	Age	Sentence
Thomas Hanchuk	Coal Miner	Austria	Single	first	25	Two Months Hard Labour
alias Kerychuk	(Farm Labourer crossed out)					
Jack Wittner	Labourer	Switzerland	"	"	24	"
Mike Dashuk	"	Russia	"	"	18	30 Days Hard Labour
alias Wachuk						
Mike Demitt	"	Austria	n/a	n/a	20	"
August Werner	"	Bohemian	Married	first	30	"
Harry Ewachuk	"	Austria	Single	second; first at Calgary, Theft	20	"
alias Wachuk						
Tony Hanyuk	"	"	Married	first	54	"
Teddy Brooks	"	"	Single	"	22	"
Nick Laudie	Miner	"	Married	n/a	20	"
Bill Greek	Labourer	"	Single	first	25	"
Everet Dubbert	Printer	Hamburg, Germany	"	"	21	"
John Parnyuk	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Alex Rawling	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
alias						
Tom Karychuk						

Source: Provincial Archives of Alberta, Documents of the Provincial Gaol at Fort Saskatchewan, Acc. 68.29, Item 12, Description Book 1914, 67-80.

corpse. When they reported this to the Royal North-West Mounted Police at Athabasca, they were arrested and charged with Johnson's murder and with vagrancy. They were convicted on the vagrancy charge, and were sentenced to six months' hard labour.⁷⁹ In January 1915, they were released and the murder charges

⁷⁹NAC RG 18, vol. 3256, file 1914 HQ 681-K-7 (vol. 1), Crime Report, 22 November 1914. The detective sergeant in charge of the case reported to his commanding officer: "I have gone into this case with the intention of eliminating all but Rowan and Barrett, but as I go along these little suspicions keep cropping up. I wish to state that I am not losing any opportunity to try to get evidence against Rowan and Barrett, but up to the present haven't got any whatever."

were dropped. No other suspects were ever arrested for the Johnson slaying.⁸⁰

Defending Rowan and Barrett seems to have taken up most of the Edmonton IWW energies at the time. The Wobbly press made frequent appeals for funds and in mid-August a local Defense League was formed. Edmonton support for this cause indicates extremely good relations between the IWW and the dominant faction of city council and its supporters. Not only was the executive of the Edmonton Trades and Labor Council (probably the McNamara administration's staunchest supporter) instrumental in setting up the Defense League, but the lawyer engaged to defend them was Ald. Joe Clarke, widely seen as the administration's mastermind.⁸¹

The McNamara administration collapsed that summer under the weight of scandal. The report of a judicial inquiry into the Edmonton police department was released 23 July and found that the mayor and his supporters had attempted to turn Edmonton into a city "wide open" to prostitution and gambling. On 6 August, McNamara's alliance with Joe Clarke ended in a fistfight during a council meeting. At the end of the month, council arbitrarily reduced civic employees' salaries ten per cent due to fiscal emergency, halted all construction and laid off employees in every department. When the provincial government finally disbursed funds for municipal relief measures late in 1914, Edmonton hired 500 men to build sewers. Each worked three days a week for 20 cents an hour. Married men were paid in groceries, and single men in meals and lodging. Those unfit for sewer work were sent to a municipal woodyard.⁸²

At summer's end, the Edmonton *Labour Gazette* correspondent reported: "Owing to the business depression caused by the European war, the labour market was in such a deplorable state that any comparisons with the previous month or the corresponding period a year ago would be unfair." Drought and a modest harvest

⁸⁰NAC RG 18, vol. 487, file 348, A.S.C. McDonnell to A. Norquay, 25 May 1915. The case is an intriguing unsolved murder, fully documented in NAC RG 18, vol. 487, file 348, and vol. 3256, file 1914 HQ 681-K-7 (vols. 1 and 2), as well as PAA, Coroner's and Inquest files, Acc. 67.172, Item 603. The victim, Hiram F. Johnson, had been writing to Rowan regularly at the IWW hall in Edmonton, and had said in his last letter he was being harassed by his neighbours who did not like him because he was not Catholic and a Wobbly. Rowan was to expect letters every two to three weeks, if they stopped he would know Johnson was "out of commission."

