

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

BONDS OF BROTHERHOOD?: THE EXPERIENCES OF LABOUR
IN CALGARY, 1903-1919

by

DAVID BRIGHT

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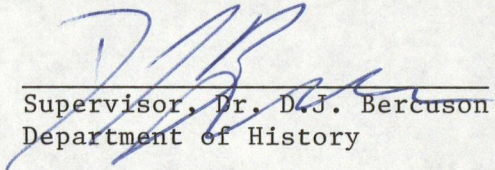
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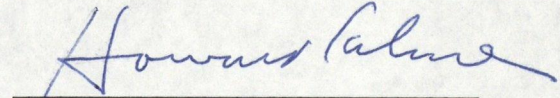
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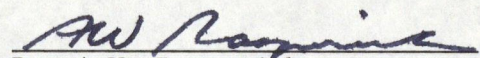
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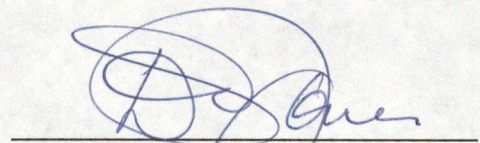
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Supervisor, Dr. D.J. Bercuson
Department of History


Dr. H.D. Palmer
Department of History


Dr. A.W. Rasporich
Department of History


Dr. D.C. Jones
Department of Educational
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Abstract

The years 1903-19 were an important transitional period in Calgary's history. The city's industrial base expanded and diversified; capital investment intensified; and a distinctly urban environment evolved in response to the demands of the ever-increasing population. Paralleling these transitions was the emergence of a working class: men and women who shared a common experience and identity resulting from their position within Calgary's changing economy. This study examines that experience and identity as Calgary was transformed from a frontier settlement into an urban metropolis.

Four broad aspects of labour's experience in Calgary are considered in the attempt to trace the emergence of the city's working class. First, from an assessment of the movement of real wages it is clear that labour's economic position deteriorated during the boom years of 1903-12. This is contrary to previous assumptions by historians. Second, during the same period cultural and ethnic influences helped mitigate adverse material conditions and shaped the development of class relations. Third, a continuity of experience, rather than change, characterised labour's fortunes during the war, underlining the fact that the Calgary working class was shaped primarily by local conditions not national crises. Finally, the lack of labour radicalism or working-class militancy in 1919 accurately

reflected the course and nature of developing class relations over the previous two decades.

In this manner, it is argued that the emergence of a working class in Calgary must be regarded first and foremost within a specific, local context. A considerable matrix of factors - economic, social, political, and cultural - must be considered if the possibilities and limitations facing the emergent class are to be understood. In 1919, Calgary workers were aware of their collective interests and problems but few advocated the re-structuring of society as a solution to economic and social inequalities. In the process of becoming divided *into* classes, the city had not become polarised *by* class. On the contrary: the 'bonds of brotherhood' were but one aspect of labour's experiences in Calgary.

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This thesis is dedicated to two people: to Emma Curtin, for her continued inspiration and guidance in the face of adversity; and to my mother, Jeanne Bright, for her continued love and support during my stay in Canada.

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Abbreviations

BSMIU	- Bricklayers and Stonemasons International Union
CMA	- Canadian Manufacturers Association
CPR	- Canadian Pacific Railways
CTLIC	- Calgary Trades and Labour Council
DLP	- Dominion Labour Party
DTLC	- Dominion Trades and Labour Council
FWU	- Federated Workers Union
GMA	- Glenbow Museum Archives
GWVA	- Great War Veterans Association
IBEW	- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
ITU	- International Typographical Union
LRL	- Labour Representation League
OBV	- One Big Union
RNWMP	- Royal North West Mounted Police
SMW	- Sheet Metal Workers
SPC	- Socialist Party of Canada
UBCJA	- United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America
WLL	- Women's Labour League

Introduction

This is a study of the experiences of labour in Calgary, 1903-19. It examines how working people made adjustments in their lives and expectations as Calgary was transformed from a frontier settlement into an urban metropolis dominating southern Alberta. In particular it addresses the question whether the tensions generated by rapid economic expansion brought into being an alienated and radical working class, or whether class relationships were the product of a more complex network of influences. In other words, what shape *did* the bonds of brotherhood assume in Calgary during the years of boom, depression, and war?

