

## “Cracking the Stone” The Long History of Capitalist Crisis and Toronto’s Dispossessed, 1830–1930

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Volume 69, Spring 2012

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1011328ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

### ISSN

0700-3862 (print)  
1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Palmer, B. D. & Heroux, G. (2012). “Cracking the Stone”: The Long History of Capitalist Crisis and Toronto’s Dispossessed, 1830–1930. *Labour / Le Travail*, 69, 9–62.

### Article abstract

What constitutes proletarianization? The conventional answer to this seemingly simple question often stresses waged labour. Yet many workers, past and present, are routinely unable to secure paid employment, in part because of the persistence of capitalist crises of various kinds. This study of indigent workers in Toronto from the 1830s to the 1930s is premised on an understanding of proletarianization as dispossession, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the ways in which capitalism necessarily produces recurrent crises, leaving many workers wageless. It addresses how wagelessness and poverty were criminalized through the development of institutions of ostensible charitable relief, such as the Toronto House of Industry, in which those seeking shelter and/or sustenance were required to chop wood or, more onerously, break stone in order to be admitted to the ranks of those ‘deserving’ of such support. By the end of the nineteenth century-resistance to such “labour tests” was increasingly evident. Protests took place in Toronto, where the black flag was carried in demonstrations demanding “work or bread.” Refusing to “crack the stone” and demands that relief be administered differently were common features of mobilizations of the wageless in the opening decades of the twentieth century, in which socialists often took the lead. By the time of capitalism’s devastating collapse in the Great Depression of the 1930s, Toronto’s wageless were well situated to mount an outcasts’ offensive.

## ARTICLE

# “Cracking the Stone”: The Long History of Capitalist Crisis and Toronto’s Dispossessed, 1830–1930

**Bryan D. Palmer and Gaetan Heroux**

### Capitalism As Crisis

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Walter Benjamin,  
“Theses on the Philosophy of History,” (1940)

WRITING AMIDST FASCISM AND WAR, but with capitalism coming out of the economic collapse of the 1930s, Benjamin’s storm was “what we call progress.” Today, with Paradise increasingly difficult to envision, that storm might well be called crisis.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a mid-20th century view of History as Progress see E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth 1975 [1961]), 109–132. On contemporary, post-1970 capitalist crisis see Ernest Mandel, *The Second Slump: A Marxist Analysis of Recession in the Seventies* (London 1978); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005* (New York and London 2006); Greg Albo, Sam Gindin, and Leo Panitch, *In and Out of Crisis: The Global Financial Meltdown and Left Alternatives* (Oakland, California 2010). Our purpose in this paper is *not* to define crisis or differentiate among different kinds of capitalist crisis. This requires a separate, and lengthy, study. Rather, we stress the more general interpretive point that crisis is inherent in the capital-

It is difficult, as many economic histories have suggested, to scrutinize the century reaching from the 1830s to the 1930s, and not discern a series of long economic downturns, punctuated by relatively short periods of prosperity. At the very least, in much of the developing capitalist world in this era, we must recognize the continuity of crisis: economic dislocation and troubling political turmoil in the 1830s; the “Hungry Forties”; major depressions lasting for years, the initial outbreaks of which took place in 1857, 1873, and 1893; a generalized malaise that blanketed much of the 1880s, and the pre-World War I years; the recessionary dip in the business cycle associated with 1919–1922, which marked a part of the 1920s with the label “lean”; and, finally, the great collapse of 1929, which lifted, again, only with that modern solvent of capitalist crisis, war. Good times were rare times in capitalist development.<sup>2</sup> This insight framed Marx’s *oeuvre*, the 1873 afterword to the second German edition of *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, declaring: “The contradictions inherent in the movement of capitalist society impress themselves upon the practical bourgeois most strikingly in the changes of the periodic cycle, through which modern industry runs, and whose crowning point is the universal crisis. That crisis is once again approaching, although as yet but in its preliminary stage; and by the universality of its theatre and the intensity of its action it will drum dialectics even into the heads of the mushroom upstarts ....”<sup>3</sup>

One critical component of Marx’s vision was thus his fundamental grasp of the inner dynamic of capitalism. More clearly than any other thinker of his time, Marx understood that capitalism’s logic was premised on an internal reciprocity, in which progress was dependent on destructiveness. “The growing incompatibility between the productive development of society and its hitherto existing relations of production expresses itself in bitter contradictions, crises, spasms,” Marx wrote in the *Grundrisse*, concluding that, “The violent destruction of capital not by relations external to it, but rather as a condition of its self-preservation, is the most striking form in which advice is given it to be gone and to give room to a higher state of social production.” It was precisely because capitalism was a socio-economic order in which positive gains could only be registered with the negatives of loss that Marx saw the

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ist mode of production and, in particular, this has consequences for class formation in terms of how to understand the reciprocal and interrelated nature of waged labour and wagelessness. On the nature of capitalism, which necessarily generates crisis, see Murray E.G. Smith, *Global Capitalism in Crisis: Karl Marx and the Decay of the Profit System* (Halifax and Winnipeg 2010). Finally, if capitalism is inherently crisis-ridden, this is *not* to suggest that capitalism, *per se*, is *in crisis*, and its existence threatened. For that to be the case, a class conscious opposition, on a mass basis, must exist, with the potential to create an alternative socio-economic order.

2. See, as one economic history example, Harold G. Vatter, *The Drive to Industrial Maturity: The U.S. Economy, 1860–1914* (Westport, Connecticut 1976).

3. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (Moscow, no date), Volume 1, 20.

necessity of socialism. Production for profit, the rate of which was bound, over time, to fall, led invariably to new, intensified, and aggressive acts of capitalist exploitation, oppression, and despoliation. Replacing this systemic destruction with production for use was the only way in which human society could survive and progress. Marx looked forward to the day "When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples." This and only this would provide answers to humanity's needs, so debased by "the supreme rule of capital" whose "destructive influence" was felt in a metaphorical "trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut" by men of "Property, Order, Family, and Religion."<sup>4</sup>

### The Analytics of Nomenclature

Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge.

Walter Benjamin,  
 "Theses on the Philosophy of History," (1940)

WHEN CAPITALISM IS UNDERSTOOD as a political economy of development, progress, advance, *and* destruction, a social order, not just of contradictory impulses and episodic clashes of counterpoised interests, but of fundamental *crisis*, even the meaning of labour must be rethought somewhat. Michael Denning has recently suggested the necessity of radically reconceptualising life under capitalism in ways that "decentre wage labour" and replace a "fetishism of the wage" and the "employment contract" with attention to "dispossession and expropriation." Marx, after all, did not invent the term "proletarian", but adapted it from its common usage in antiquity, when, within the Roman Empire, the word designated the uncertain social stratum, divorced from property and without regular access to wages, reproducing "recklessly". J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi drew on this understanding in an 1819 work of political economy that chronicled the "threat to public order" posed by a "miserable and suffering population," dependent as it was on public charity. "[T]hose who had no property," Sismondi wrote, "were called to have children: *ad prolem generandum*." Max Weber commented similarly: "As early as the sixteenth century the proletarianising of the rural population created such an army of unemployed that England had to deal with the problem of poor relief." Three centuries later, across the Atlantic, transient common labourers were being described in a discourse seemingly impervious to change: "a dangerous class,

4. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (Harmondsworth 1973), 749–750; Marx, "The Future Results of the British Rule in India," in *Surveys From Exile: Political Writings*, Volume 2 (Harmondsworth 1973), 324–325.

inadequately fed, clothed, and housed, they threaten the health of the community.” As Denning concludes:

Rather than seeing the bread-winning factory worker as the productive base on which a reproductive superstructure is erected, imagine the dispossessed proletarian household as a wageless base of subsistence labour – the ‘women’s work’ of cooking, cleaning and caring – which supports a superstructure of migrant wage seekers who are ambassadors, or perhaps hostages, to the wage economy. ... Unemployment precedes employment, and the informal economy precedes the formal, both historically and conceptually. We must insist that ‘proletarian’ is not a synonym for ‘wage labourer’ but for dispossession, expropriation and radical dependence on the market.

“You don’t need a job to be a proletarian,” Denning insists with a bluntness that is both insightful and myopic, “wageless life, not wage labour, is the starting point in understanding the free market.”<sup>5</sup>

For all that Denning captures the fundamental importance of wagelessness, all the more so within a context of capitalism *as crisis*, his dichotomization of wageless life and waged labour is myopic. It nearsightedly clarifies the importance of dispossession while obscuring the extent to which proletarianization is meaningless outside of the existence of the (often distant) wage as both an enduring if universally unpleasant end and a decisive means of survival within capitalist political economy. David Montgomery captures the connectedness of being waged and unwaged in his rich discussion of common labourers: “Whether they were working flat out, sleeping behind a furnace or inside a boxcar, getting ‘quitting mad’, enjoying the conviviality of the saloon, or being thrown back into the ranks of the unemployed ... one thing was clear: For common laborers, work was the biblical curse. It was unavoidable, undependable, and unrewarding. But they had urgent need for money.” Similar reciprocities characterized the lives of North American canallers studied by Peter Way in the period 1780–1860, and these also frame Andrea Graziosi’s discussion of unskilled labour in the United States of 1880–1915.<sup>6</sup> Wagelessness and waged employment are not oppositions, then, but gradations on a spectrum traversing desire and necessity that encompasses many possibilities for the proletarianized masses. Between these “ideal types” exist

5. Michael Denning, “Wageless Life,” *New Left Review*, 66 (November–December 2010), 79–81; J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Nouveaux principes d’économie politique ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population*, 2 volumes (Paris 1819), II, 262, 305, I, 146, quoted in Gareth Stedman Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (London 2004), 151; Max Weber, *General Economic History*, translated by F.H. Knight (New York 1961), quoted in G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London 1981), 262; Edith Abbott, “The Wages of Unskilled Labor in the United States,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 13 (June 1905), 324; and Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Policing the Early Modern Proletariat, 1450–1850,” in David Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History* (Orlando, Florida 1984), 163–228.

6. David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The workplace, the state, and American labor activism, 1865–1925* (New York 1987), 91; Peter Way, *Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780–1860* (Baltimore and London 1993); Andrea Graziosi, “Common Laborers, Unskilled Workers, 1880–1915,” *Labor History*, 22 (Fall 1981), 512–544.

other shared structures of the social relations of material life, which include seasonal employment, a range of reproductive labours,<sup>7</sup> gendered and racialized constructions of "work", and subsistence economizing that is based on exchange relations of all kinds, including truck, sexualized barter, and criminalized commerce.<sup>8</sup>

As Marx noted in *Capital*, "Every combination of employed and unemployed disturbs" the harmonious and sacred laws of bourgeois order, articulated most rigorously in the market freedom of the laws of supply and demand, the necessity of capital governing and disciplining a labour force for whom work defines being.<sup>9</sup> Such major destabilizing combinations of the waged and the wageless were a part of the eruptions of class struggle in Canada and the United States that repeatedly disturbed social order in 1877, 1886, 1894, 1919, and throughout the 1930s. They were often associated with insurrection-like uprisings of railroad and mill workers, campaigns for the shorter workday, and, in the case of the post-World War I revolt, with growing anxiety over working-class internationalism, increasingly expressed in variants of revolutionary syndicalism and bolshevism that exploded in the General Strike. The mailed fist of military suppression, the psychic satisfactions of bringing anarcho-communists to the gallows in 1887, and the brute force of the deportations and jailings that flowed in the wake of the state trials of the Red Scare era of 1917–1919 no doubt eased many an anxiety-ridden bourgeois mind.<sup>10</sup>

7. Most stimulating have been the early publications of Wally Seccombe. See, for instance, Seccombe, "Marxism and Demography," *New Left Review*, 137 (January–February 1983), 28–29.

8. Consider, for instance, the discussion in Bryan D. Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York 2000).

9. Marx, *Capital*, I, 640.

10. On this well-known history see, among many possible sources, Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco 1972); David Montgomery, "Strikes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Social Science History*, 4 (February 1980), 81–104; Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Urbana and Chicago 1987); Desmond Morton, "Taking on the Grand Trunk: The Locomotive Engineers Strike of 1876–1877," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 5–34; J.A. Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strikes in the United States* (Chicago 1877); Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," and Larry Peterson, "Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike: the Origins of Communist Labour Unionism in Europe and North America," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 11–45, 115–132; Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 2010); and Todd McCallum, "'Still Raining, Market Still Rotten': Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression," PhD dissertation, Queen's University, 2004, a much revised and conceptually reconfigured version of which is about to appear with Athabasca University Press under the tentative title *Hobohemia and the Crucifixion Machine: Rival Images of a New World in 1930s Vancouver*. See as well McCallum, "The Reverend and the Tramp, Vancouver, 1931; Andrew Roddan's 'God in the Jungles,'" *BC Studies*, 147 (Autumn 2005), 51–88; McCallum, "Vancouver Through the Eyes of a Hobo: Experience, Identity, and Value in the Writing of Canada's Depression-Era Tramps," *Labour/Le Travail*, 59 (Spring 2007), 43–68; and for Toronto in particular the important work of Marcus

What all of this suggests is the necessity of seeing the waged and the wageless as part of a dispossessed class whole, one in which the obscured forms of resistance that have historically developed among the jobless demand consideration. Precisely because capitalism as an economic system has conjoined the order of manufacture and accumulation with the disorder of destructive crisis, the social relations of production have been constituted in a like symbiosis, in which labouring life, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, has, for the bulk of humanity, oscillated around fields-of-force seemingly polarized by wagelessness, on the one hand, and waged work, on the other. Yet these apparent opposites are but components of a complex totality, their connectedness premised on a fundamental dispossession, the defining feature of proletarianization. That dispossession, in as much as it marks out human beings as destitute of ownership of the means of their production, exists *regardless of whether one happens to be working for wages or not*. It continues to define workers no matter the level of security they have achieved, or failed to achieve, in their employment. Marx noted this when he suggested that capitalist enrichment was premised on, “The condemnation of one part of the working class to enforced idleness by the over-work of the other part,” accelerating “the production of the reserve army on a scale corresponding with the advance of social accumulation.” Every proletarian can thus be categorized, not so much according to their waged work, but to the possible forms of surplus population, which Marx labelled “the floating, the latent, and the stagnant.” This is why the accumulation of capital is also the accumulation of labour, but the Malthusian multiplication of the proletariat does not necessarily mean the working class will, in its entirety, be waged. “The lowest sediment of the relative surplus-population,” Marx wrote, “finally dwells in the sphere of pauperism. ... the quantity of paupers increases with every crisis. ... Pauperism is the hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial reserve army. Its production is included in that of the relative surplus population, its necessity in theirs; along the surplus population, pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production, and of the capitalist development of wealth. It enters into the *faux frais* of capitalist production.”<sup>11</sup>

As John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney, and R. Jamil Jonna suggest in a recent issue of *Monthly Review*, Marx’s way of seeing class formation was much ahead of his time, anticipating how modern imperialism and the relentless march of capital accumulation on a world scale would result in the quantitative expansion and qualitative transformation of the global reserve army of labour. This massive reserve, from which capital draws much

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Klee, “Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Anarchy and Despotism: The State, Capital, and the Working Class in the Great Depression, Toronto, 1929–1940,” PhD dissertation, Queen’s University, 1998; Klee, “Fighting the Sweatshop in Depression Ontario: Capital, Labour, and the Industrial Standards Act,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 123–152.

11. Marx *Capital*, I, 641, 643–644.



sustenance for its accumulative appetite, now numbers in the billions. As it has grown, so too have the dimensions of misery of the dispossessed expanded: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole, is therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, ritualty, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital."