⁸¹*Voice of the People*, 13, 20 August 1914; *Solidarity*, 15 August, 24 October, 7 November, 19 December 1914, 9 and 30 January 1915, 6 February 1915; *Bulletin*, 17 August 1914; PAA, Edmonton Labour Council Papers, Acc. 74.57, Minute books of general meetings, 17 August 1914. The IWW secretary, J.G. Gavell, took the trouble to describe a meeting of the Temperance and Moral Reform League called to condemn McNamara and Clarke in a letter to Rowan; NAC RG 18, vol. 487, file 348, G.G. Gavell (sic) to James Rowan, 4 August 1914, in division report, 4 August 1914.

⁸²Gray, *Red Lights*, 145; EA, Commissioners Reports, microfilm 13, Joint Commissioners' Report no. 122, 18 August 1914; *Labour Gazette*, 15 (September 1914), 364; *Ibid.*, 15 (February 1915), 791; *Ibid.*, 15 (April 1915), 915. It is intriguing that in Edmonton an administration prepared to tolerate prostitution was also prepared to tolerate the Wobblies (in fact, the IWW hall and the brothels shared the same neighborhood), while in Calgary the same police chief who closed the brothels repressed the IWW; Gray, *Red Lights*, 175-9.

meant few hands were required, and surplus labour drove down wages.⁸³ As Alberta economic conditions deteriorated, the IWW too declined. Its agitation among the unemployed seems to have stopped.

The IWW in the United States continued its efforts among the unemployed through winter 1914-15. More significantly, locals in midwestern American cities began their first major organizing drive in the harvest fields in the summer 1914, though the Edmonton and Calgary IWW locals remained uninvolved.⁸⁴ By November 1915, an apparently-relieved Bill Haywood told delegates to the Agricultural Workers Organization's convention:

I don't think that the unemployed question will be as serious as last year....

There seems to be a spirit among the IWW members to get out of the [hobo] jungles and onto the job. The members have come to realize that is the place to organize.⁸⁵

The Edmonton local kept up its streetcorner oratory for a time, but by mid-April 1915, Rowan was in Great Falls, Montana and at year-end, the federal labour department was informed that Canada's last three IWW locals (Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver) "had been dissolved on account of the war."⁸⁶

In Calgary, the Socialist Party sponsored a "committee of the unemployed" during autumn 1914. Secretary L.T. English of the Calgary Trades and Labor Council contemptuously referred to SPC delegates at the Alberta Federation of Labour's October convention as "anarchists... there to urge the 'organization of the unemployed' into a force to be used for insurrection to break into the storehouses and appropriate goods and wealth wherever found." The committee met with aldermen in mid-December, but was told that since the ratepayers recently had voted to reject most major expenditures, the city could hire only a few men. The

⁸³*Labour Gazette*, 15 (September 1914), 362-4. For a description of working conditions in the Canadian harvest, see *Solidarity*, 15 October 1914.

⁸⁴Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 474-7. This was despite an appeal to organize harvest workers made from Edmonton by Allen McDonald in *Voice of the People*, 7 May 1914. When labour shortages in Canada finally forced the recruitment of harvest help from the United States in 1916, the immigration department and federal and provincial police prevented any members of the IWW's Agricultural Workers Organization from entering; Celia Danyak, "'Showing These Slaves Their Class Position': Barriers to Organizing Prairie Farm Workers," in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds., *Building Beyond the Homestead: Rural History on the Prairies* (Calgary 1985), 170-2.

⁸⁵Foner, *History*, Vol. 4, 453-5; *Solidarity*, 27 November 1915.