The Calgary centenary celebrations of 1975 stimulated a great interest in the city's history.¹ This interest focused typically on the years of 'birth to boom to bust,' approximately 1875-1914, which charted Calgary's phenomenal rise to metropolitan status. In many ways the historians who pioneered this work reflected the views of contemporary boosters, those men and women who had stressed and praised the material development of the city.² They underlined the

¹ Century Calgary Publications, six vols. (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975); Anthony W. Rasporich & Henry C. Klassen (ed.), Frontier Calgary: Town, City and Region (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart West, 1975).

² On boosterism, see Alan F.J. Artibise, 'Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871-1913,' Alan F.J. Artibise (ed.), Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), pp. 209-35.

demographic revolution which saw population increase a thousandfold between 1901 and 1911. They emphasised the tremendous expansion of construction activity and real estate speculation.³ They produced laudatory accounts of the individuals who had pioneered and duly benefitted from this unprecedented growth.⁴ While the need for such studies was evident, in the selection of subject matter and choice of language there was a sense that Calgary's development remained a matter for parochial pride rather than for meaningful analysis.

There were, of course, exceptions to this trend in Calgary's historiography. Not all historians contented themselves with rediscovering a halcyon past; some sought instead to uncover more dubious aspects of Calgary's boom years. Crime, disease, prostitution, the abuse of women, and the treatment of ethnic minorities were among the subjects that consequently received consideration.⁵ Still other

³ Bryan P. Melnyk, Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905-1914 (Alberta: Alberta Culture/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985); J.P. Dickin McGinnis, 'Birth to Boom to Bust: Building in Calgary, 1875-1914,' Rasporich & Klassen, Frontier Calgary, pp. 6-19; Max Foran, 'Land Speculation and Urban Development: Calgary, 1884-1912,' ibid., pp. 203-19.

⁴ Paul Voisey, 'In Search of Wealth and Status: An Economic and Social Study of Entrepreneurs in Early Calgary,' Frontier Calgary, pp. 221-41; Max Foran, 'Fred Lowes: Booster Extraordinaire and Symbol of an Era?' (unpublished paper, 1984).

⁵ Henry C. Klassen, 'Social Troubles in Calgary in the mid-1890s,' Urban History Review, no. 3 (February 1974), pp. 8-16; Judy Bedford, 'Prostitution in Calgary, 1905-1914,' Alberta History, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 1-11; Terry L. Chapman, 'Sex Crimes in the West, 1890-1920,' ibid., vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 1987), pp. 6-21; J. Brian

historians questioned the very solidity of the financial and economic boom itself, and challenged the assumption that those who promoted it had any rationalised, coherent policy.⁶ Attempts were also made to set Calgary's years of growth within a wider context, both temporally and geographically.⁷

Historians have thus studied Calgary's early history from a number of angles and have focused on a fairly wide selection of social groups. It is surprising, therefore, to find that relatively little has been written on the subject of the city's labouring population. It is surprising, first, because labour as an economic group was instrumental in the creation of wealth and the transformation of Calgary; and second, because labour as a social and political group influenced and inter-acted with those who shaped and executed municipal policy. In terms of production, consumption and sheer numbers, working people dominated

Dawson, 'The Chinese Experience in Frontier Calgary, 1885-1910,' Rasporich & Klassen, Frontier Calgary, pp. 124-40.

⁶ H.L. MacLeod, 'Properties, Investors and Taxes: A Study of Calgary Real Estate Investment, Municipal Finances, and Property Tax Arrears, 1911-1919' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975); Maxwell Laurence Foran, 'The Civic Corporation and Urban Growth, Calgary 1884-1930' (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, 1981).