The International Labor Organization has recently estimated that what might be called the global reserve army of labour is now larger than the approximately 1.4 billion workers who are totally dependent on wage labour. This reserve now extends well beyond the roughly 218 million unemployed, an astronomical 1.7 billion workers being designated the "vulnerably employed." A significant portion of this reserve is undoubtedly wageless, composed of members of marginal domestic economies who eke out material being through unpaid labours, scavenging, and other "Dickensian" endeavours of the kind associated with life in the favelas, barrios, and shanty towns of the developing world. Characterized by the fundamental precariousness of its everyday life, this sector knows little of the securities of the wage, which is usually unavailable or is secured only intermittently, in sporadic, but always finite, clusterings of paid employment. Often this segment of the dispossessed, reliant on scratching its day-to-day remunerations out of an *informal* economy where the struggle for subsistence relies as much on the trappings of petty entrepreneurialism of the self-exploiting penny capitalist kind, is as wageless as it is waged. All of this prompts recognition of the historical importance of considering class formation not only in terms of wage labour, but as an ongoing process of dispossession, encompassing a spectrum of possibilities that include classic waged employment relations defined by hourly rates as well as a number of other scenarios that combine types of labour that evolve outside the wage form. Mike Davis insists that what he calls the "global informal working class," a socio-economic stratum that he sees "overlapping with but non-identical to the slum population," now surpasses one billion in number, "making it the fastest growing, and most unprecedented, social class on earth."<sup>12</sup>

Study of the dispossessed, then, must begin with an understanding that working-class life is not defined by either the wage or wagelessness, but is bounded by both. Proletarianization, to be sure, has conventionally been studied by labour historians fixated on waged employment, and the modern field of working-class history has been highly influenced, indeed structured, by discussions that have tended to reify the waged dimension of labouring lives. The animating notions of the "labour process" literature that grew out of Harry Braverman's influential study of the degradation of work in the 20th century

12. John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney, and R. Jamil Jonna, "The Global Reserve Army of Labor and the New Imperialism," *Monthly Review*, 63 (November 2011), <<http://monthlyreview.org>>, accessed 21 November 2011; Marx, *Capital*, I, 644–645; Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London and New York 2006), 178.



could be cited as but one example of many equivalent developments.<sup>13</sup> There is no need to cast the insights of past scholarships aside in a quest for new and singular models of what constitutes the essence of proletarianization. There is a little of this at work in the analytics of nomenclature structuring recent scholarly trends, as our critical welcoming of the contribution of Denning suggests. But we offer a slightly different orientation. Against the refusals of what are presented as orthodox Marxism, which we suggest contain as much easy caricature as critical dissection, we offer a more open-ended understanding of how to approach the diversities of proletarianization and, in particular, the study of the wageless. If Denning finds terms like the reserve army of labour and the lumpenproletariat inadequate, just as the declaration of lack that is present in more mainstream designations of the *unemployed* inevitably forces consideration in directions of the determinative influence of the wage relation, we find in all of these categories something of value. For along the continuum of proletarianization encompassing waged work and wagelessness, free labour and outlawed outcast, lie many way stations in which the dispossessed, as an historical collectivity, find that they must pause, in varying ways at different times, to sustain and reproduce themselves, to adapt and to resist. This, as much as the arrival of the factory system, is the stuff of class formation. The dispossessed, to adopt a phrase from E.P. Thompson, constituted a proletarianized stratum “present at its own making.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Moments in an Obscure History of Crisis and the Dispossessed: Toronto, 1830–1925**

The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. ... For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

Walter Benjamin,  
“Theses on the Philosophy of History,” (1940)

#### *Origins of the House of Industry*

In Canada, proletarianization as an act of dispossession reaches into an early 19th century past. This historical context is not easily assimilated to the formalized labour markets, state initiatives, and class mobilizations of later periods. The history of this original accumulation of capitalist dispossession is untidy as it blurs lines of distinction that we have come to see as natural and inevitable: urban/rural; waged employment/public charity; paternalism/freedom; petition/conflict. Those experiencing dispossession did so in varied

13. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1974).

14. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York 1963).

ways that yielded nothing approximating a collective, working-class solidarity. As native-born landed producers, immigrant newcomers,<sup>15</sup> or British mechanics, their separation from the land, their subordination to contractors and militias ruthless in enforcing the roughest of labouring environments on the early public works of canal and railroad construction, or their sense of artisan, apprenticed skills being debased, conditioned no community of common class interests. Nonetheless, these distinct streams of proletarianization were tributaries destined to feed a common process, one in which dependency on the wage was always rendered precarious by the harsh and recurring realities of wagelessness.

On the Upper Canadian frontier, in which Old Toronto, or Muddy York, was a metropolitan outpost destined for post-Confederation provincial dominance, the revolution in social relations that would follow in the wake of capitalist industrialization explored by Gregory S. Kealey may well seem obscure.<sup>16</sup> Toronto in 1834 had a population of a mere 9,000. Its productive apparatus, dominated by the often paternalistic master-journeymen reciprocities of the artisan manufactory and the ostensible *noblesse oblige* of the Tory oligarchy, hardly crystallized unambiguous class antagonisms. Yet as Albert Shrauwers has recently shown, the 1830s was a turning point in Toronto's evolution. The bitter fruits of dispossession were increasingly visible in the transition from a landed order in which the authority of the gentlemanly elite held sway to a more socially revolutionized and commodified market economy, in which the agricultural, commercial, financial, and industrial components of Toronto's economy were all subordinated to capitalist disciplines.<sup>17</sup>

Although a crisis on the land did not, in general, precipitate mass rural migration to the towns or to less concentrated farming settlements in the west until the 1840s and 1850s, Upper Canadian landed relations were anything but tranquil.<sup>18</sup> The gentlemanly capitalists that Shauwers identifies with the traditional Family Compact held much of the best land, either working it through

15. For a recent discussion of managing the migrants that accents the role of the developing layers of the state over the course of the 19th century see Lisa Chilton, "Managing Migrants: Toronto, 1820–1880," *Canadian Historical Review*, 92 (June 2011), 231–262.

16. Industrial-capitalist Toronto in the late 19th-century is the subject of Kealey's pioneering account of workers confronting the disciplines of the new order: Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1860–1892* (Toronto 1980).

17. Albert Shauwers, "The Gentlemanly Order & the Politics of Production in the Transition to Capitalism in Upper Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 65 (Spring 2010), 9–46.

18. See David Gagan, "Land, Population, and Social Change: The 'Critical Years' in Rural Canada West," *Canadian Historical Review*, 59 (1978), 293–318; Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto 1981); J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway* (Montreal and Kingston 2000); and for the experience of workers on the land, Terry Crowley, "Rural Labour," in Paul Craven, ed., *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 17–41.

hired hands or holding it in speculation, and the church and state with which this elite was intimately connected each took one-seventh of the province's acreage. Free land grants, originally designed to attract settlers, were turned back in 1826, replaced by sale through public auctions that were exploited by large land companies, unscrupulous colonizing agents, and nascent banking institutions, all of which were, again, never far removed from the influence and the interests of powerful circles of Compact alignments. Assisted emigration efforts were curtailed, and prospective landowners now had to pay for their passages and purchase their lots on credit. As one contemporary wrote in 1835, "The system of selling land on credit, and contracting debt at stores, hath proved ruinous of later years to settlers without capital, who have no other means of extricating themselves than selling their properties." Even large families could not insure their prosperity, and prior to 1840 only 2 to 5 per cent of all rural producers in Upper Canada had over 100 acres in cultivation. A distinct minority, to be sure, could afford to hire labour for the initial land clearance, but demand for such proletarians exceeded supply. Lord Goderich, the colonial secretary, explained in 1831 the dilemma faced by patrician, polite society: "Without some division of labour, without a class of persons willing to work for wages, how can society be prevented from falling into a state of almost primitive rudeness, and how are the comforts and refinements of civilized life to be procured?"<sup>19</sup> Consolidating capitalism faced a decisive imperative: dispossession or ruin. It drove relentlessly in the direction of the former.

By the mid-1830s, land policy, speculative endeavours and hoarding, and the penetration of the market and its solvent of social differentiation in town and country were lending considerable force to Goderich's insistence that "there should be in every society a class of labourers as well as a class of Capitalists or Landowners." This presaged Edward Gibbon Wakefield's later enunciation, in 1833, of a theory of "systematic colonization," which Marx integrated

19. Gary Teeple, "Land, Labour and Capital in Pre-Confederation Canada," in Teeple, ed., *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada* (Toronto 1972), 43–55; Graeme Wynn, "Notes on Society and Environment in Old Ontario," *Journal of Social History*, 13 (Fall 1979), 51–52; Peter A. Russell, "Upper Canada: a Poor Man's Country? Some Statistical Evidence," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Volume 3 (Gananoque, Ontario 1982), 138–144; Patrick Shirreff, *A Tour Through North America: Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and the United States, as Adapted for Agricultural Emigration* (Edinburgh 1835), 363–365, quoted in Schrauwers, "Gentlemanly Order," 27, 29–30; Schrauwers, "Money Bound You – Money Shall Loose You': Micro-Credit, Social Capital, and the Meaning of Money in Upper Canada," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 53 (2011), 1–30; John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics in the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Kingston and Montreal 2001), esp. 266–272; Leo A. Johnson, "Land Policy, Population Growth, and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793–1851," *Ontario History*, 63 (March 1971), 41–60; with Goderich quoted in Leo A. Johnson, *History of the Country of Ontario, 1615–1875* (Whitby, Ontario 1973), 66.

into his discussion of capitalist primitive accumulation.<sup>20</sup> In the rural areas of the Home District, within which Toronto was located, some 10,172 out of 14,994 labouring-age males (68 per cent) were landless by mid-century, and wage rates had plummeted across the Canadian colonial landscape.<sup>21</sup> With some 230,000 Irish immigrants crashing the Ontario-Quebec labour market in their flight from Old World famine in the later 1840s, the dispossession of this transatlantic proletarian contingent translated into a rural reserve army of labour, some of which inevitably found its way to Ontario's cities.<sup>22</sup>

Toronto inevitably confronted the fallout from this process of dispossession. Over the course of the winter of 1836–1837 an economic crisis exacerbated the growing problem: commerce stagnated; houses stood empty for want of rent; the Bank of Upper Canada pressured its debtors to settle accounts, including an ironworks that was forced to close, its 80 employees thrown out of work; a Mechanics' Association was formed to lobby for the protection of the interests of tradesmen; and printers and tailors struck their masters. William Lyon Mackenzie, a newspaper editor and proprietor whose notoriety as a relentless critic of the aristocratic governing Tories and outspoken leader of the Reform element was well known, railed that his typographers should spend their evenings "studying the true principles of economy which govern the rule of wages." Meanwhile, the flood of pauper emigrants passing through Toronto, estimated in the 1830s to be in the tens of thousands annually, continued, with fears of recent cholera epidemics associated with the immigrant ships fresh in the minds of many.<sup>23</sup> A wageless, diseased population, increasingly visible

20. Johnson, *County of Ontario*, 68; Marx, *Capital*, I, 766–773.

21. Johnson, "Land Policy," 57–59.

22. Bryan D. Palmer, "Social Formation and Class Formation in North America, 1800–1900," in Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History*, 247; Donald H. Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish?" in Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Volume III, 111, 204–356; H.C. Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650–1860* (Toronto 1981), 96–129, esp. 109; Stephen A. Speisman, "Munificent Parsons and Municipal Parsimony: Voluntary vs. Public Poor Relief in Nineteenth-Century Toronto," *Ontario History*, 65 (March 1973), 37; Kenneth Duncan, "Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West," in Michiel Horn and Ronald Sabourin, eds., *Studies in Canadian Social History* (Toronto 1974), 140–163; Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1940s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 9–40; John C. Weaver, "Crime, Public Order, and Repression: The Gore District in Upheaval, 1832–1851," *Ontario History*, 78 (September 1986), 186; William Thomas Matthews, "By and For the Large Propertied Interests: The Dynamics of Local Government in Six Upper Canadian Towns During the Era of Commercial Capitalism, 1832–1860," PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 1985, 41–45.

23. Albert Schrauwers, *'Union is Strength': W.L. Mackenzie, the Children of Peace, and the Emergence of Joint Stock Democracy in Upper Canada* (Toronto 2009), 189; Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812–1902* (Toronto 1982), 20; F.H. Armstrong, "The Reformer as Capitalist: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Printers' Strike of 1836," *Ontario History*, 59 (September 1967), 187–196; Paul Romney, "On the Eve of the Rebellion: Nationality, Religion and Class in the Toronto Election of 1836," in David Keane and Colin Read, eds., *Old Ontario:*

on city streets and challenging its ruling order's sense of public propriety and paternal responsibility necessitated a response. This was especially the case if firebrands like William Lyon Mackenzie were not to make ideological capital out of their constant harangues that social development and harmonious relations were threatened by a pernicious oligarchy, which was daily fomenting a "universal agitation." Mackenzie's obnoxious claims that "privilege and equal rights" and "law sanctioned, law fenced in privilege" were at loggerheads in Upper Canada in 1837, forcing a terrible contest, were but one reflection of dispossession's distressing consequences.<sup>24</sup>

At the centre of this history of dispossession was the 1830s creation of a set of carceral institutions which, as Albert Schrauwers has argued, criminalized the poor.<sup>25</sup> Pivotal in this development, which extended beyond the Kingston Penitentiary and local and debtors' gaols, was Toronto's House of Industry. As conflicting historiographic interpretations of the meaning of the House of Industry suggest, it was, like almost everything in the city in 1837, contested terrain, pitting Tories against Reformers. The clash of oppositional forces around the establishment of the Toronto House of Industry played out in Radical Reformers such as Mackenzie and James Lesslie opposing the establishment of what they perceived to be an arm of the old-style English Poor Law discipline, long rejected in Upper Canada,<sup>26</sup> at the same time that they embraced the need to extend relief of the poor. The practice of the Toronto House of Industry ironically ended up bringing some reformers and some members of the Family Compact together, bound as they were as men of property to a broad agency of class discipline. Impaled on the horns of class formation's incomplete development in 1836–1837, both the clash of views around the House of Industry and the fate of the insurrectionary impulse of the Rebellion itself reflected a politics that was compromised and incompletely differentiated into oppositional interests. As Stanley Ryerson long ago

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*Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless* (Toronto and Oxford 1990), 205–206; Geoffrey Bilson, *A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto 1980), 63. Discussion of the economic crisis of 1836–1837 appears in Colin Read and Ronald J. Stagg, eds., *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto and Ottawa 1985), xxix–xxx, with a number of relevant documents following. Note as well Donald G. Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (Toronto 1937), 288–320.

24. W.L. Mackenzie, *The Constitution*, 26 July 1837, quoted in Schrauwers, "Gentlemanly Order," 10.

25. See Albert Schrauwers, 'Union is Strength', especially 56–65, and for a useful more general statement, Michael B. Katz, "The Origins of the Institutional State," *Marxist Perspectives*, 4 (Winter 1978), 6–23. Note as well, John C. Weaver, *Crimes, Constables, and Courts: Order and Transgression in a Canadian City, 1816–1870* (Montreal and Kingston 1995).

26. See Russell C. Smandych, "William Osgoode, John Graves Simcoe, and the Exclusion of the English Poor Law from Upper Canada," in Louis A. Knafla and Susan W.S. Binnie, eds., *Law, Society, and the State: Essays in Modern Legal History* (Toronto 1995), 99–129.

noted, the proletariat, waged *and* wageless, was "not yet in a position to act in [its] own name or give independent leadership to the struggle."<sup>27</sup>

Something less punitive than was perhaps envisioned by crusading former English Poor Law Commissioner and recently-ensconced Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, Sir Francis Bond Head, the Toronto House of Industry was nonetheless a decisive articulation that new initiatives had to be undertaken to address the poverty, disease, and wagelessness that engulfed Toronto.<sup>28</sup> The Bond Head-endorsed 1837 statute, authorizing Houses of Industry to be erected across Upper Canada, produced little immediately. No such establishments, which at first were to be funded entirely by voluntary subscriptions, were set up outside of Toronto until the late 1840s. Nonetheless, the criminalization and institutionalization of the wageless reflected both the growing unease among the patrician and propertied, as well as their panicked recourse to discipline the unruly:

That the persons who shall be liable to be sent into, employed and governed in the said House, to be erected in pursuance of this Act, are all Poor and Indigent Persons, who are incapable of supporting themselves; all persons able of body to work and without any means of maintaining themselves, who refuse or neglect so to do; all persons living a lewd dissolute vagrant life, or exercising no ordinary calling, or lawful business, sufficient to gain or procure an honest living; all such as spend their time and property in Public Houses, to the neglect of lawful calling....

... That all and every person committed to such House, if fit and able, shall be kept diligently employed in labour, during his or her continuance there; and in case the person so committed or continued shall be idle and not perform such reasonable task or labour as shall be assigned, or shall be stubborn, disobedient or disorderly, he, she or they, shall be punished according to the Rules and Regulations made or be made, for ruling, governing and punishing persons there committed.<sup>29</sup>

"The chief objects," of Toronto's House of Industry, wrote one commentator supporting its creation in 1836, were "the total abolition of street begging, the putting down of wandering vagrants, and securing an asylum at the least

27. See Romney, "On the Eve of the Rebellion," 192–216; Bryan D. Palmer, "Popular Radicalism and the Theatrics of Rebellion: The Hybrid Discourse of Dissent in Upper Canada," in Nancy Christie, ed., *Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America* (Kingston and Montreal 2008), 403–439; Stanley B. Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Confederation and the Roots of Conflict in the Canadas, 1815–1873* (Toronto 1968), 132.

28. Contrast Rainer Baehre, "Paupers and Poor Relief in Upper Canada," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1981), 57–80 and Russell Smadych, "Rethinking 'The Master Principle of Administering Relief' in Upper Canada: A Response to Allan Irving," *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 27 (1991), 81–86.

29. *The Statutes of the Province of Upper Canada* (Toronto 1837), 80–82, reprinted in S.D. Clark, *The Social Development of Canada: An Introductory Study with Select Documents* (Toronto 1942), 232–233.



possible expence for the industrious and distressed poor.”<sup>30</sup> Toronto’s Poor House, as it was colloquially known, fittingly took over an old, abandoned building that had previously served as York’s Court House. At first the House was used primarily by widows, deserted women, and their children, and few receiving so-called indoor relief as inmates were actually male. Outdoor relief, or the dispensing of food and fuel to needy families, constituted most of the House of Industry’s work in providing for the poor. The first annual report of the House of Industry indicated that 46 persons received indoor relief, while the corresponding figure for recipients of outdoor relief was 857. In its earliest years two-thirds of those seeking aid from the new institution were Irish, demonstrating how poverty, criminalization, and ethnicity congealed.<sup>31</sup>

In 1848 the House of Industry acquired a substantial new building. By the early 1850s, the refuge began taking in small numbers of homeless men, on average three a night, providing “an asylum to the indigent poor.” According to antiquarian histories, “many a homeless waif” received “a night’s lodging, with supper and breakfast, to invigorate him for the coming day’s search for work,” which was to be undertaken after male “lodgers” chopped some wood for the institution. These innovations and expanded assistance were implemented as temporary expedients, judged necessary as “the surest means of doing away with street begging.” It was understood that the “casual homeless” would have one night of shelter and then be on their way. From 1837 to 1854, Toronto’s refuge accommodated 2620 indigents, but its outdoor relief remained especially important.<sup>32</sup> As Richard B. Splane suggested decades ago, the Toronto House was, in its beginnings both a house of refuge and a house of correction, a hybrid that could appeal to conservatives and liberals alike.<sup>33</sup>

James Buchanan’s *Project for the Formation of a Depot in Upper Canada with a View to Relieve the Whole Pauper Population of England* (1834) envisioned a Foucauldian institution of inspection, monitoring, and training in religion, work discipline, and, for children, the rudiments of an education. This kind of response might be associated with high Toryism, congruent with its author’s claimed “hatred of Democracy,” but Buchanan had kinship connections with the leading family of moderate Reform, the Baldwins. Indeed,

30. Quoted in Baehre, “Paupers and Poor Relief,” 74.

31. These early figures and the House of Industry’s First Annual Report are cited in *Sixtieth Annual Report of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1896–1897*, 5–6. See also Duncan, “Irish Famine Immigration and the Social Structure of Canada West”; and Spiesman, “Munificent Parsons,” 37.