⁸⁶NACRG 18, vol. 3256, file 1914 HQ-681-K-7 (vol. 1). A.E.C. McDonnell to RNWMP Commissioner, 13 November 1914, described a speech by an IWW member who declared "that any man who fought against the Germans was a Mut"; *Ibid.*, vol. 487, file 348, copy of affidavit sworn by James Rowan, 19 April 1915; Canada, Department of Labour, *Sixth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada* 1916, 51. After 1916, Rowan became known as the "Jesus of Nazareth of the lumberjacks of the [Pacific] Northwest" in the United States, served time in Leavenworth prison with the rest of the IWW leadership, then led the decentralizers in their split from the rest of the General Executive Board in 1924; Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (New York 1968), 129, 207, 209-10; C.H. Cahan, *Socialistic Propaganda in Canada: Its Purposes, Results and Remedies* ([Montreal 1918?]), 14; Joseph R. Conlin, "Wobbly Papers; Industrial Unionist," in Conlin, ed., *The American Radical Press, 1880-1969*, Vol. 1, (Westport, Conn. 1974), 130-2.

committee does not seem to have survived into the new year.⁸⁷

Edmonton's jobless workers had one last burst of activism in the spring 1915. Four hundred men gathered in Market Square one Saturday morning in late April, looking for work. Their negotiations with city officials achieved nothing after they demanded to be paid in cash for relief work. The employment bureau superintendent estimated 50 of the men were Bulgarians and that 250 were new to the city. Two days later, 50 men invaded the Edmonton Welfare Board offices. The board recently had assumed responsibility for the civic relief office. The invaders said they would not leave till they got food. However, they left quickly when the police arrived. They then milled about in Market Square, where two were arrested when the crowd refused to disperse. The *Edmonton Bulletin* maintained nothing to be done for the men, since "Edmonton has been pretty freely advertised as a poor place for a man to come to looking for a job and cash is the one thing the city has not got."⁸⁸

Events in Calgary during May 1915 offer a pathetic epilogue to the IWW's agitation in Alberta. For the second year in a row, spring brought no end to unemployment. As a result, city council ordered the civic labour bureau to provide relief work, on a two-week rotation basis, to 75 per cent of the men on its rolls. Immigrants apparently "mobbed" the labour bureau when a new register of men seeking work was drawn up in connection with this plan, and at the top of the list were 1,191 "English" and 594 "foreign" names.⁸⁹ Five hundred angry "British" workers met the following Saturday afternoon to discuss the problem, but quickly split into two factions between trade union members and unorganized workers. The latter accused the labour council of favouring union labour through its representatives on the city bureau's management committee. However, both groups expressed the same views to city council. They "protested against the employment of any enemy nationality under any circumstances," and asked for "the rigorous internment of all enemy subjects before they can work any further mischief."⁹⁰

City council then ordered the labour bureau to demand immigrants' naturalization papers; a week later council disqualified men naturalized since 1 August 1914, and voted to ask the federal government to intern all 'enemy aliens' in Alberta.⁹¹ But even this did not satisfy the 2,000 people who met the following Sunday afternoon and passed a resolution asking the three levels of government to dismiss all Germans and Austrians, regardless of naturalized status, and to hire only citizens of Britain and its allies.⁹²

⁸⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 November 1914; *Calgary Herald*, 16 December 1914. The committee was represented at a meeting of trade unionists and politicians; NAC RG 27, vol. 3134, file 151, "Report of unemployment conference at Calgary, Alberta. November 6, 1914," 24.

⁸⁸ *Bulletin*, 26 and 27 April 1915; editorial in *Ibid.*, 28 April 1915.