⁷ Max Foran, 'Land Development Patterns in Calgary, 1884-1945,' Alan F.J. Artibise & Gilbert A. Stetler (ed.), The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City (Toronto: Macmillan Ltd., 1979), pp. 293-315; James D. Anderson, 'The Municipal Government Reform Movement in Western Canada, 1880-1920,' *ibid.*, pp. 73-111; Paul Voisey, 'The Urbanization of the Canadian Prairies, 1871-1916,' Social History, 8 (May 1975), pp. 77-101.

Calgary's economic and social development. Appreciation of labour's experience is therefore a preliminary to an understanding of Calgary society in this period.

To date, scarcely more than half a dozen works have directly focused on labour in Calgary. In 1975, Elizabeth Taraska produced a study of the city's craft union movement from 1900 to 1920, a work that Alimohamed Damji extended but did little to develop in his treatment of the years 1919-24.⁸ Taraska's own belief that a "lack of accessible source material, not lack of interest" accounted for the dearth of western labour studies does not apply in the case of Calgary.⁹ The city's Glenbow Museum Archives house a wealth of papers and records of potential value to labour historians. Nevertheless, there has been no substantial advance on Taraska's thesis in fifteen years.

Towards the end of the 1970s Warren Caragata set labour developments in Calgary within a provincial framework, as did Alvin Finkel in his study of the Alberta labour party.¹⁰ Henry Klassen produced brief studies of labour's experience

⁸ Elizabeth Ann Taraska, 'The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-1920 (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975); Alimohamed Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism: The Calgary Labour Movement, 1919-1924' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1987).

⁹ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. iv.

¹⁰ Warren Caragata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1979), and 'The Labour Movement in Alberta: An Untold Story,' David Leadbeater (ed.), Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1984), pp. 99-137; Alvin Finkel, 'The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-1942,' Labour/Le Travail, 16 (Fall 1985), pp. 61-96.

in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and finally Patricia Roome surveyed the activities of labour women in the 1920s and 1930s.¹¹ This effectively completes the list.

The paucity of works on labour in Calgary is one reason for the present study. Another, and more important, reason is the fact that problems of interpretation and focus weaken much of the existing historiographical literature. In particular, these problems have hindered a satisfactory examination of the relationship between the experiences of labour as an organised movement and labour as an unorganised class.

Taraska, for example, argued that until the war "labour solidarity was retarded because strong unions jealously guarded their chances for economic success at the expense of their weaker brothers."¹² A craft-consciousness that was "totally preoccupied with individualistic job-oriented goals" precluded a broader sense of class-consciousness.¹³ Similarly, Damji regarded labour's course in the 1920s as a retreat into "conservative craft-unionism" following the

¹¹ Henry C. Klassen, 'Life in Frontier Calgary,' A.W. Rasporich (ed.), Western Canada: Past and Present (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart West Ltd., 1975), pp. 42-57, and 'The Bond of Brotherhood and Calgary Workingmen,' Rasporich & Klassen, Frontier Calgary, pp. 267-71; Patricia Roome, 'Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935,' Linda Kealey & Joan Sangster (ed.), Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 89-117.

¹² Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. 2.

¹³ Ibid., p. 88.

defeat of the class-consciousness that marked its "brief flirtation with radicalism" in 1919.¹⁴ In this manner, craft and class have been sharply distinguished as separate and qualitatively different experiences for labour. Yet it is not clear that such a dichotomy existed for contemporaries: instead, craft unions formed one part - indeed an intrinsic part - of class experience. In the 1970s, a new school of Canadian Marxist historians announced that labour history had ceased to be "simply a category of political economy, a problem of industrial relations, a canon of saintly working class leaders, a chronicle of local unions or a chronology of militant strike actions."¹⁵ Instead, workers' culture was seen as the key to understanding the totality of labour history.¹⁶ Yet even historians who favoured this cultural approach in favour of the traditional one that focused on working-class structures, nevertheless devoted much of their attention to the role of unions and political parties in shaping class relations.¹⁷ The experience of craft was a formative part of wider class experiences.