32. Henry Scadding, *Toronto of Old*, ed., F.H. Armstrong (Toronto 1966), 214; *History of Toronto and the Country of York Ontario...* (Toronto 1885), Volume I, 325; Spiesman, “Munificent Parsons,” 38–39; *Report of the Trustees of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1852*, 8.

33. Richard B. Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario, 1791–1893: A Study of Public Welfare Administration* (Toronto 1965), 71; J.M.S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto 1984), 100.



Dr. William Baldwin was to take up management of the Toronto House of Industry when it was established in March 1837. Thus the House of Industry proved a meeting ground of Tory and Reform on the eve of the Rebellion of 1837, foreshadowing the extent to which the political antagonists of this era might well share a common unease as the threatening portents of the dispossessed were increasingly obvious.<sup>34</sup> Toronto's wageless would exist in the shadow of the House of Industry for decades.

*In the Era of Confederation: State Formation and the Poor*

The Reform insurrection of 1837, however anti-climactic, dealt a series of death-blows to the *ancien regime*. In the subsequent era of state formation, culminating in Confederation in 1867, new senses of public responsibility and political culture consolidated in the 1840s.<sup>35</sup> Mechanics and tradesmen petitioned legislatures in ways that would have been unimaginable in decades past, while local government was fundamentally reconfigured.<sup>36</sup> Toronto's 1846 Act of Incorporation was amended, widening the possible reach of control and coercion that could be deployed against the wageless by providing for the establishment of an industrial farm to complement the already existing House of Industry, which drew, from 1839 onwards, not only on private donations but on annual provincial grants. Over the course of the 1850s a spate of municipal legislation addressed the growing need to attend to the destitute and the workless; by 1866 the Municipal Institutions Act mandated that all townships in the province of Ontario with a population of over 20,000 provision houses of industry or refuge. Between 1840–1860, moreover, Toronto's House of Industry competed with eight other local private charitable institutions receiving government grants for the relief of the poor.<sup>37</sup> One crucial piece of legislation that followed on the heels of Confederation was the 1867 Prison and Asylum Inspection Act. It defined provincial responsibilities for social welfare and, of course, deepened the process whereby criminalization,

34. James Buchanan, *Project for the Formation of A Depot in Upper Canada with a View to Relieve the Whole Pauper Population of England* (New York 1834), quoted in Baehre, "Pauper and Poor Relief," 70, and for documents relating to Buchanan, Charles R. Sanderson, ed., *The Arthur Papers Being the Papers Mainly Confidential, Private, and Demi-Official ...* (Toronto 1943), Volume 1, 16–17, 229–231; Schrauwers, 'Union is Strength', 192.

35. An important older statement is Ryerson, *Unequal Union* while newer analytic sensibilities and perspectives emerge in many of the essays in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto 1992).

36. See Jeffrey McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Toronto 2000); Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800–1850* (Montreal and Kingston 2000).

37. J.H. Aitchison, "The Development of Local Government in Upper Canada," Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1953, esp. 656–657; Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, 40, 72–79; Matthews, "By and For the Large Propertied Interests," esp. 306–378, which deals with the consequences of the 1857 commercial collapse.

incarceration, and relief of the indigent were not just associated as part of a common response to proletarianization, but were now bureaucratically congealed in a statute that assigned responsibility for these spheres of “correctional intervention” to a single inspector, John Woodward Langmuir.<sup>38</sup>

Small wonder that the oscillating reciprocities of waged and wageless life instilled in those undergoing proletarianization a recurrent sense of grievance. A carpenter questioned the state of affairs in 1852: “He asks that it be fair, that for five months in the year able and willing mechanics, are compelled to accept the alternative of walking the streets or working for wages which do not afford ample remuneration for the labour performed.” Finally, “after submitting to all this, with apparent resignation – after enriching their employers by the sweat of their brow, on terms which barely keep the thread of life from snapping – they are told with barefaced effrontery that they were employed in charity.” Seasonal labour markets, with their harsh material ritual of winter’s idleness and paternalistic alms, were by mid-century being challenged by the dispossessed.<sup>39</sup>

Economic crisis was the necessity that proved the mother of this new inventive stage in the developing responses to wagelessness, emanating not only from capital and the state, but from the proletarianized as well. The massive social dislocation occasioned by the arrival of tens of thousands of ill and impoverished famine Irish immigrants in the post-1847 years was one part of this process, helping to swell Toronto’s population to 45,000 by 1860–1861. At that point Toronto contained more people who were by birth Irish than those who were born in England, and the 12,441 Irish-born trailed only the 19,202 Canadian-born, many of whom likely had Irish parentage.<sup>40</sup> So, too, with the emergence of the railroad and the advancing stages of industrial-capitalist production in urban centres was class differentiation, organization, and conflict becoming more visible. The number of strikes in Canada soared in the 1850s, when 73 such work stoppages represented fully 55 per cent of all labour-capital conflicts taking place in the entire 1815–1859 period. No other

38. Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, 43–51. There is much on Langmuir in Edward McCoy, “The Rise of the Modern Canadian Penitentiary, 1835–1900,” PhD thesis, Frost Centre for Canadian and Indigenous Studies, Trent University, 2011. Chilton, “Managing Migrants,” 252–256 has useful information on emigration agents and subsidizing the transportation costs of immigrants making their way to Toronto in these years.

39. The carpenter is quoted in Judith Fingard, “The Winter’s Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-Industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815–1860,” *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1974), 74–75, but the entire article is now a classic statement on poverty, early Canadian unemployment, and charitable relief of the poor. In the period that Fingard addresses nascent capitalist developments jostled uneasily with older social and productive relations rooted in pre-capitalist economic formations. In some ways the seasonality of winter and the employment crises that came with its onslaught would be exacerbated by intensified capitalist crises in the latter half of the 19th century.

40. Peter G. Goheen, *Victorian Toronto: 1850–1900* (Chicago 1970), 75–76.

decade saw more than 30 strikes.<sup>41</sup> For the workless, however, it was the commercial collapse of 1857 that registered discontent most decisively.

The cruel impact of the economic downturn occasioned perhaps the first mass protests of the obviously organized unemployed in the Canadian colonies. Upwards of 3,000 Quebec City out-of-work labourers, many of them shipwrights and other workers employed in the building of vessels, convened St. Roch protest meetings, marched through the streets of Lower Town, and demanded work, not alms. Recognizing that their wageless plight was "the effect of 'the crisis' upon the shipbuilding interest," the demonstrations of the workless, however moderate and often contradictory (rejecting alms they could also plead for bread and charitable relief from sources of government or private citizens), generated a mixed response on the part of the powerful. Newspapers could side with the demands of the workless, urging the colonial government to provide significant relief for the labouring poor, but as protests continued reporting took on a more critical tone, with headlines such as "More Mob Demonstrations."<sup>42</sup>

The crash of 1857 had a devastating effect on Toronto. Nineteenth-century commentators recorded the extent of the crisis, seizing the opportunity to moralize, conveying well the extent to which wagelessness was now associated with incorrigibility and criminality: "There was much suffering and want among the labouring classes, with a corresponding amount of drunkenness, vice, and crime." Police records indicate that in 1857 one in nine Toronto residents faced arrest, finding themselves before the police magistrate. This state of affairs necessarily heightened class tensions. Jesse Edgar Middleton's 1923 multi-volume official history of Toronto declared cryptically, "Much disorder was caused by railway construction laborers between 1852 and 1860." Newspapers from the local Toronto *Colonist* to the distant New York *Herald* noted the profusion of beggars: "They dodge you round corners, they follow you into shops, they are found at the church steps, they are at the door of the

41. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*, 3–34, suggests the importance of the 1840s and 1850s as pivotal decades in the transition to industrial capitalism. On the Irish the views of Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada* and Akenson, "Ontario: Whatever Happened to the Irish" provide perspectives that probably need to be blended into one another rather than counterpoised polemically. For class struggle in this period an older, unpublished work still repays examination: Paul C. Appleton, "The Sunshine and the Shade: Labour Activism in Central Canada, 1850–1860," MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1974. For an introduction to the nature and dimensions of working-class activity see Bryan D. Palmer, "Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada, 1820–1890," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 61–84. Inequality and class differentiation is addressed substantively in Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1975).

42. J.I. Cooper, "The Quebec Ship Labourers' Benevolent Society," *Canadian Historical Review*, 30 (December 1949), 338–339; Fingard, "Winter's Tale," 74–75, 89; Peter A. Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and Their Families in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto 1998), 23–24.

theatre, they infest the entrance to every bank, they crouch in the lobby of the post office, they assail you in every street, knock at your private residence, walk into your place of business ... ." Asserting that "begging has assumed the dignity of a craft," the *Colonist* complained that, "Whole families sally forth, and have their appointed rounds; children are taught to dissemble, to tell a lying tale of misery and woe, and to beg or steal as occasion offers." Correspondents bemoaned that Toronto's "streets swarmed with mendicants" and that it was impossible to go into public thoroughfares without annoyance from them.<sup>43</sup>

Over the course of the 1850s the House of Industry reported that the number of people seeking relief doubled, and the municipality upped its grant to the refuge by 100 per cent. Immigration agents attended to the newly arrived, providing bread, temporary shelter, passage money, and information relevant to settlement and employment. A House of Providence soon outstripped the Toronto House of Industry in terms of those it sheltered, with the annual collective days stay of the poor in the former totalling 45,722 compared to 27,863 for the latter in 1872. An Orphan's Home, Boys and Girls Homes, and a Female Aid Society supplemented the charitable role of the House of Industry by the 1860s. But Toronto's Poor House still received the largest provincial grant of any such institution in Ontario, its annual subsidy of \$2900 amounting to 10.5 cents for each inmate's daily stay. It also expanded its operations in the 1850s, opening a soup kitchen. With small towns and villages in Toronto's hinterland urging their poor to seek relief at the House of Industry, it served an increasingly mobile contingent of the dispossessed, some of whom came, not only from across Ontario, but also from Europe and the United States. Bishop Strachan suggested, in 1857, that Toronto, with its "central position has become a sort of reservoir, and a place of refuge to the indigent from all parts of the Province."

There was growing discontent among the small and concentrated bureaucratized, managerial officialdom that monitored the funding and activities of houses of industry and providence. Langmuir, for instance, disapproved of Toronto's refuge even being called a "House of Industry." No industry, he claimed, took place within its walls, the suggestion being that the poor should indeed be made to labour for their bed and breakfast. Such institutions were "Poor-houses and nothing but that." Langmuir also suggested that absolute reliance on provincial funding was misplaced, since he believed it was well established that "every Municipality shall take care of its own poor." He further regretted that a generalized permissiveness undermined the good an institutionalized response to poverty and wagelessness might accomplish,

43. Rev. Henry Scadding and John Charles Dent, *Toronto: Past and Present: Historical and Descriptive: A Memorial Volume for the Semi-Centennial of 1884* (Toronto 1884), 212–213; Strachan to Hutcheson, Toronto City Council Papers, quoted in D.C. Masters, *The Rise of Toronto: 1850–1890* (Toronto 1947), 80; Jesse Edgar Middleton, *The Municipality of Toronto: A History* (Toronto and New York 1923), 264.

bemoaning the lack of more compulsory measures. Largely responsible for the Ontario Charity Aid Act of 1874, Langmuir elaborated a political economy of poor relief rooted in the belief that, "unless we desire to see local Poor Houses *mainly* supported by Government but *entirely* controlled by municipalities or private boards, the principle that further Government aid to such establishments should depend upon the amount they obtain from the general public, cannot be yielded."<sup>44</sup>

In the aftermath of the destabilizing consequences of the 1840s and 1850s, especially the crisis unleashed with the commercial crash of 1857, state formation in Canada culminated in what Langmuir would later describe as "one of the most complete charitable and correctional systems on the continent." This was part and parcel of what Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern have called "the social organization of early industrial capitalism."<sup>45</sup> The long recessionary downturn of 1873–1896, punctuated by acute crises in the 1870s and 1890s, however, taxed this system. As the wageless proliferated, those afflicted by it organized and resisted, their consciousness and activism challenging both the increasingly oppressive conditions imposed upon them by economic depression and the pressures towards compulsion that were inevitably at work in a relief order that could not accommodate the expanding numbers of indigent families and out-of-work labourers.

#### *The Underside of the Great Upheaval, 1873–1896*

The 1873–1896 years witnessed the culmination of Toronto's 19th-century industrial-capitalist revolution. In tandem, it experienced the unmistakable growth of workers' organizations, political mobilizations, and protests, including strikes, fully 122 of a national total of 425 fought over the course

44. The above paragraphs rely on *Report of the Trustees of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1852*, 8; *Report of the Trustees of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1854*, 9; Spiesman, "Munificent Parsons," 39–49, as well as Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, 47–51, 79–84, which draws on, among other sources, Langmuir's annual reports in Ontario's *Sessional Papers*. See as well Careless, *Toronto to 1918*, 100; C. Pelham Mulvany, *Toronto Past and Present until 1882* (Toronto 1884), 63–69.

45. Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1881), Number 8, 15, quoted in Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, 49; Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge 1975). A recent study documenting the extent to which the old connections of master and man remained embedded in craft production understates the extent to which the long and complex process of proletarianization had indeed affected the social relations of production and the social organization of early industrial capitalism. See Robert Kristofferson, *Craft Capitalism: Craftworkers and Early Industrialization in Hamilton, Ontario, 1840–1872* (Toronto 2007). Contrast it with the perspectives outlined in Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1975) and the later study of Katz, Doucet, and Stern, as well as Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Kingston and Montreal 1979), especially the discussion of the producer ideology, 97–123.

of the 1880s being waged in Toronto. Labour newspapers like the *Ontario Workman* and the *Palladium of Labor* anchored themselves in Toronto, just as the Nine-Hour League and the Canadian Labour Union in the 1870s and the Knights of Labor and the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada played significant roles in the now bustling manufacturing metropolis, which boasted a population approaching 200,000 by the end of the 19th century. This was the unmistakable expression of a working-class presence that, however much it was accommodated to the logic of capitalist class relations and the disciplines of the wage, did indeed challenge employers and their often servile state.<sup>46</sup>

Since waged life was never entirely separable from wageless life, the articulation of proletarian interests through organizations of labour, demands for improved conditions in workplaces, and the withdrawal of waged services, it follows that further expressions of working-class protest would also surface, not at the point of production, but against the coercions of non-production. In this latter struggle, the entrenched ideologies of British Poor Law discourse figured forcefully. The “undeserving poor” were to be subject to the laws of “less eligibility,” stipulating that relief would only be made available to those among the wageless who *would* work for their aid, which could only be dispensed in ways that made it even less attractive than what could be secured by the worst-paid unskilled labour. Toronto’s *Globe* made all of this abundantly clear in an 1877 manifesto-like declaration on the wageless: “we do not advocate a system which could leave them to starve, but we do say that if they are ever to be taught economical and saving habits, they must understand that the public have no idea of making them entirely comfortable in the midst of their improvidence and dissipation. If they wish to secure that they must work for it and save and plan. Such comfort is not to be had by loafing around the tavern door, or fleeing to charity at every pinch.” Three years earlier, the 1873 depression as its backdrop, the same newspaper denounced any “poor law as a legislative machine for the manufacture of pauperism. It is true mercy to say that it would be better that a few individuals should die of starvation than a pauper class should be raised up with thousands devoted to crime and the victims of misery.”<sup>47</sup>

Over the course of the long downturn of the late 19th century, evidence of the precariousness of working-class life was unambiguous. The ideological assault on the wageless went into overdrive. A floating mass of workless males generated intensified panic as the depression of 1873 deepened into

46. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*; Palmer, “Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada,” 73; Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (Cambridge and New York 1982).

47. *Globe*, 26 January 1877, as cited in Michael Cross, ed., *The Workingman in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto 1974), 196 and in James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941* (Toronto 1983), 7; *Globe*, 27 February 1874, as cited in Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, 16.