⁸⁹ *Herald*, 4 May 1915; statistics from *Ibid.*, 14 May 1915.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11, 14 May 1914.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 13, 14, 20 May 1915.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1915. Similarly, in June 1915 English-speaking coal miners in the Crowsnest Pass threatened to strike unless all enemy aliens were fired, and in Calgary in February 1916, a mob of 500 attacked a restaurant which had allegedly fired returned veterans and replaced them with Germans:

In summer 1916, after large numbers of tradesmen had enlisted, taken jobs in other industries, or returned to Britain, and when a plentiful harvest provided work for the unskilled, the *Labour Gazette* finally reported "but few unemployed" in Calgary, while in Edmonton "labour generally was more fully employed than at any time in the past two years...."⁹³

THE IWW'S COMMITMENT to organize unskilled labourers was a radical orientation in and of itself. For instance, one historian of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council during this period concluded that the council "disregarded the plight of unorganized bunkhouse men [employed as construction labourers] and unemployed workers."⁹⁴ The following account of James Rowan's speech in Edmonton in March 1914 (during the lull between bursts of agitation among the unemployed that year) demonstrates the movement's practical objective of raising the living standards of the unskilled:

Urging the workers to rid themselves of employment agencies as they would rid themselves of lice, James Rowan, of the Industrial Workers of the World, Local No 339, gathered in a large crowd yesterday afternoon at the corner of 103rd avenue and First street. Standing on a canned goods case he said that organization of unskilled workers was the only remedy for the appalling labor conditions of the West....

"When a bricklayer, a mason or a carpenter wants work," he asked, "does he go to an employment shark and buy a master for a dollar? No! The would-be employer goes to the union and gets men. If the unskilled workers were organized they could prevent this hiring and firing of men for the sake of the graft that's in it."⁹⁵

During a period of economic hardship, such men could not imitate the skilled workers in basing their claim to municipal aid on the socially-accepted grounds of being voters, taxpayers, or (often) British citizens. Yet the IWW had no hesitation in basing their demands on the men's right to respect as workers.

But there also was a clearly ideological element in the IWW's efforts. Organizers demanded work, not charity, because they believed that capitalism, not the men themselves, were to blame for the destitution of the jobless. This refusal to be apologetic undoubtedly led as well to the daring of the IWW's tactics, which

Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners'*, 67; Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto 1982), 48. Ironically, Calgary was spared the riots and demonstrations by the immigrant unemployed experienced elsewhere in the spring of 1915; Roy, "Vancouver," 400-2; Goeres, "Disorder," 39.

⁹³On Calgary, *Labour Gazette*, 16 (July 1916), 1354; on Edmonton, *Ibid.*, 16 (August 1916), 1458. It is worth noting that the 1913-15 depression and World War I put an end to Western Canada's construction boom and sharply reduced the importance of the men the IWW represented among the working class: between 1911 and 1921, simple labourers declined from 9.6 to 5.4 per cent of the male work force in the prairie provinces. Thompson, *Harvests*, 174.

⁹⁴Elizabeth Taraska, "The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-1920," MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975, 36.

⁹⁵*Bulletin*, 7 March 1914.

easily exceeded more-conventional assemblies' polite requests to government authorities. Moreover, in both Edmonton and Calgary alike, the unemployed included native-born Canadians, British, and European immigrants. The IWW's presence seems to have fostered an inter-ethnic solidarity founded on the right to work, "regardless of race, color or nationality." It is significant that in the IWW's absence, Calgary workers quickly descended to nativism in their demands for relief benefits.

It is not surprising, however, that Wobbly-led jobless workers failed to get what they asked for. Although IWW radicalism was a mobilizing force, it could not overcome this constituency's objective weaknesses. Given their social and economic marginality of the unemployed men, their political force was only equal to their threat to public order — and hungry men were no match for the police. Moreover, public responsibility for providing relief was thrust onto municipalities which barely could afford to care for the resident unemployed. Having failed, it is not surprising the IWW's Unemployed Leagues quickly collapsed. The migrant labourers were rational men, and if parades and meetings were brought no results, they had to apply their energies elsewhere in order to stay alive.

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