1877–1878. Masses of migrant labourers, ostensibly travelling to secure illusive waged employment, became the scourge of small towns and large cities alike. Welcomed with the lock-up and public derision in the press, tramps were criminalized and vilified, socially constructed as thieves and denigrated as “pests,” “voracious monsters,” “outrageously impertinent,” an “irrepressible stampede” deserving of “a well-aimed dose of buckshot rubbed in well with salt-petre” and other forms of vigilante, lynch law. In Lindsay, Ontario, roughly 90 miles from Toronto and studied by Richard Anderson, the local newspaper (the *Canadian Post*) carried over 100 news items relating to tramps in the 1874–1878 years. Their tone was almost universally derogatory, and tramps were in general depicted as an outcast stratum rarely interested in finding employment, poor because they were “work-shy and degenerate.” Many, riding the rails, were en route to Toronto, where police stations, in 1877 and 1878, reported sheltering over 1200 “waifs” annually.<sup>48</sup>

If the 1880s saw the economy struggle out of its 1870s doldrums, the recovery was anything but robust, and the migratory wageless continued to unsettle respectable society, as established in a study by James Pitsula. Toronto’s newspapers competed against one another, pushing the denunciations of the “loafing aristocracy” to new extremes, calling for the expulsion of tramps from the city, judicious use of the lash against those for whom work was “aversion,” and vigilant police monitoring of peripatetic vagrants given to “murders, burglaries, incendiaries, and highway robberies.” A little “hard labour,” suggested the *Globe*, would do this “dissipated” and “shiftless” element good, since the Poor House had become increasingly lax in enforcing earlier expectations that those seeking accommodations for the night would chop wood for their food and lodging. Toronto’s Associated Charities pressed new forms of “labour tests” in 1881–1885 as a prerequisite for relief, requiring tramps to break stone. Many left the yard rather than undergo the rigours of the “labour test.” At the House of Industry, the Associated Charities crusade to force the refuge to adopt similar unwaged work requirements proved futile,

48. Richard Anderson, “‘The Irrepressible Stampede’: Tramps in Ontario, 1870–1880,” *Ontario History*, 84 (March 1992), 33–56. This period saw repeated concern expressed by trustees of the House of Industry that other Ontario municipalities were dumping their poor on Toronto, especially in the depths of winter. See *Annual Report of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1877*, 3; *Annual Report of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1879*, 6. The late 19th-century war on the tramp can be informed by a range of commentary, including Marx’s discussion of “The Nomad Population,” in *Capital*, I, 663–667; Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880–1930* (Urbana and Chicago 2003); Jim Phillips, “Poverty, Unemployment, and the Administration of the Criminal Law: Vagrancy Laws in Halifax, 1864–1890,” in Philip Girard and Jim Phillips, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law: Nova Scotia*, Volume 3 (Toronto 1990), 128–162; David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century* (New York and Cambridge 1993), 87–88; and Edmund Kelly, *The Elimination of the Tramp By the Introduction into America of the Labour Colony System Already Proved Effective in Holland, Belgium and Switzerland, with the Modifications Thereof Necessary to Adapt This System to American Conditions* (New York 1908).



even though the House had in the past required manual work from all of those who availed themselves of indoor relief. Instead the refuge concentrated on establishing an expanded wayfarer's lodge in 1884–1885, where large numbers of indigent men could be put up for the night in a casual ward, their bodies soaked in a hot bath, their heads doused in vermin-killing liquid solution, and their clothes fumigated, “cleansed and classified” in the vernacular of poor relief officialdom. Prior to this renovation, the cramped House of Industry had drawn complaints of the lodging's “sickening smell.” Residents of the overcrowded Poor House “apartments” had been described as “thickly packed as herrings in a barrel,” the atmosphere likened to “a carload of hogs in transit.”<sup>49</sup>

The growing number of habitual tramps furnished with temporary board and lodging by the House of Industry in the mid-1880s necessitated yet another adoption of a modified “labour test,” if only to deter the ostensibly shiftless and physically weak from staying in the expanded casual ward too long. Making inmates saw a quarter-cord of wood, a job that took the able-bodied and reasonably dexterous approximately three hours before they were allowed to lunch on a watery bowl of soup and a hunk of bread (managers insisted that it was not their responsibility to provide the workless with “sumptuous fare”), had its effect. Those checking into the wayfarer's lodge declined from totals of 730 in 1886 to 548 in 1889. The worsening economic climate of the depressed 1890s saw an expanded need for relief, however, and the casual ward was opened for the summer as well as winter months. The numbers of casuals staying at the House thus soared, climbing to highs of 1700 in 1891 and 1500 in 1895 and 1897, rarely falling below 1200. The average contingent sleeping at the House per night never dipped below 60 between 1890 and 1897, when a high of 100 was reached (a comparable figure for the 1880–1885 years had been roughly 26). In 1891, 832 casuals stayed in the wayfarer's lodge of Toronto's House of Industry for two or three nights, while 415 lodged in the Poor House for more than three days; 24 hard-core recidivists spent more than 100 nights in the refuge.<sup>50</sup>

The economies of this crisis of wagelessness drove the ideology and practice of poor relief in more disciplinary directions. Reverend Arthur H. Baldwin, rector of Toronto's All Saints Church and one of the House of Industry's most outspoken trustees, gave evidence at the Toronto sessions of the Royal Commission on Prisons and Reformatory System in November 1890. Baldwin

49. James M. Pitsula, “The Treatment of Tramps in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto,” Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1980), 116–132; “The Support of the Poor,” *The Canadian Presbyterian*, 7 January 1881; “Tramps and Waifs,” *Globe*, 22 March 1887.

50. Pitsula, “Treatment of Tramps in Late Nineteenth-Century Toronto,” 116–132; “Tramps and Waifs,” *Globe*, 22 March 1887. One part of the inner history of wood cutting as a “labour test” involved the Board of the House of Industry subcontracting the delivery of cord wood and the transportation of cut wood sold to clients to the Rogers Coal Company. The owner of this enterprise, Elias Rogers, was involved in a price-fixing ring in the coal industry in the late 1880s. See Careless, *Toronto to 1918*, 143.

provided advance notice that Toronto's premier institution of poor relief was not interested in coddling "the loafing system that is now going on," stressing that a more rigorous "work test" than that of cutting wood was needed if the encouragement of pauperism was to be avoided: "It seems a great pity," he pontificated, "that these people should be allowed to go in and dwell [in the casual ward] and do nothing but cut a little wood, as we insist upon their doing."<sup>51</sup> A new labour regime was clearly in the offing.

It was in this context that the House of Industry shifted what was expected of casuals lodging with it from wood-cutting to the more onerous stone-breaking. "Until the vagrant is offered some alternative that even he will recognize as more unpleasant and disagreeable than work," claimed the Board of the House of Industry in 1891–1892, "the tramp trouble will never be cured." Cutting wood wasn't cutting it: relatively few refused this "labour test." Between 1891 and 1895, according to Pitsula's calculations from the *Annual Reports of the House of Industry*, 29,652 requests of the indigent to cut wood were complied with, while a bare 432 refusals were registered. In 1896, when the stone-breaking regime was implemented, the situation altered dramatically: only 792 completed the task of stone-breaking, compared to 1202 who refused to undertake the "labour test." As indicated by the vagrancy convictions of John Curry and Thomas Wilson in January 1896, those who refused stone-breaking assignments were soon subject to confinement. Magistrate Denison sentenced this duo, who said they preferred jail to the new "labour test," to a three month-term in the refuge of their choice. One month later, upping the ante, City Alderman Jolliffe introduced a motion making it mandatory for all able-bodied applicants for relief in Toronto seeking outdoor assistance to break a yard of stone in return for their coal subsidy, doubling the amount of work required to receive winter fuel. "The stonepile," as Pitsula concludes, had become "an emblem for the work ethic." And those who demonstrated insufficient commitment to the regime of labour discipline were to be criminalized. When Reverend Brown was asked at the hearings into prisons and reformatory systems in Ontario in 1890 whether or not it would be a good idea to turn the House of Industry into a correctional facility, he replied authoritatively: "I think it would be a great advantage to the city."<sup>52</sup>

A war against the tramps was clearly being waged in the name of morality and the disciplining power of relief. The Toronto *Evening Star* fired on the poor in an editorial volley:

51. *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to enquire into the Prison and Reformatory System of the Province of Ontario*, 8 April 1891, 682–685. See also the comments on "work tests" in *All Saints Church Parish Magazine*, V (December 1895), 138.

52. *Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1891–1892*, 9; Pitsula, "Treatment of Tramps in Toronto," 131–132; "Talking of the Law," *Toronto Evening Star*, 10 January 1896; "House of Industry Still in a Bad Way Financially," *Toronto Evening Star*, 19 February 1896; *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into Prison and Reformatory System in the Province of Ontario*, 8 April 1891, 684.

'If ye work not, neither shall ye eat', has, as dictum the sanction of the Holy Writ. Nothing can be more demoralizing than giving alms to men who are quite able to work, but very unwilling. At the instance of Ald. Jolliffe, the management of the House of Industry, one of the most costly and important of the Toronto charities, obtained from the City Council a large quantity of stone, with the intention of having it broken by the 'casuals', who resort thither for out-door or indoor relief. The complaint of these people generally is that they can find no work to do, and are, therefore, forced to beg. The truth, as tested experiment is that very few of them are willing to work, while all are willing to depend on charity for their living. The discouraging result of the labor test in the House of Industry, so far from causing abandonment of the experiment, ought to impress on the City Council the absolute and urgent necessity of making a more general application of it. ... While we have nothing but words of praise for the many excellent men and women who do so much to relieve distress, we have no toleration for that good natured, shiftlessness which prompts soft-hearted and soft-headed people to add to the demoralization of those who are already paupers in spirit. The best tonic for them is a strong daily dose of hard, manual labor, with a threat of starvation on the one hand, and the inducement of decent living on the other.<sup>53</sup>

Thomas Conant voiced all-too-common prejudices in his *Upper Canada Sketches*, asking bluntly "whether the hard-working and the thrifty ought to be taxed to provide for the lazy and the thriftless. Or again, is it wise to foster the growth of a class of persons whose filth and foul diseases are the result of laziness and their own vices."<sup>54</sup>

This class war was not waged one-sidedly. Not only was stone-breaking unpopular, but the refusal to comply with the more stringent "labour test" occasioned organized protests by the poor. The rush of refusals in 1896 could not have happened without discussions and deliberations on the part of the wageless. Consequences of their recalcitrance were quite severe. Refusal to break stone left the single unemployed indigent men without visible means of support and sustenance, subject to incarceration for vagrancy. Family men seeking outdoor relief in the form of food and fuel put themselves, their wives, and children at risk with their refusals. Yet not only was stone-breaking rejected, the poor gathered outside of City Hall to protest Jolliffe's motion. An unidentified spokesman, described as "a strong hulk fellow," spoke for his wageless counterparts: "And they calls that charity, do they? Got to crack a heap o' stones for what yer get. Ain't no charity in that es' I can see."<sup>55</sup>

The rebellion of stone-breaking refusal in the 1890s was, to be sure, a minor event, but it signalled a shift in the activities of the workless, which took a more organized and collective turn in the depression of 1873–1877 and its immediate aftermath. With industrialists acknowledging that, "fifty per cent

53. "The Labor Test," *Toronto Evening Star*, 16 May 1896.

54. Thomas Conant, *Upper Canada Sketches* (Toronto 1898), 195.

55. "Around a Stove. Daily Gathering of Queer People at City Hall. Men out of Employment and Those Seeking Charity. How They View Officials and How Officials View Them," *Toronto Evening Star*, 22 February 1896. See also "Stone Test Scares Them. Tramps Object to Work for Food and Lodging," *Toronto Evening Star*, 21 December 1897.

of the manufacturing population of the country are out of work," and fledgling newspapers of the organized working class addressing unemployment and its evils, it was but a short step to deputations of the jobless marching in demand of some kind of redress.<sup>56</sup> Ottawa became a center of this 1870s agitation, a natural enough development given parliament's proximity and the possibility of federal politicians voting funds for expanded public works.<sup>57</sup> Over the course of the winter of 1879–1880, Ottawa newspapers bristled with accounts of petitions, marches, torchlit processions, and other gatherings of hundreds of "unemployed workingmen." Editorials chastened those who were described as looking "needy and seemed determined to get work or fight," claiming that the government could not be expected to provide for them. Canada was not a land of "State Socialism."<sup>58</sup>

To be sure, the unemployed protests of 1873–1880 were seldom unambiguous stands of unity expressing a solidarity of the waged and the wageless. Much of the respectable labour discourse of dissent in these years still clung to an ideology of the deserving vs. undeserving poor. Too much was conceded to the antiquated and class-compromised assumptions of earlier Poor Law perspectives. And in this era labour racism was never far from the resentments against mainstream politicians who, while glorying in the nation-building exploits of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, seemed to care little for the plight of the workingman. The unemployed of 1880 protested the fairness of suggesting that mechanics in Canada's capital "leave the city" of Ottawa when they had contributed so much to "building it up." They buttressed this legitimate argument with angry statements far less salutary: "It was nonsense to ask residents of the city to go away west and live with Indians and half-breeds, and to work upon the railway in British Columbia, competing with Chinese cheap labour."<sup>59</sup>

Nonetheless, the trajectory of labouring experience in the 1880s was *towards* a more inclusive sense of the collectivity of class experience, the

56. B. Rosamund, *House of Commons Journals* (1876), App. 3, 200, quoted in Steven Langdon, "The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement, 1845–1875," Part II, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 8 (August 1973), 21. For relevant discussions in the Toronto-based *Ontario Workman* see "Number and Condition of the Unemployed," 18 December 1873; "The Unemployed," 5 February 1874.

57. Debi Wells, "The Hardest Lines of the Sternest School: Working-Class Ottawa in the Depression of the 1870s," MA thesis, Carleton University, 1982. Much of the discussion of unemployed demonstrations in this thesis is summarized in Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 30–33. For political context see as well Bernard Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour in the 1870s," *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (June 1960), 93–127.

58. See, for instance, *Ottawa Herald*, 23 February 1880; *Ottawa Daily Free Press*, 23 February 1880, among dozens of other newspaper accounts that might be cited.

59. Quoted in Wells, "The Hardest Lines," 98, and cited in Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 33. For a general discussion see David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872–1934* (Vancouver 2007).

common interests of skilled and unskilled, and, as a consequence, the importance of addressing not only the struggles of the waged, but also the plight of the wageless. This demanded organization, and the Knights of Labor promoted an understanding of the importance of “one big union” of all workers. Labour reform intellectuals of the 1880s, such as Toronto’s Phillips Thompson, were acutely aware of the ongoing nature of capitalist crisis, of the economic system’s insatiable appetite for accumulation, and of how this acquisitive individualism could only be fed on the contributions of labour and the despoilation of the working class:

The wheels of industry and commerce revolve at high pressure, and short-sighted politicians and publicists are loud in their congratulations on the prosperity of the country, ignoring entirely the fact that all this crowding on of sail and expenditure of surplus productive energy is simply preparing the way for the inevitable return of hard times. The inflation period is generally of short duration. Present demands are soon supplied, and goods again begin to accumulate in the factories and warehouses. The competition between producers is no longer as to which shall turn out goods most rapidly and in greatest volume, but which shall sell the cheapest. Production slackens, wages fall, employés are discharged. Enforced economy diminishes the purchasing power and causes further stringency and greater distress among workers, and so the vicious circle is completed. Those who, reluctantly in some cases and willingly in others, crowded two days work into one, now think themselves fortunate to obtain one day’s work in two.

“Capitalism has created a monster which threatens to destroy the classes, if not the system, that gave it life,” Thompson wrote. “The number of men and women who cannot get work on any terms implies a far larger class whose pay has become a mere pittance ....” Thompson’s *The Politics of Labor* (1886) sought to break down the separations of the skilled and unskilled, and eradicate, to some degree, the barriers to working-class solidarity erected by gendered and racialized prejudice, not to mention craft exclusion. Against the constant appeals of capitalist competition, Thompson posed the possibilities of true working-class cooperation. “Where is the advantage of cheapness of production to the army of the unemployed and half-employed, or to those whose labor has been so cheapened by competition that their purchasing power is correspondingly lessened?” he asked, the question itself an acknowledgement of how proletarians necessarily shared the fruits, bitter and sweet, of always confronting the possibility of being waged and being wageless. The half-employed, the cheapeningly employed, and the unemployed – for Thompson this was the army that would march against capital. It was, arguably, the beginning of a union of the dispossessed.<sup>60</sup>

60. Phillips Thompson, *The Politics of Labor* (New York and Chicago 1987), 186–188; Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 171–172; Russell Hann, “Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E.E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson and the *Toronto News*, 1883–1887,” in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto 1976), 35–57. The Knights of Labor stimulated many approaches to the problem of unemployment. See, for instance, G.B. DeBernardi, *The Equitable Co-Operative Association for the Employment of Idle Labor by Mutual Exchange* (Sedalia, Missouri 1888).

As this union struggled, against all odds, to realize itself in the 1880s, evidence of how the lives of the waged and the wageless shaded into one another surfaced in many quarters. Toronto workers surveyed by the Bureau of Industries at the end of the decade averaged only 44 weeks of employment a year, if they happened to find work six days a week. This was in the best of times. For many workers, as Sager and Baskerville have pointed out, being out of work for a goodly part of every year was the norm. By the end of the century at least one out of five urban Canadian workers were wageless at some point in the year regardless of whether the times were lean or fat. Testimony before the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in the late 1880s, from both employers and workers, made it abundantly clear that few industrial establishments, building projects, and transportation endeavours paid workers for more than eight-to-ten months of any given year. The Toronto House of Industry accommodated tramps, to be sure, but to the extent that the migratory wageless who depended on its shelter and subsistence fare can be classified occupationally, skilled workers were not far behind unskilled labourers in lining up for relief. Toronto printers claimed that thirty per cent of their number were without work in the 1890s. "I am not alone in my trouble," declared one Toronto unemployed father of six in 1891, "There are two hundred members of the union to which I belong in the same position as myself." If the organization of the wageless was not dramatic in this period, it had nonetheless surfaced and made particular kinds of statements. At one of the 1880 Ottawa demonstrations of the unemployed, a black flag was unfurled. As a fitting symbol, the anarchist banner signified for the angry workers who marched under it the possibility of death. This was the wages of the war on the dispossessed. But if those out of work understood that their own demise by starvation might well be imminent, they shook their defiant fists in the face of authority and vowed "death to the government" that they claimed was responsible for their destitution. Carrying such a provocative symbol, some who hoisted the black flag thought they "would be clubbed by the Police and shot down like dogs."<sup>61</sup>

In February 1891 two Toronto procession protests of the wageless also carried a black flag, this one emblazoned with the words "Work or Bread." Taking place on a Wednesday and a Thursday, the marches drew from 300–1000 unemployed workers. Some of the out-of-work were reluctant to admit that they had appealed "to the charities" for the first time in their lives, but the crowd was also an angry one. It grew progressively more agitated as Mayor Clarke, who at first seemed sympathetic and promised that the City would look

61. Bettina Bradbury, "The Home as Workplace," in Craven, ed., *Labouring Lives*, 417, citing *Bureau of Industries*, 1888, 42; Greg Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Toronto 1973), for a small sampling of the testimony; Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827–1959* (Toronto 1973), 90; *Ottawa Free Press*, 27 February 1880; Wells, "The Hardest Lines," 95; Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 33 and 40, quoting *Globe*, 21 February 1891.



into finding work for the jobless, later shifted ground, telling the protesters that there were no more public works projects that could be funded. Clarke's remarks, from the steps of City Hall, drew angry heckling. Threatening disorder, one man shouted, "Necessity knows no law," and that his need was for immediate work to feed a "dependent family." To be sure, these protests did not bridge all of the significant gaps separating those who felt themselves deserving because of their longstanding waged status and those who, as habitués of the House of Industry, might often be perceived as more acclimatized to their wagelessness. One reflection of this was discontent that family men were not being privileged over the single unemployed in the granting of work on some City sewer construction jobs. Such a "breadwinner" argument pitted the "casuals" and tramps of the House of Industry against the out-of-work building tradesmen, transportation workers, printers, and others who made up the bulk of the February 1891 protesters.<sup>62</sup> Yet a new page had been turned in the late 19th century as workers began to address the experience of dispossession as one in which the discontents of waged and wageless life congealed. This hinted at the decisive role that a left politics would play in future mobilizations of what had now come to be referred to as "the unemployed".

The black flag that flew at demonstrations of the wageless in the late 19th century proclaimed the presence of the left among the unemployed. Memories of this haunted Toronto's community of relief professionals for some time. In 1908 Superintendent Arthur Laughlan of Toronto's House of Industry explained how it had come to pass that the "labour test" of breaking stone, so exemplary in its disciplining capacities, had been charitably reduced from two yards to half a yard, which still constituted a crate weighing over 600 pounds:

Our work test is a splendid thing and tends to keep down the number of applicants for help to a minimum. Well, you see, we were the victims of considerable imposition during the depression about 14 years ago, when the unemployed were carrying the black flag. ... We then decided to establish a stone-yard, and before we would give relief each able-bodied-man had to break two yards of stone. This innovation was pronounced a success, and the applications for relief began to fall off at a rapid rate, until we had very few families to talk of. We found, however, that two yards of stone was too much for a man to break, and at my suggestion the Board reduced it to one yard. It was afterwards reduced to half, and today they only have to break a quarter of a yard.

"The labour test" of "cracking the stone", it turns out, was both born and somewhat beaten back under the black flag.<sup>63</sup>

62. The *Globe's* 19 February 1891 image of a black flag, 'Work or Bread', demonstration adorns the cover of Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, where the event of 11 February 1891 is discussed, 39–40, citing and quoting "Work or Bread," *Globe*, 12 February 1891; *Globe*, 13 February 1891; *Labor Advocate*, 20 February 1891; 27 February 1891. See also Lipton, *Trade Union Movement of Canada*, 90; Russell G. Hann, Gregory S. Kealey, Linda Kealey, and Peter Warrian, *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History* (Kitchener 1973), 9–10.

63. "Need Not Hunger If They'll Work. Superintendent Laughlan of House of Industry Willingly Feeds the Industrious. He Has a Work Test – It's Work. ... Soup, Fuel and Grocery





**Breaking Stone for House of Industry, Toronto, ca. 1900**  
 City of Toronto Archives, Series 810, File 2

*The Left and the Toronto Wageless Before the Great Depression, 1900–1925*

To be sure, the left would fly other flags, including those of “deepest red” that were associated with the arrival of socialism and communism in the 1890–1925 years. And among some in this often fissiparous and differentiated left, antagonism to the wageless as little more than capitalism’s refuse would surface in denunciations of the poor as parasites. John Rivers, a writer in the socialist newspaper, the *Western Clarion*, lumped hoboes, transients, the unemployed and the poor with others “at the bottom of the social pit” who

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Orders Result,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 28 January 1908. On the amount of stone that had to be broken and its weight see Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver 1980), 37. Black flags and anarchism would have been associated in this period with Chicago’s Haymarket events of 1886–1887. See Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton 1986); James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: The Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York 2007). The unemployed who carried the black flag in Toronto’s 1891 protest did so a mere four years after the execution of the Haymarket anarchists. Toronto radical Phillips Thompson recorded his sense of the climate surrounding this first North American Red Scare at the time: “the entire press gave rise to a furious, insensate howl for blood and vengeance. ... The case was prejudiced against men on trial for their lives.” He condemned “the hideous brutality which found in the death sentence of the ... convicted Anarchists a subject for ghoulish rejoicing and heartless jests ...” Thompson, *Politics of Labor*, 167.

were “unable to help themselves or assist others.” The best thing for a socialist to do was to “ignore them.” In Lindsay, Ontario, echoes of the earlier 1870s tramp panic could be heard in a Socialist Party of Canada publication, *Gems of Socialism* (1916), which declared confidently that, “The tramp and the millionaire are brothers under the skin. They both live without labor, or rather, live on the labor of others.” “Revolts of the unemployed” erupted across Canada in the opening decades of the 20th century, fuelled as often as not by the crisis-nature of capitalism. With the revolutionary left’s involvement in and support of these uprisings, a more expansive understanding of the complex reciprocity that joined the waged and the wageless under capitalism emerged.<sup>64</sup>

Toronto had helped nurture the Canadian socialist left in the 1880s and 1890s, becoming a haven for bohemian radicalism and dissident thought. It was a center of the Canadian Socialist League, the first indigenous and popularly based socialist organization in the country, founded in 1899. The long capitalist crisis of 1873–1896 convinced many Toronto radicals, nascent socialists, and developing Marxists that chronic unemployment, among other afflictions plaguing the working class, could only be resolved by a root and branch alteration of the entire capitalist system. Many such critics were Christian socialists, and they found themselves locking horns with more conservative, churched voices in the eclectic Social Problems Conferences that often addressed issues of poverty in the 1890s. As early as 1889 such radical types had clashed in the Toronto Labour Council with one of Canada’s leading public intellectuals, Goldwin Smith, who had a penchant for denouncing William Morris, John Ruskin, the British Fabians and other “poverty destroyers.” As this broad left coalesced, it articulated increasingly radical views on how capitalism, recurring economic crises, mechanization of industry, and concentration of wealth and ownership of the productive forces were widening the domain of wagelessness.<sup>65</sup>

During the period 1900–1925 Toronto was transformed. The largest manufacturing centre in Ontario, the heartland of Canada’s regionalized industrial-capitalist development, the city grew by leaps and bounds. Fed by a massive influx of immigrants from the British Isles, the United States, the “white Dominions” of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, other parts of Canada such as Newfoundland, and non-English speaking Europe, Toronto’s

64. For discussion of socialists and “the degenerate and dangerous class,” where quotes such as those in the above paragraph appear, see Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People’s Enlightenment in Canada, 1890–1920* (Toronto 2008), 208–211.

65. See the important statement on Toronto radicalism in the 1890s in Gene Homel, “‘Fading Beams of the Nineteenth Century’: Radicalism and Early Socialism in Canada’s 1890s,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (Spring 1980), 7–32. For one accessible collection of writings by a Canadian socialist of this era that commented on unemployment and capitalist crisis see Ian McKay, ed., *For A Working-Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay’s Writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897–1939* (St. John’s 1996), esp. “The Secret of Poverty,” “The Scourge of Unemployment: A Critique of Goldwin Smith,” and “The Right to Work,” 34–39, 47–52.

population soared, increasing 75 per cent between 1901–1911, when it surpassed 375,000. Annexation gobbled up new physical territory, which was needed for developing industries and working-class suburbs. Capital invested in manufacturing increased by 618 per cent between 1900 and 1921, while the gross value of production, indexed at 100 in 1900, climbed to 148 in 1905, 255 in 1910, and 847 in 1919. Changes in the lives of working-class people living in Toronto abounded. White-collar jobs expanded as the offices and financial institutions needed in the invigorated economic environment grew. Work opportunities for women, who now had employment alternatives to domestic service and sweated work in the garment trades, increased significantly. But for all the change experienced by Toronto's expanding working class, the continuity in capitalism as crisis was perhaps evident. Boom years were never long enough. Bust inevitably followed. Panics and acute depressions occurred in 1907–1908, 1911–1915, and again in the post-war climate of 1919–1921. Wagelessness, for a time, became the lot of "all but a relatively small number of wage earners."<sup>66</sup>

The left perspective on capitalism, crisis, and unemployment may not have resonated that well in Toronto's boom years of expansion that followed on the heels of the final ending of the long, late 19th-century economic malaise. Samuel Gompers, patriarch of the conservative craft unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, received a rousing ovation from Toronto organized labour at an open-air rally in May 1900. His Hamilton delegate, John Flett, was quite successful in expanding the number of chartered locals of international unions in Canada, condemned by some employers as an "invasion." Claims were made that the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada had grown from a membership of 8000 in 1900 to 100,000 in 1914, and much of this affiliation would have been in Gompers' international craft unions. These bodies, numbering only 16 in Toronto in the 1880s, totalled 106 in 1902. No other city came even close to rivalling this AFL presence. When the voice of the unemployed was heard early in the century it often spoke in the idiom of the rights of the skilled to be protected from competition in the labour market.<sup>67</sup>

In December of 1903 a "meeting of the unemployed of the city of Toronto," undoubtedly spurred to action by the prospects of winter's oncoming layoffs, adopted a resolution deploring the misrepresentation of industrial conditions

66. For an introduction to Toronto's economic transformation in these years and the condition of the working class see Michael J. Piva. *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto – 1900–1921* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979). See as well Leonard C. Marsh, "The Problem of Seasonal Unemployment: A Quantitative and Comparative Survey of Seasonal Fluctuations in Canadian Employment," MA thesis, McGill University, 1933, 134–135; and for women workers Marsh, *Canadians In and Out of Work: A Survey of Economic Classes and their Relation to the Labour Market* (Oxford 1940), 273–279.

67. Robert H. Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: A Study in American Continentalism Before the First World War* (Toronto 1974), 44, 53; Palmer, "Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada," 82; Goutor, *Guarding the Gates*.

in Canada and the resulting “encouragement of indiscriminate immigration.” By 1907–1908, however, with the economy slowed to a snail’s pace and the ranks of the out-of-work reaching crisis proportions, Toronto was forced to open a Civic Bureau to register the names of those in need of work. Three thousand promptly signed up, those 300 fortunate enough to secure work at snow removal receiving \$2.00 daily for a maximum three-day stint. The next December, winter again threatening, another Free Employment Bureau was opened, and within three months 5,500 jobless workers had registered. Working-class suburbs on the outskirts of Toronto, where labourers had purchased small plots and thrown up shacks, were said to be suffering for want of employment, and as the usual means of offering relief to city residents was not available, the *Globe* started a subscription campaign to alleviate the distress of “this class.” City of Toronto disbursements for the House of Industry’s usual outdoor relief jumped from an average of around \$10,000 annually in 1904–1907 to over \$26,000 in these depressed years 1908–1909. The carrot of relief, however, was never far distant from the stick, which included the awful conditions prevailing in the House of Industry, the rigours of the “labour test,” and the threat of legal confinement if the poor refused to abide by the disciplinary rules. At the height of the 1908 economic crisis, 240 so-called tramps were being sheltered in Toronto’s House of Industry, with fully 90 of them forced to sleep on concrete floors for want of beds. Those who refused to “crack the stone” for such accommodations faced the increased possibility of criminal charges and incarceration. Vagrancy arrests, never above 975 in any two-year period between 1901–1906, ballooned to over 800 annually in 1908–1910. In this climate, when the wageless were driven to destitution and marked out for a variety of coercions, the left critique of capitalist crisis undoubtedly registered more forcefully with Toronto’s dispossessed.<sup>68</sup>

Organized protests reflected this. March 1908 saw 1,000 unemployed converge on Toronto’s City Hall, demanding work. Rebuffed by the Mayor, who stated clearly that temporary employment would never be provided solely as a means of relief, the wageless retreated. Nine months later they were back in force, a contingent of radical activists at their head. The Toronto January 1909 wageless rebellion was led by well-known socialist agitators, Ernest Drury and Wilfred Gribble. More militant than their 1908 predecessors, 1,000 unemployed surrounded City Hall and spilled over into an adjacent street, blocking the road. Drury had barely begun to address the crowd when the police intervened, forcing the unemployed protest to reassemble in Bayside Park, a kilometre distant from the downtown core. Ankle-deep in mud, the wageless listened to a parade of revolutionaries, whose speeches scaled the heights of political denunciation of capitalism as well as addressing more

68. Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour* (Kingston 1968), 117; Piva, *Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*, 69, 71–74; *Labour Gazette*, IV (July 1903–June 1904), 614; VIII (July 1907–June 1908), 962–963; “Toronto Free Employment Bureau,” IX (July 1908–June 1909), 1343; “Need Not Hunger if They’ll Work,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 28 January 1908.

immediate prosaic demands. There was talk of the forcible seizure of property to provide for the poor. But there was also interest in building a sustained movement of the jobless. Whatever the subject, the politics of class grievance animated every word. Socialist Party of Canada soap-boxer Wilfred Gribble told the assembled that, "It goes hard with me to have to stand here in three or four inches of mud when we want to hold a meeting. You men built these great buildings ... you built these railways, you built the big halls in this city, but when you want to meet you can't have one of them." A petition was soon placed with the City's Board of Control, demanding a hall at which the unemployed could assemble.<sup>69</sup>

A few days later, the wageless again convened at City Hall, their mood described as "dangerous." Albert Hill climbed atop a wagon to address the large throng, which had once more spilled over into streets, prompting the police to disperse the gathering. He pointed out, as had Gribble earlier, that while the "big guns and important people" were received warmly by civic officials, the unemployed could not find a place to meet. Making their way to Bayside Park, the body promptly appointed a committee of twelve to return to City Hall and demand access to St. Andrew's Hall as a place where the out-of-work could gather. Five hundred demonstrators trailed the delegation and, upon arrival at the seat of municipal power, swarmed the front and side entrances, seeking out the top-floor meeting rooms of the Board of Control. Told to depart by the police, the unemployed offered no resistance, but determined to return.<sup>70</sup>

As several hundred of the unemployed milled about City Hall the next day, their movements watched closely by the police, Drury led a delegation into the building, where the Board of Control was addressed. It was beseeched to let out St. Andrew's Hall for regular meetings of the unemployed to urge upon civic officials the necessity of providing the unemployed with work. The delegation was treated to gratuitous insult. Mayor Oliver remarked that Drury had led "every unemployed deputation" that had crossed his threshold over the course of the last year-and-a-half. As Drury detailed the great suffering experienced by the wageless, he was told by the Mayor that the House of Industry was always available to the destitute. One of the delegation heckled him, referring to the beds in the refuge as "bug traps." Controller Geary demanded to know how many of the small delegation were socialists. Three of the contingent acknowledged that they were indeed advocates of a radical overhaul of capitalist institutions. This unleashed a flurry of concern that St. Andrew's Hall would be used to "preach a doctrine of discontent." No doubt sensing that

69. *Globe*, 17 March 1908, cited in Piva, *Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*, 74; "Hot Talk in Muddy Park. Orators of the Soap-Box Order Harangue a Crowd on the Waterfront. And Talk of Taking Forcible Possession of Contents of Warehouse," *Toronto Daily Star*, 5 January 1909.

70. "Ugly Temper of Idle Men. The Unemployed Gathered Swiftly this Morning into Army at City Hall. Blocked Street but Had to Move On," *Toronto Daily Star*, 13 January 1909.



the municipal authorities cared less about the plight of the poor than they did about policing the politics of the wageless, Drury and his comrades withdrew. Accompanied by 30 watchful police, a large crowd of the unemployed made their way back to Bayside Park, now a traditional gathering place.<sup>71</sup>

Over the next few days the nascent unemployed movement enlisted the support of sympathetic reverends, preeminent among them Dr. G.S. Eby of the College Street People's Church, aka The Church of the Revolution. The travails of the outdoor relief system were now being complained about by religious figures, who questioned the long delays experienced by destitute families applying for emergency aid from the House of Industry. This, in turn, elicited criticisms from a Toronto alderman. Meanwhile, an organized group of 85 refused the "labour test" at the Poor House two days running in what was obviously a direct action protest, albeit one that left the single unemployed "casuals" homeless in the dead of winter.<sup>72</sup> Having wrested from the Board of Control the right to meet at St. Andrew's Hall, over 1,000 unemployed gathered there on 21 January 1909 to hear a rousing social gospel address from the Reverend Dr. Eby. "The day has come when men are tired of talking of hell and heaven," Eby thundered. "There are multitudes of people in the churches who want to bring heaven to earth." Drury proved more provocative in his speech. Urging the wageless to refuse both the symbolism and the substance of the discipline of "cracking the stone", he railed against the quality of the House of Industry's provisions: "I advise you men to go there," he told the wageless, "not with the intention of breaking stone but of stealing a loaf of bread. I wouldn't give a pig the provisions I got there."<sup>73</sup>

Out of this initial St. Andrew's Hall meeting came an extraordinary set of recommendations, quite unlike anything before articulated by those seeking relief. Given what we know of the practices of the House of Industry, the list of six demands generated out of the unemployed mobilization of January 1909 stood as an unambiguous indictment of decades of Toronto's treatment of the dispossessed, governed as it was by routines of "labour tests" and procedures of "cleansing and classifying." They also united the interests of the "casual" single unemployed men who stayed overnight in the House of Industry, recipients of indoor relief, and those families who drew on the outdoor dispensations of the Poor House. The wageless, whatever their station, wanted the abolition of the

71. "To Get Work for Idle Men. Heard Deputation Today. The Speaker Dropped the Violent Tone When They Entered City Hall. A Large Force of Police on Hand to Guard Against Any Disturbance," *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 January 1909.

72. "Stuck a Pin in Ald. J.J. Graham," *Toronto Daily Star*, 18 January 1909.

73. "A Preacher to the Unemployed. Rev. Dr. Eby Roused the Crowd to Very High Pitch of Enthusiasm. Then Speaker Got Hot and Proceeded to Abuse the Civic Authorities in Angry Terms," *Toronto Daily Star*, 21 January 1909. On the social gospel see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–1928* (Toronto 1973). McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 472, refers to Eby's 1909 Church of the Revolution, noting its connection to the Social Democratic Party and the encouragement of early socialist feminism.

civic relief department; the establishment of "running baths" for workmen; daily fare composed of more than eleven-cent-a-day servings of adulterated soup and stale bread; provision of adequate and warmer clothing in winter; investigation of the bread depots so that there was monitoring of their activities and assurances that distressed families would not suffer; and, finally, and most strikingly, taking control of the distribution of relief out of the hands of the Associated Charities of Toronto and vesting it in the committee of the unemployed. Not yet ready to demand the abolition of "cracking the stone", the socialist-led wageless had, in 1909, nonetheless mobilized their ranks, broadened their struggle, and crystallized a fundamental challenge to their dispossession.<sup>74</sup>

This rebellion of the dispossessed generated a predictable opposition, one that undoubtedly stifled the stirrings of the unemployed. Mayor Oliver made threatening noises that trouble-makers would be deported. A letter to the editor of the Toronto *Star* bemoaned the "Brutal Treatment of the Unemployed," hinting at the way in which resistance to "cracking the stone" had unleashed an ideological counterassault of property and propriety:

Though this city claims to be so very religious, you have a savage way of treating poor fellows that have nowhere to go. The statement that some of the men refused to work has appeared in the whole Canadian press from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But nobody ever asked why such a large percentage of men refused to work. No, they are simply put down as lazy. Now, when a man goes to a place like the House of Industry, it is plain that he is half starved already. There he gets bread and some warm water called tea, at night, and in the morning. Most likely he will not get a bed the first three nights, but will sleep on a floor, with hardly any room to turn. When he gets up in the morning, after what little sleep he had been able to get, he is required to break a lot of stones. The quantity of stones to be broken will take a man used to it three hours, but a man not used to that kind of work will take from four to six hours. Six hours hard work for a bit of dry bread and a rest on the floor. And we sing 'Britons Never Shall be Slaves'. Let the people of Toronto reflect a little on the conditions in this city and cease casting slurs upon those who are for the time being in bad circumstances.

The letter, signed simply "Out of Work," was a reflection of what the dispossessed were up against in their daily struggle to survive, as well as in their organized effort to resist.<sup>75</sup>

A year later, in February 1910, seven members of the non-stone-breaking brotherhood refused the House of Industry "labour test" and found themselves before Magistrate Ellis, charged with vagrancy. Amidst growing speculative animosity to the workless flooding into Toronto from parts unknown, turning the city into an "Eldorado of the tramp fraternity," the men became scapegoats in an age-old ideological assault on the "undeserving poor." The Superintendent of the House of Industry, who chastised the group who refused to "crack the stone" as merely "playing with the whole thing [labour test]" and

74. "A Preacher to the Unemployed," Toronto *Daily Star*, 15 February 1909.

75. "Brutal Treatment of the Unemployed," Toronto *Daily Star*, 15 February 1909.



having the temerity to feign indifference to “even go in the yard to look at the pile of stone,” saw in this workless crew proof that many “casuals” seeking lodging at his institution “spend their money in outside towns and then come back to Toronto in droves and expect to be kept.” Disgusted that one of the men, Alfred Lawson, “wouldn’t break eight ounces of stone in eight hours,” the Poor House official urged the court to get tough on those who defied the “labour test.” The Magistrate, unimpressed with the lot before him, decided to teach those indigents who opted for recalcitrance a lesson: he sentenced them to jail terms of from 30 days to 3 months, promising them “a chance to do real work.” Meanwhile, the House of Industry, pleading economies, doubled the quantity of stone it required from all “casuals” receiving bread, water, and a place to lay their heads.<sup>76</sup>

The criminalization of the dispossessed proceeding apace, the crisis of worklessness deepened in 1911–1912 and plummeted even further in a severe depression in 1913–1914. By this latter date, the federal government estimated the ranks of the unemployed had swelled to 100,000 nationally, with Toronto claiming 15,000 out-of-work in January of 1914 and 20,000 unemployed over the course of October 1914 to May 1915. Toronto’s relief system sagged under the pressures of more and more applications for aid, with Superintendent Laughlin complaining that he “had never before seen anything like it.” In the winter of 1914–1915 more than 5,000 families, representing in excess of 25,000 people, were applying for relief to the beleaguered House of Industry. Long queues of men, “two and three deep, lined up outside the ... building waiting for shelter for the night.” The usual recourse to a series of start-up/close down Civic Employment Bureaus did little to ease the situation. Maladministered and overwhelmed by applications, such *ad hoc* agencies competed with corrupt private employment enterprises and managed, for the most part, only to secure temporary work, in limited amounts, for the growing army of the unemployed. Throughout the crisis, which one historian has termed a “Canadian unemployed revolt” led by the Industrial Workers of the World in the west and the Social Democratic Party in Ontario, calls for “able-bodied vagrants” to be “made to work for their living until they have acquired the habit of self-support” continued to be heard. Ontario’s Commission on Unemployment singled out Toronto as an example of the worst abuses:

The vagrant thrives on Soup Kitchens, Houses of Industry, Salvation Army Shelters and similar institutions maintained for the purpose of rendering temporary assistance to a worthier class. The experience of Toronto in this respect is conclusive. ... Men are coming into Toronto from the mining camps and smaller places, spending their money in drink,

76. “Vagrants Sent Where They’ll Have to Work. House of Industry Too Easy for them and They go to Prison – Early,” Toronto *Daily Star*, 8 February 1910; “More Stone Breaking. Casuals at House of Industry Must Crack Double Quantity,” Toronto *Daily Star*, 25 January 1910; “Toronto a Mecca of Tired Tramps. Tramps Flock Here, and the Associated Charities Want Steps Taken to Keep them Working. Also Asks that Province Make a Grant to the House of Industry,” Toronto *Daily Star*, 21 December 1910.

and complaining of not being able to get work. A lot of them don't want it and wouldn't take it if they had a chance. This class of men augment the already too numerous criminal class.

Decimating the trade unions, whose numbers in Ontario dropped 25 per cent, and straining the disciplinary order of relief to the breakpoint, the crisis of 1913–1914 left the waged and the wageless in the same sinking boat of capitalist crisis. In September 1914, 600 delegates to the Toronto Trades and Labour Council gathered in an effort to compile information on the unemployment crisis. They set up a committee system with captains appointed for each ward, tasked to assemble complete statistical returns on the dimensions of joblessness in the city. A labour-movement funded Trades Industrial Toy Association was set up to give work to unemployed mechanics in the manufacture of children's playthings. Joseph T. Marks, his *Industrial Banner* something of a beachhead of Toronto trade union labourite radicalism, spearheaded a "Provincial Publicity Campaign on Unemployment," but his efforts apparently led to little. The situation for working women was particularly dire, and the Women's Patriotic League was urging "girls, whether office clerks or factory hands, or in whatever position held previously, to accept what can be secured for them to tide themselves over this period." With a single advertisement for a stenographer eliciting 500 applications and, for the first time in living memory, the demand for domestic servants exceeding the supply, many women were driven to accept "situations in the country, glad to be able to rely thereby upon board and lodging at least." Contemporary claims were made that the unemployment crisis of 1913–1914 was the most severe in the history of the Dominion of Canada, with routine reports in the *Labour Gazette* detailing the worsening conditions in Toronto.<sup>77</sup>

Toronto's wageless thus faced an uphill battle in the crisis of 1911–1915. Many refused the labour discipline of "cracking the stone", expressing preference that they be jailed rather than subjected to the "labour test." When William Brothers, an elderly homeless man, was brought before Magistrate Denison on vagrancy charges in December 1912 and admonished to go to the House of Industry, he replied with conviction that, "I'd lay down on the street and die," before he would check himself into the Poor House. "The jail's the place for me." The magistrate accommodated, sentencing Brothers

77. Piva, *Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*, 75–86 presents a good summary of the Toronto situation, and provides the quote from Ontario, *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment* (Toronto 1916), 77–78, 201–202. Note as well, McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 209; James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914–1925* (Toronto 1991), 18–19, 80; Baskerville and Sager, *Unwilling Idlers*, 176–184; *Labour Gazette*, XV (July 1914 to June 1915), 464–465, 666–667; *Eighty-Fourth Annual Report of the House of Industry, City of Toronto, 1920–1921*, 7, 10; "100,000 Jobless: The Forgotten Depressions of 1908–1916," in Irving Abella and David Millar, eds., *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto 1978), 73–76; Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 12–16; Bryce Stewart, "Unemployment and Organization of the Labour Market," *American Academy of Political and Social Science*, "Social and Economic Conditions in the Dominion of Canada," *The Annals*, 107 (May 1923), 286–293.

to four months. In February 1915 “casuals” spending nights in the wayfarer’s lodge ward of the House of Industry were again refusing to break stone for their keep. George Bust and Nick Melasel were charged with vagrancy for their insubordinate behaviour. Courtroom dialogue reveals a defiance bred in the realization of the unemployed that the inequalities of the class system produced counterpoised interests in the midst of capitalist crisis, a sensibility that was being promoted among the wageless by socialist soap-boxers and organizers.

Constable McBurney stated in prosecution, that Bust had been getting his meals free at the House of Industry and had refused to work for them – that is crack stone.

“That’s correct,” said Bust with defiant air.

“Oh, I see, you are one of those who has come to the conclusion that somebody has to support you,” said Squire Ellis.

“Oh yes,” said Bust, who had a sullen expression on his face.

“Did you refuse to crack stone for your meals?”

“Yes, and there’s lots like me.”

“And do you sleep at the police stations?”

“Yes, with a hundred others,” replied Bust.

“Have you hunted for work?”

“I certainly have.”

“Yet you refused to work for your food?” continued the Squire.

“That’s one way of looking at it – your way,” said Bust.

Stands of combativeness before constituted authority had a way of being repaid in kind. “Well, I think you need looking after,” concluded his Worship Squire Ellis, “it’ll be \$20 and costs or 90 days.” Other shelters, too, faced similar resistance to the “labour test.” At the Fred Victor Mission, which housed upwards of 70 homeless a night, the unemployed organized a protest against what they considered “unfair practice.” The Mission was of the view that the agitation was the work of socialists.<sup>78</sup>

World War I ended the particular 1911–1915 capitalist crisis. Wartime production eased wagelessness. This happened, for the most part, in the aftermath of military enlistment, be it coerced or voluntary. Roughly 600,000 served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, with 250,000 joining between June 1915 and May 1916. The pressures put on the relief order both by the sheer numbers of unemployed requiring assistance and the increasing and challenging activism of resistance to “cracking the stone”, often orchestrated by left agitators, lessened. One measure of this is revealed in the statistics of

78. “Preferred the Jail to Any Other Place. Aged Vagrant Insisted on Being Sent Across the Don, and He was Obligated,” Toronto *Daily Star*, 18 December 1912; “Refused to Work, But Took Meals – Jailed. George Bust was Defiant in Police Court – Received a Lesson. Couldn’t Find Work. Wouldn’t Crack Stone at the House of Industry for His Breakfast,” Toronto *Daily Star*, 5 February 1915; Cary Fagan, *The Fred Victor Mission Story: From Charity to Social Justice* (Winfield, BC 1993), 62.

the poor's utilization of police jail cells as lodging. In 1915, the Toronto reports indicated that over 10,500 people had been sheltered at various police stations across the city. One year later, in 1916, with the war drive and its recruitment campaigns in full swing, less than 375 had availed themselves of jail beds. The Canadian Patriotic Fund, privately financed and administered, provided the families of unemployed men who enlisted a "reasonable standard of comfort," and tens of thousands of single men joined the armed forces to extricate themselves from wagelessness. Sixty thousand families benefited from the Patriotic Fund's largesse, which totalled almost \$40 million in the 1914–1919 years. The unemployed had been vanquished, as it were, as capitalism found something of a resolution to its economic and political crises in the breakout of hostilities in Europe. Defiant resistance was difficult to mount in these circumstances, especially as inducements to patriotic duty were everywhere and often overrode understandings of the class solidarities of the waged and the wageless. In a January 1915 fund-raising entertainment at Massey Hall, organized by the Toronto District Labor Council on behalf of the unemployed, the message of the necessity of fighting against wagelessness was drowned out in dutiful renditions of "The Death of Nelson" and "We'll Never Let the Old Flag Down," the evening being capped off by a recitation of "The Empire Flag," the address delivered by a speaker wrapped in the Union Jack.<sup>79</sup> No black flags flew at this unemployed rally.

War mobilized the state to harness the productive enterprise and energy of the nation, refining a new apparatus of the regulatory state, and in doing so it galvanized initiatives in monitoring and addressing unemployment. By war's end, amidst the winding down of specialized industrial pursuits and the return of jobless veterans, it was feared that unemployment would swell to 250,000 in 1918 alone. Labour, having tasted the possibilities of full employment during wartime, providing waged and wageless to the battlefield lines, both domestically and in the European theatre, was in a combative mood. Tensions were exacerbated by a growing left-wing presence in the unions and among the unorganized and unwaged working class, where talk of the Revolution in Soviet Russia and ideas of production for use not for profit were common. Coalition government leader, Sir Robert Borden, was warned by one high-ranking advisor in 1918: "People are not ... in a normal condition. There is less respect for law and authority than we probably have ever had in the country. If ... Canada faces acute conditions of unemployment without any adequate programme to meet the situation, no one can foresee just what might happen." Setting up the Employment Service of Canada, a national network of labour exchanges funded and run by the joint efforts of provincial and federal

79. *Toronto Police Report, 1915*, 20; *Toronto Police Report, 1916*, 20; Phillip Morris, ed., *The Canadian Patriotic Fund: A Record of its Activities from 1914 to 1919* (No Place, No Date), 23, 271, cited in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 14; Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915–1930* (Toronto 1987), ix, 24; Naylor, *New Democracy*, 23.

governments, was one component of the state response. Unemployment insurance systems were studied, and drew a surprisingly strong consensus of favourable opinion among government officials, mainstream trade union leaders, and progressive employers. But the political will to implement such a system evaporated in the Red Scare climate of 1919. Clamping down on working-class militancy, suppressing a 1919 General Strike wave, deporting “alien” radicals, and using state trials of socialist agitators to establish decisively that the red flag, Soviets, and workers’ control of production would not become part of the Canadian way of life trumped a forceful state program that would decisively address unemployment in new ways.<sup>80</sup>

Toronto contributed more recruits to the war effort than any other city. It would see the return of more soldiers, all of them looking for work, as well. No city, however, had been harder hit than Toronto in the closure of wartime’s munitions industries. Amidst the labour revolt of 1919, there was a push, not only for sympathetic and general strikes, but for a cash bonus to be paid to World War I veterans. One commentator described the proposed \$2000 gratuity as “one grand solution for virtually all the troubles due to unrest, unemployment, discontent and Bolshevism.” Many Toronto veterans agreed, and rallied at Queen’s Park where they were treated to a rabble-rousing speech from J. Harry Flynn, an opportunistic demagogue who quickly established himself as a leading voice of the returned soldiers. “Let us put a peaceful demand,” shouted Flynn about the bonus, “and if it is not answered, I say let us take it by force.” There was, however, to be no bonus granted, or seized, in 1919. Instead, out-of-work veterans were advised to head to the hinterland. A “Back to the Land” movement, said many employers and not a few farmers, would allow rural producers to “get labour more cheaply.” At this the Toronto Great War Veteran’s Association took considerable umbrage, arguing that those who had served overseas for four years had not been separated from loved ones and served their country only to be told they could “take employment mucking in the bush,” far from the family hearth.<sup>81</sup> Toronto-headquartered Frontier College put a novel spin on the idea that movement to the country could alleviate unemployment, suggesting that municipalities purchase homesteads and employ the jobless in clearing 160 acres and building a house and barn on each improved lot, which could then be sold for a profit.<sup>82</sup>

80. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 14–27; *Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment* (Toronto 1916); Udo Sauter, “The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 6 (Autumn 1980), 89–112; Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 108. On the climate of this era see Kealey, “1919: The Labor Revolt,” 11–44; McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 417–530; Kramer and Mitchell, *When the State Trembled*; and Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925* (Toronto 1998).

81. Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 124–129; Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 28.

82. “Work of the Frontier College, Toronto: Proposal for Reduction of Unemployment,” *Labour Gazette*, XXI (1921), 1289.

The crisis of wagelessness that afflicted veterans and non-soldiers alike deepened until, in the fall of 1920, the economy took another turn for the worse, plunging into depression. Toronto employers reduced working time in order not to have to effect mass layoffs, but such band-aid solutions only covered the wound of wagelessness incompletely and for limited time periods. Veterans who had managed to secure work now lost their jobs, with estimates being that one in five able-bodied ex-soldiers were forced into wagelessness with the new depression. As national unemployment rates climbed to over ten per cent, encompassing 214,000 jobless individuals, the situation in Toronto taxed the public employment bureaus to the break point. Over the winter of 1919–1920 these bodies, which favoured the returned soldier, managed to secure 70 per cent of all applicants employment, but in 1920–1921 that figure dropped to 58 per cent. More than 3,000 of those registered with the Bureaus were "unplaced" and at the height of the crisis that number skyrocketed to 15,000. Federal payments to the municipality of Toronto for the emergency relief of the unemployed over the course of December 1920 to April 1921 totalled \$134,128, or almost 40 per cent of the total distributed across the country. Toronto police cells, a home to so many destitute in 1915, but largely empty of these patrons in 1916, began to fill again. By 1925, a record 16,500 people were housed in city cells, many of them ex-servicemen who had joined the army of the unemployed.<sup>83</sup>

At the Toronto House of Industry the litany of complaint and register of inadequacy rose. The poor and unemployed insisted that the outdoor relief doled out to the destitute was woefully insufficient. Social workers claimed that families dependent on assistance were slowly starving. Civic support to the Poor House was challenged as too meagre to begin to address the nature of the unemployment crisis. A nurse who regularly visited homes of the Toronto indigent saw children going hungry and concluded that it was "impossible for human beings to live at all on what the city supplies." The plight of the workless, claimed these critics, was reminiscent of the "Dark Ages."<sup>84</sup> Such charges and allegations were met with the usual arsenal of denial. Officially constituted and often church-affiliated Neighbourhood Workers' Associations and the superintendant at the House of Industry continued age-old claims that, "Everyone should know that no man needs to sleep in the parks or walk the streets in Toronto. There is shelter for him. When we encourage begging on

83. G.D. Robertson to Walter Rollo, 15 December 1921, in *Labour Gazette*, XXI (1921), 46; Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 142; Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 29; Piva, *Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*, 83–84; "Emergency Relief for Unemployed in Canada," *Labour Gazette*, XXI (1921), 999; *Toronto Police Report, 1925*, 24; Marsh, *Canadians In and Out of Work*, 257–270.

84. "Can't Keep Wolf From Door with Doles from City. Families Would Starve If They Had to Depend on Civic Help Alone. Tales of Sufferers. Work of Other Institutions Hampered by Parsimony of the City," *Toronto Daily Star*, 27 August 1921.



the street – which is against the law in the first place – you are encouraging something at the same time that is most deadly for the man.”<sup>85</sup>

When frustrated jobless veterans sought relief in paying overdue rent, they found themselves “chasing around from one place to another ... for ... three weeks,” unable to find any agency to lend them a hand. Fearing evictions and seeking only loans which they committed to pay back, the ex-servicemen formed a delegation and went to City Hall to seek out Mayor Maguire. Finance Commissioner Ross curtly dismissed the group. “Anybody who thinks that we are going to liquidate his arrears of rent is in error.” The former soldiers who decided to organize a Toronto-to-Ottawa trek in protest of inaction on unemployment fared no better. They hoofed it 220 miles to the nation’s capital, only to be sent back empty-handed on the train.<sup>86</sup> Liberal reformers like Bryce Stewart looked disdainfully on the tendencies of those in power to pass the buck of unemployment to the next generation. “If we wait long enough,” he wrote in 1921, “the bread lines and out-of-work doles will cease, unemployment will be gone, men and women will rise out of dull inaction and find joy again in the work of head and hands.” Then, all would be forgotten: “The present time will be referred to as the ‘hard times of 1920–1921’ an unfortunate experience to be forgotten if possible.” But Bryce had seen it all before, having written on the 1913–1915 crisis, and he was convinced that “the divine right of unpreparedness” was not going to stave off the next, inevitable downturn: “Men will pursue their usual ways and in 1925, or 26 or 27 or some other year, the dark ogre of unemployment will again thrust his long arm into the factories and mines and shops and offices, tear the workers from their tasks, bank the fires, hang out the ‘No Help Wanted’ signs and shut the doors against them.”<sup>87</sup>

Even as the economy resuscitated somewhat in the years after 1921, the 1920s hardly saw unemployment extinguished. Between 1922 and 1929, the annual average unemployment rate was eleven per cent, and 30 per cent of all workers found themselves wageless at some point in the year, usually for around eighteen weeks.<sup>88</sup> Ex-servicemen remained central to the ongoing crisis of the Toronto dispossessed well into the mid-1920s. By 1925 the presence of beggars on city streets and the ongoing influx of the wageless into Toronto from other municipalities precipitated yet another round of ideological and material attack on the poor. Toronto’s chief-medical-officer, Dr.

85. “No Man Needs to Beg on Streets Though Destitute in Toronto. Your Response to Appeal of Furtive Individuals is Likely to be Tribute to the Professional ‘Pan-Handler,’” *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 January 1922.

86. “Where to Get Relief, Many Still in Doubt,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 7 February 1922; *Report of the Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, 1922* in *Ontario Sessional Papers*, 84 (1923), 29–31, cited in Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 142.

87. Bryce Stewart, “The Problem of Unemployment,” *Social Welfare* (March 1921), 170 quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 43.

88. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 4.

Charles Hastings, campaigned to rid the city of beggars, whom he considered a variant of the age-old "undeserving poor." Known as an aggressive advocate of improved public health and an enemy of slum conditions, Hastings was also capable of sounding the tocsin of vigilance against the vagrants. He suggested that Toronto civic officials publicize "through the local papers and the Canadian press generally" their intention next winter to terminate "relief to non-residents, or anyone unable to prove their residence, and that, in addition to this, citizens of Toronto be urged not to give promiscuously to men soliciting help at private houses, or to those accosting individuals on the streets, but that they be asked to refer all such persons to the House of Industry, where their case can be properly investigated and where those deserving will receive the necessary food and shelter." Hastings' harangue occurred at a time when George Hamilton, of a government employment bureau, noted that every day between 1500 and 2500 men were applying for jobs of any kind. For every 100 of them there was work for one of their number. Malnutrition and exposure incapacitated many of those seeking labour, 75 per cent of whom, according to one representative of the unemployed, Frank Fleming, were veterans.

Moderate in his views, Fleming still stressed that for all its efforts to relieve the poor, the House of Industry was not able to keep up with the rising pressures on its resources. Hundreds of the unemployed spent their nights huddled in "cold box cars and [on] cement floors," experiencing anything but the pampered existence of the indulged indigent. If there was indeed unrest among these poor folk, Fleming suggested, it was the work of "Reds" and "Communists," who were prodding the army of the unemployed to vocalize its discontents and mobilize its ranks.<sup>89</sup>

The red flag had apparently been unfurled among the wageless. The Workers Party of Canada, born amidst the post-World War I downturn, had from its inception been active in forming what James Naylor refers to as "large and militant" Unemployed Associations in Toronto and Hamilton. Capitalism was assailed as the cause of the crisis of wagelessness, and among these advocates of a Soviet Canada the demand among the jobless was for "work or full maintenance." Communists considered unemployment central to the class struggle, on a par with wage reductions and the open shop as an issue around which revolutionaries organized and cultivated resistance. "Moscow Jack" MacDonald, a Toronto patternmaker who would emerge in the 1920s as one of Canadian communism's mass leaders, toured the country in the hard winter of 1921, speaking to fellow militants on the scourge of unemployment. Nonetheless, the communist presence in Canadian working-class circles, be they of the waged or wageless kind, was weak, subject to the red-baiting of the

89. On Hastings see Piva's repeated accounts of his aggressiveness as a public health official in Piva, *Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*; "Is Appointed to Study Single Man's Problem. Dr. Hastings Also Warns Non-Residents Not to Expect Aid During Winter," *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 September 1925; "Women Pledge to Help Unemployed Men," *Toronto Daily Star*, 3 February 1925.

mainstream press as well as employers, not to mention a contingent of died-in-the-wool reactionaries ensconced in the most conservative elements of trade union officialdom. Since 1919, this layer of the labour bureaucracy had taken direct aim at revolutionaries in the workers' movement. Two Toronto District Labor Council figures, W.J. Hevey and Arthur O'Leary, launched the *Labor Leader* as the Winnipeg General Strike was winding to a close. The paper, cuddling up to employers and screaming from its masthead fierce opposition to IWWism, One Big Unionism, and Bolshevism, was a strident voice of anti-communism and a proponent of the most entrepreneurial wing of business unionism. The wageless found little in the way of support within its pages. Repudiated by organized labour because of its ideas and its paymasters, large corporations who footed the bill for its publication, the *Labor Leader* nonetheless survived into the mid-1920s, denouncing Toronto's communists as servants of Moscow masters and suggesting that Russian Reds were not above threatening good and godly churchgoers with death. As the economic downturn of the early 1920s sapped the strength of the waged and threw more and more of the wageless into the trough of material despondency, conservatizing tendencies could be discerned within the Toronto dispossessed. Tim Buck, a Toronto machinist and perennial communist candidate for the presidency of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, polled 25 per cent of the delegates at the 1923–1924 annual convention. Thereafter it was downhill, and as the capitalist crisis of the early 1920s passed into the complacency of 1925–1926, the workless, their numbers declining, had a brief reprieve. The red flag, flying listlessly over the thinning ranks of the unemployed, readied itself for the next downturn. It would not be long in coming. In the next offensive of the outcasts, the reception of this red flag, prepared in the 1900–1925 years, was unprecedented.<sup>90</sup>

### Conclusion: The Outcasts' Offensive

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

Walter Benjamin,  
"Theses on the Philosophy of History," (1940)

AS WE ENTER THE 1930S, the obscure history of the wageless and resistance that we have outlined above becomes more familiar. Study of the crisis of unemployment in Canada in the Great Depression is a staple of modern historiography, and there are excellent, deeply researched monographic accounts

90. Naylor, *New Democracy*, 118–121, 248; Walter Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919–1929* (Toronto 1968), 47–48; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto 1992), 227. On early Canadian communism see Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Victoria 2004).

and proliferating journal articles on the state and provisioning for the jobless, work camps and their discontents, and the organization of the unemployed, including much discussion on major events such as the On-To-Ottawa trek, a protest march that culminated in police attack on wageless demonstrators in Regina in 1933.<sup>91</sup> Document collections on the "dirty thirties" provide powerful and provocative evidence of the depth of resentment and anger that engulfed the jobless in the precipitous economic collapse of 1929–1935.<sup>92</sup> Popular historians like William Gray, Barry Broadfoot, and Pierre Berton have written widely-read accounts that explore the Great Depression as a crisis of unemployment.<sup>93</sup> Novelist Irene Baird captured something of the west coast plight of single unemployed men, but did so with the traditional sense that their oppression bore no relation to the comfortable privileges of the waged.<sup>94</sup> And recent unpublished work by scholars such as Todd McCallum and Marcus Klee builds on this past research and writing to craft imaginative perspectives on the working and the workless that place in new light the always evolving relations and reciprocities of waged and wageless life.<sup>95</sup>

The wageless, then, get some of their due in treatments of the single decade in Canadian history that is most readily associated with an undeniable crisis of capitalism and its human costs in terms of unemployment. It is not hard to understand why. By February 1930 the numbers of unemployed in Canada were estimated to be 323,000, with the rate of joblessness at 12.5 per cent and climbing. Sixteen months later, in June 1931, 435,000 of Canada's 2.5 million wage earners were unemployed, or roughly 17 per cent. That rate soared to 25 per cent by February 1932, and then crossed the incredible 30 per cent

91. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*; G.M. LeFresne, "The Royal Twenty Centers: The Department of National Defence and Federal Unemployment Relief, 1932–1936," History Thesis, Royal Military College, Kingston, 1962; Victor Howard, *The On to Ottawa Trek* (Vancouver 1970); Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek* (Toronto 1973); Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Montreal 1987); Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On To Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Calgary 2003).

92. Michiel Horn, ed., *The Dirty Thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression* (Toronto 1972); L. M. Grayson, ed., *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett, 1930–1935* (Toronto 1971).

93. William Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies* (Toronto 1966); Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Markham, Ontario 1975); Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression, 1929–1939* (Toronto 1990).

94. Irene Baird, *Waste Heritage* (Toronto 1974 [1939]).

95. McCallum, "Still Raining, Market Still Rotten," and other works cited above; Marcus Klee, "Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Anarchy and Despotism"; Klee, "Fighting the Sweatshop in Depression Ontario." Klee's work is notable in focussing on Toronto, which has received surprisingly little attention. Note that in Horn, ed., *Dirty Thirties*, the representation of the Depression follows a classic contour of dating it from the stock market crash of October 1929 and accents the significance of Canadian staple resource production in the west. This necessarily leaves important centres of manufacturing and urban concentrations of the working class marginalized in the study of the economic collapse and its human dimensions.

threshold in 1933. Dominion Bureau of Statistics estimates were that between 600,000 and 700,000 Canadians were unemployed in 1932, and a year later that number had grown to 876,000. The percentage of the unemployed among trade unionists rose each year from 1929–1932, more than tripling to 22 per cent. Almost a million-and-a-half people were on relief. There was no denying the dimensions of the crisis.<sup>96</sup>

The problems posed by wagelessness were neither obscure nor unrecognized. H.M. Cassidy and the Unemployment Relief Committee of Ontario summarized what many mainstream commentators considered to be the contours of a deteriorating socio-economic order:

Unemployment has also interfered with the normal mode of life of the unemployed in a dozen and one other ways. It has made for fewer marriages and fewer births, and probably for a greater proportion of illegitimate births; for a greater number of suicides; for wives working and husbands staying at home; for discontent, unrest, and the development of bad habits among boys and girls of the school-leaving age; for overcrowding in the home; for family friction and disagreement; and for an increased number of deportations and the consequent disruption of the plans and aspirations of immigrant groups. It has induced attitudes of discontent, unrest and suspicion of established institutions in many people. The fact of drawing relief over long periods bids fair to develop in many an attitude of dependency. The effects of unemployment upon the unemployed and their families must be to make of them poorer citizens and poorer workers. Our most precious asset, the good quality of our population, is threatened with serious deterioration if unemployment continues.<sup>97</sup>

Yet, as federal, provincial, and municipal governments toyed with reforms and new initiatives in their ostensible efforts to address the catastrophic impact of rampant worklessness, little was accomplished. Liberal Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, who recognized in 1919 that “the fear of unemployment” lay at the root of much of the discontent among working people, reduced the plight of the out-of-work to infighting among politicians in 1929. He considered municipal and provincial pleas for federal aid to buttress their relief efforts as little more than a Tory raid on the Liberal government’s budget surplus, which the incumbent Prime Minister wanted to use to good effect in the forthcoming election. When it came to giving any sitting Conservative government funds “for these alleged unemployment purposes,” King told the

96. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 12–103 presents an excellent summary of the dimensions of the unemployment crisis in the early 1930s, but for a usefully concentrated contemporary account, on which we also draw, see A.S. Whiteley, “Workers During the Depression,” in H.A. Innis and A.F.W. Plumptre, eds., *The Canadian Economy and Its Problems* (Toronto 1934), 110–126. Note as well the excellent discussion and compilation of data in H.M. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929–1932* (Toronto 1932); and the national overview in Marsh, *Canadians In and Out of Work*.

97. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929–1932*, 274. For an explicitly anti-socialist discussion of unemployment that continued to stress the importance of ex-servicemen, see C.P. Gilman and H.M. Sinclair, *Unemployment: Canada’s Problem* (Ottawa 1935).

House of Commons in April 1930, "I would not give them a five-cent piece."<sup>98</sup> King's replacement as leader of the country, the Tory R.B. Bennett, assumed the office of Prime Minister in 1930. He acknowledged that the economy had bottomed out, but deplored, in 1931, that "people are not bearing their share of the load." The unemployed, Bennett complained, would not "work their way out of their difficulties." Rather, they chose to "look to a government to take care of them." Himself a rich man, Bennett espoused an ideology of individualistic self-help: "the fibre of some of our people has grown softer and they are not willing to turn in and save themselves. They now complain because they have no money."<sup>99</sup> Eventually prodded to do more than King in terms of alleviating distress and destitution, Bennett's main concern seemed to be to thwart the communists that powerful correspondents across the country advised him were an imminent threat. British Columbia's premier, S.F. Tolmie, warned Bennett's Minister of Labour, Gideon Robertson, in 1931 that, "The unemployment situation is becoming daily more acute and with communistic agitation it is a much more serious question ... . The Reds in Vancouver are already talking about revolution." Indeed the Communist Party of Canada and its Workers Unity League were organizing a nation-wide campaign for a non-contributory unemployment insurance program, which would fund a minimum level of relief for all Canadians through appropriating funds from defence spending and upping taxation on all incomes over \$5000 a year. Following a national day of protest against unemployment, Bennett received a petition signed by almost 100,000 Canadians.<sup>100</sup>

This was the background to a memorable suggestion, made in an address at Toronto's tony Royal York Hotel, earning the millionaire Tory Prime Minister his scornful nickname, "Iron Heel" Bennett:

What do they offer you in exchange for the present order? Socialism, Communism, dictatorship. They are sowing the seeds of unrest everywhere. Right in this city such propaganda is being carried on and in the little out of the way places as well. And we know that throughout Canada this propaganda is being put forward by organizations from foreign lands that seek to destroy our institutions. And we ask every man and woman in this country to put the iron heel of ruthlessness against a thing of that kind.<sup>101</sup>

Bennett, however, was behind the times. Toronto civic authority, especially Police Chief Draper's "Red Squad", had been practicing what Bennett preached for some time.

98. Quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 42.

99. Bennett correspondence quoted in Grayson, ed., *Wretched of Canada*, xx.

100. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 52; and for similar warnings see Horn, ed., *Dirty Thirties*, 320–322. For Communists and the unemployed see as well John Manley, "'Starve, Be Damned!' Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–1939," *Canadian Historical Review*, 79 (September 1998), 466–491.

101. *Toronto Mail and Empire*, 10 November 1932, quoted in Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 117.



The ostensible prosperity of the late 1920s masked the extent to which unemployment returned each winter with a vengeance. Thus, over the course of January–April 1929, well before the stock market crash that for many signalled the arrival of the Great Depression, the out-of-work numbered between 263,000 and 290,000. These official figures of joblessness plummeted in summer months, to as low as 39,000, before rising again in the fall. By 1930, however, seasonal abatements in unemployment had lessened considerably, and by 1932 the numbers of jobless simply increased month-by-month regardless of the weather. There were approximately 50,000 more Canadians unemployed in June 1932 than there had been the previous January.<sup>102</sup>

Toronto followed these trends. In June 1931 of 242,000 wage earners in the city, fully 40,500 were not working. From August to November of 1931, 36,550 unemployed men registered with the Toronto Central Bureau of Employment Relief, 16,664 of them single and 19,886 of them married with dependents. A large number of these men were returned soldiers, 60 per cent could be classified as unskilled or semi-skilled, and one-third of the wageless were natives of Canada. Among the significant number of immigrants who were without work, roughly half had been in the country less than five years, and were thus liable to be deported should they become recipients of public relief. Virtually none of the workless had any tangible property, such as real estate or automobiles, and only a bare 4.4 per cent could claim a bank account. Many were of course forced to turn to institutions of relief, such as the House of Industry, which saw the number of Toronto families drawing from its resources increase from 3,470 in 1929 to over 20,000 in 1932. The almost 63,000 Torontonians drawing relief in January 1932 constituted roughly ten per cent of the population of 631,207, but in specific working-class suburbs, like East York, the crisis of unemployment hit harder, with residents on assistance surpassing 45 per cent in February 1935. Toronto, with roughly eight per cent of nation's population, accounted for almost one-fifth of the country's relief bill.<sup>103</sup>

The Communist Party of Canada stepped into this capitalist crisis with a vengeance, and was met, almost immediately, with ruthless repression. Well before the economic downturn was recognized, communist open air meetings were precipitously attacked by the police, and leaders like Jack MacDonald brutally beaten. Part of the reason the civic "Red Squad" moved with such viciousness to crush communist "free speech" rallies was the fear that the wageless would be drawn to the politics of the red flag. "In Toronto, the capital of the province, [the communists] are endeavouring in every way to spread their evil doctrines," declared Police Commissioner Judge Coatsworth in

102. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario*, 17–51 presents a wealth of figures on the dimensions of unemployment and dependency.

103. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario*, esp. 35–44; James Lemon, *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto 1985), 62; Patricia V. Schulz, *The East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto 1975), esp. 5–8.

defence of the actions of the cops in savagely dispersing a 13 August 1929 evening gathering of 5,000 at Queen's Park, in which the crowd was anticipating speeches from known Communist Party of Canada members. With even local newspapers suggesting that the police had acted with unnecessary, and illegal, violence, and the Mayor of Toronto calling for charges to be laid against the offending officers, Coatsworth explained that the revolutionary element needed to be kept in check because "at a time of unemployment they become dangerous."<sup>104</sup>

Indeed, in the years to come, communists, as well as a range of other revolutionaries and radicals, among them Trotskyists, social democrats affiliated with the newly-established Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, socialists and labourites of various stripes, and anarchists, would agitate among the unemployed.<sup>105</sup> Organizations would be formed, demands posed, demonstrations and marches planned and carried out, evictions resisted, and police battled. A new militancy breathed life and vibrancy into the often enervating experience of dispossession. A Toronto demonstration of several thousand jobless in March 1930 foreshadowed developments of the next decade. Gathering a few blocks from the House of Industry, the group carried banners and were headed by Communist Party of Canada secretary, Tom McEwen. Marching to City Hall, the unemployed protest was monitored by police forces, who quickly moved in when McEwen climbed up the municipal building's steps to address the protesters. Before he could get more than a few words out of his mouth, McEwen was arrested and the police, some on horseback and some on foot, began dispersing the crowd. Many of the wageless resisted. Fights between the unemployed and the cops broke out as the demonstrators were pushed away from City Hall and herded down Bay Street. One woman and ten men were eventually taken into police custody. In the days to come the demands of the wageless surfaced as delegations of the unemployed, subjected to heavy police surveillance and intimidation, waited on the Toronto Board of Control. The out-of-work demanded jobs at trade union wages; relief paid in cash rather than dispensed in charitable "gifts" of food and fuel; the abolition of all work tests; a reduction in the hours of the waged; and unemployed representatives

104. "Chief Draper's Stand in Quelling Reds Here is Upheld by Mayor. Insists, However, Policemen Responsible for Brutality Must be Disciplined," *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 August 1929; "Mayor Insists Police Must be Disciplined. Toronto Police Use Fists, Feet and Batons to Clear Queen's Park," *Toronto Daily Star*, 14 August 1929; "Bolshevism Must Go Asserts Coatsworth in Supporting Draper," *Toronto Daily Star*, 15 August 1929.

105. For only a sampling of evidence see Workers Educational League, *Unemployment – wage reductions – the open shop* (Toronto 1930), 2pp broadside; and for unstudied Trotskyist agitation among the unemployed, "Unemployment Crisis Does not Slacken," *The Vanguard* (November–December 1932); "Unemployed Organize!" *The Vanguard* (December 1934); "R.B. Bennett's New Deal to Dupe the Masses," *The Vanguard* (February 1935); "Figures Show Plight of Canadian Workers: Employed and Jobless Suffer Alike," *The Vanguard* (17 December 1935); "Unemployed Strike in Toronto's Suburb," *The Vanguard* (July 1936); Schulz, *East York Workers' Association*.

on all relief committees in the city. A new day in the history of the wageless, their sense of themselves, and their understanding of what they needed and deserved, had dawned.<sup>106</sup>

There were of course those who wanted to preserve the old days of charitable relief, dispensed only grudgingly to those who could establish their deservedness. Communists and other radicals were the new “undeserving.” One of the unemployed delegation presenting the demands of the wageless at Toronto’s City Hall was Harvey Jackson, a 25-year old member of the Communist Party. Jackson, whom a poverty inspector working with the police had previously singled out with a benign offer of waged employment, had not reported for his labour assignation. He was promptly arrested and charged with vagrancy after the Board of Control meeting. A popular organizer with the National Unemployed Workers’ Association, Jackson “frequented labour bureaus, missions, and flop-houses looking for recruits,” flying the red flag in his wageless labours among the jobless. To the Toronto police, however, Jackson was simply “one of those ungrateful people who lived off the church mission charity and then complained that they did not get proper food.” Jackson found himself sentenced to sixty days “hard labour.” To add insult to injury, he got a dressing down from the magistrate, who declared Jackson “just the type who should go to Burwash,” an Industrial Farm/Correctional Prison south of Sudbury in northern Ontario where inmates were given a taste of work discipline. The judge was anything but impressed with Jackson: “Looking for work and praying he does not find it. Just a lazy loafer of the worst kind. The police treated this man with every consideration – even got him a job – and then he fails to come back to get it. Then the next day the police find him as one of the agitators right here in City Hall.” Jackson’s work for the wageless was put on hold.<sup>107</sup>

The sheer numbers of the unemployed, obviously present at their own making in ways that were finally registering in the political, social, and economic spheres of civic society, opens a new chapter in the history of wagelessness in Canada. As the 1930s unfolded, and more and more Canadians found themselves jobless, it became difficult to sustain the ideological typecasting that had long relied on social constructions like “the undeserving poor”. There is of course no doubt that the particularities and depth of the capitalist crisis of the Great Depression had much to do with this. Nevertheless the new, and extreme, circumstances of the 1930s did indeed unfold against the backdrop of a century of developments associated with wagelessness, including the long

106. “‘Red Thursday’ in Toronto Proves a Fiasco. Police Disperse Mob as ‘Red’ Agitators Obey Moscow Order. Communists Whisked into City Hall After Leaders Attempt to Spout Doctrines – Kicking Shins Chief Method of Attack. Eleven Arrested At Disturbance,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 7 March 1930.

107. “Say City’s Relief Scale is Totally Inadequate. Unemployed Ask for Increased Allowance, Declaring they are Undernourished. Police Stand on Guard,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 12 March 1930; Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band: The Clashes Between Communists and the Canadian Establishment, 1928–1932* (Ottawa no date), 109–110.

history of the dispossessed, which encompassed dissident ideas symbolized by flags of black and red, and acts of refusal both individual and collective. Toronto figured forcefully in this development, as a rich history of wageless activism and agency reveals.<sup>108</sup>

Before this outcasts' offensive, however, lay decades of a developing history of the Toronto dispossessed, inseparable from the equally long history of capitalist crises. "Cracking the stone" seems an appropriate title for an exploration of wagelessness in Toronto in the 1830–1930 years. First, it conveys well both the significance of and resistance to longstanding understandings that the wageless needed to prove their deservedness through labour. This is the empirical substance of our narrative of the House of Industry and its disciplines and the poor's refusals to be brought entirely under the sway of these kinds of rigours. Second, there is in the symbolism of "cracking the stone" an appropriate representation of wider struggles against capital and the state. Such resistance has historically challenged a hard and intractable capitalism that inevitably produces not just the aberration of crises, in the plural, but the constant of crisis as a singular, defining feature of the relations of exploitation, a breeding ground of inequality and oppression. Third, the imagery of "cracking the stone" speaks as well to the rigidities of conceptualizations of class formation that separate waged and wageless into static, abstract categories of differentiation within working-class experience. We reject this stone-like ossification, and indeed want to crack it apart in an insistence that "labour" always encompasses under capitalism the reciprocities of waged and wageless life. With these principles as our point of departure, we follow Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" maxim that "the sequence of events" in the chronicle of the dispossessed must not be told "like the beads of a rosary." Instead, we have tried to grasp these moments of a long past so that they can illuminate "the constellation which [our] own order has formed with a definite earlier one."<sup>109</sup> This confirms us in our conviction that capitalist crisis is the rule rather than the exception, that class struggle is necessarily composed of a variety of parts, the totality of which brings waged and wageless together rather than separating them in the judgemental ideology of the Poor Law. If we have less faith than did Benjamin in the ultimate capacity of the angel of history to contain the storm of progress, its inherent crises growing both more intense and following more and more closely on the heels of one another, we nonetheless appreciate, as did Benjamin, that there is no turning back.

108. For all the excellent work that has been done on communists, the left, and the unemployed in Canada in the 1930s (see Manley, "Starve, Be Damned," as but one important example), the particularities of the Toronto campaigns of the workless remain to be explored. We are engaged in that project, which represents a continuation of this paper.

109. This and all previous quotations from Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," (1940) come from Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York 1968), 253–264. An older study, outlining an understanding of the relationship of history and social analysis, still repays reading. See C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (London 1959), 143–164.

Capitalism *as* crisis has made that impossible and those who would pin the angel's wings, holding them stationary, would "have little luck." We take hope in the almost inexhaustible resources of the wageless, who have shown, time and time again, the capacity to confound critics and condescension in their challenge to crises not of their own making, but in which their being is inevitably entwined. Finally, we grasp that the history of the dispossessed is always about movement, possibility, and change, much of which happens in ways that are difficult not only to interpret, but even to see.

As the economy lay in shambles in the winter of 1931, a thousand men a day were eating their February meals in a Toronto soup kitchen located in St. Lawrence Hall. They filed into the auditorium as volunteers punched their tickets, authorizing a feed of beans, stew, and coffee. "By keeping stomachs filled," wrote one journalist, Toronto was preventing "riots, perhaps bloodshed." There appeared no life in the wageless dining at St. Lawrence Hall: no collectivity, no communication, no combativeness. Few signs apparently existed that the *un*-employed could possibly generate protest. Those reduced to this status were apparently those devoid of a great deal. "They are men without emotions," declared an account in the *Toronto Star*. "They ate in complete silence. No one spoke to their neighbour."<sup>110</sup> Two police officers were present to see that it was so. In the years that followed squads of gendarmes would be needed to keep the peace and Toronto's wageless would mobilize by the tens of thousands, turning Queen's Park, Allan Gardens, Earlscourt Park, Trinity Park and other public spaces into spirited forums for the unemployed and their spokesmen. "Labour tests" of all kinds would be opposed vigorously, and the out-of-work built new associations, councils, and organizations throughout Toronto's wards and working-class suburbs, all of them questioning and challenging relief practices and demanding better treatment of the indigent. Defiant in the face of a relentlessly condescending authority, the wageless marched and assembled without official approval and its demanded permits. They were adamant that they would gather as they saw fit, until "the iron heelism of Chief Draper is stamped out."<sup>111</sup> Often led by communists, social democrats, and others on the left, the wageless expanded their challenge to the relief order, calling for, among other things, non-contributory unemployment insurance; cash relief for the unemployed; an end to the evictions, seizures, and foreclosures of the homes and other property of the wageless; free medical and health service for the unemployed and their dependents; uninhibited access to public buildings and parks used for meetings of the jobless; no deportations; and unity of the employed and unemployed. This movement, growing out of the realities of dispossession, was nonetheless grounded in something more

110. "Apathetic Acceptance Marks Club Dinners. No Anger or Resentment Shown as 500 Jobless Eat in Dead Silence," *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 February 1931.

111. "Charge Police Refused Aid to Girl Trampled by Horse. Protest Alleged Neglect as Allan Gardens Meeting Broken Up," *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 August 1933.

than the kinds of essential *absence* that so often characterizes – in the past as well as in the present – the representation of those in need of waged work.<sup>112</sup>

Indeed, it is one chapter in the long text of struggles, reaching back centuries, according to Christopher Hill, in which the social construction of the dispossessed relied explicitly on structures of incarceration and ideologies of criminalization, generating refusals and resistance of many kinds. The decades of defiance and dissent that followed the English Revolution of 1640, for instance, saw radical pamphleteers argue that “houses of correction, so far from curing begging, were more likely to make honest men vagabonds and beggars by destroying their reputation and self-respect.”<sup>113</sup> This moment of the Diggers, Levellers, and Ranters was certainly an early instance of the modern *historical* project of reclaiming the *commonwealth* that Peter Linebaugh chronicles in his recently-published *Magna Carta Manifesto*. What Hill and Linebaugh document in their recovery of the quest for “liberties and commons for all” has been effectively articulated in the Occupy Wall Street (and elsewhere) mobilizations of 2011–2012:

In 1649  
 To St. George’s Hill,  
 A ragged band they called the Diggers  
 Came to show the people’s will  
 They defied the landlords  
 They defied the laws  
 They were the dispossessed reclaiming what was theirs

We come in peace they said  
 To dig and sow  
 We come to work the lands in common  
 And to make the waste ground grow  
 This earth divided  
 We will make whole  
 So it will be  
 A common treasury for all

From the men of property  
 The orders came  
 They sent the hired men and troopers  
 To wipe out the Diggers’ claim

112. These demands constituted planks in the program of the Communist Party-led Unemployed Councils movement. See National Committee of Unemployed Councils, *Building a New Unemployed Movement* (Toronto 1933).

113. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York 1972), 33; Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley 2008).



Tear down their cottages  
 Destroy their corn  
 They were dispersed  
 But still the vision lingers on<sup>114</sup>

Toronto's workless carried this vision from the 19th century into the 20th, from which it would live on into our own times. In determining not to "crack stone", a seemingly mundane refusal to oblige authority's demands that the poor comply with a regime of forced labour to receive food, lodging, and other necessities, the indigent of Toronto did their part in breaking much larger boulders, which weighed heavily on labour's collective experience. In the process, blows were struck, and fissures forced, in the harsh disciplines of capitalist crisis and its relentless assault on the working class, be it waged or wageless. This was and remains one part of the project of emancipation in which class figures so centrally. Such human liberation, encompassing workers but reaching beyond them as well, depends, in part, on working-class self activity confronting the perpetual crises of capitalism in such a way that capitalism itself is forced into a final, transformative crisis. Out of this cauldron will necessarily emerge a different socio-economic order, one premised on human concerns and needs rather than the ledgers of production's profitability. Benjamin's "angel of history" will then be able to see beyond the accumulated debris of the past, and human progress will finally "cease to resemble that hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain."<sup>115</sup>

114. For one of the many insightful commentaries on the Occupy Movement see Mike Davis, "No More Bubble Gum," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 21 October 2011. The lyrics are from Billy Bragg's "The World Turned Upside Down."

115. Karl Marx, "The Future Results of the British Rule in India," 325.