¹⁴ Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 156-57.

¹⁵ Gregory Kealey & Peter Warrian (ed.), Essays in Canadian Working Class History (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), p. 7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Bryan D. Palmer, A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). For the debate on class and culture which divided Canadian labour historians in the 1970s, see David J. Bercuson, 'Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on

An obsessive preoccupation with the events of 1919 has also determined the manner in which Calgary labour has been studied. The Winnipeg general strike and the emergence of the One Big Union have cast a shadow of radicalism and revolt over the marginal and largely inconsequential sympathy strike that was staged in Calgary. Thus the years prior to 1919 have become a tale of the rise of radicalism; the years after, a tale of its decline.¹⁸ The whiggish nature of this approach was accompanied by a form of crude economic determinism in which workers took little initiative in events. As a result, the existing literature rests upon an oversimplified causal relationship. The economic exigencies and expediencies of war first ended workers' prosperity of the boom years and then facilitated a new sense of militant solidarity. In turn, the recession of the post-war years discouraged the continuance of labour radicalism, which was replaced instead by a submissive passivism.¹⁹

the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing,' Labour/Le Travailleur, 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 95-112; Gregory S. Kealey, 'Labour and Working Class Culture in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s,' ibid., pp. 67-94; Kenneth McNaught, 'E.P. Thompson vs Harold Logan: Writing About Labour and the Left in the 1970s,' Canadian Historical Review, vol. 62, no. 2 (1981), pp. 141-68; Bryan D. Palmer, 'Listening to History Rather than Historians: Reflections on Working Class History,' Studies in Political Economy, 20 (Summer 1986), pp. 47-84. Echoes of this debate were apparent in a recent article by J.L. Granatstein in the Toronto Star, 24 June 1989.

¹⁸ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 46-87; Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 112-53.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Even if such a unilinear interpretation of the years 1903-1919 were supported by the evidence (which is doubtful), it fails to express the complexity of labour's experiences under changing economic and social conditions. The present study is therefore an attempt to address questions which have received little previous attention. Did labour, as a collective body, share in the prosperity of the boom years of 1903-12? If not, did economic inequalities nurture emergent class divisions? What role did labour's cultural and political experiences play in this period? Does change or continuity better characterise labour's war-time experience? And finally, should the events of 1919 be regarded as a denouement, as the apex of labour radicalism, or as one stage of a more complex and diverse continuum?

The nature of class and class relations is obviously central to the present study, and also the single greatest source of possible confusion and contention. Questions of class remain among the most hotly disputed in labour and social historiography.²⁰ Consequently, there is little chance of writing on class and labour using definitions acceptable to all. To obviate confusion, however, the following work accepts the Thompsonian notion that class

²⁰ See comments by McNaught, 'E.P. Thompson vs Harold Logan,' p. 168, note 62, and by Bryan D. Palmer, 'Working-Class Canada: Recent Historical Writing,' Queen's Quarterly, vol. 86 (1979), p. 613, note 45. For a recent discussion of the problematic nature of class, see Trevor Blackwell & Jeremy Seabrook, A World Still to Win: The Reconstruction of the Post-War Working Class (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), pp. 17-60.

exists as a continuous, cumulative process, of which structures such as trade unions and political organisations form only a part:

['Class'] does not exist, either to have an ideal interest or consciousness....If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply individuals....But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions.²¹

Calgary workers formed relationships, ideas, and institutions that reflected their experience of change and continuity in the years 1903-19. Whether or not these amounted to class ties - the bonds of brotherhood - is discussed in the pages which follow.

²¹ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1986 reprint (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), p. 10.

Chapter I

Calgary, 1903-1912: The City of Plenty?

Nature has been most partial to Calgary. She has been lavish in her gifts. Let the industrious man go to work, and in a few years his labors will be rewarded with unbounded prosperity.¹

The greatest need of the country is people with strong brain [*sic*], muscles and energy to make good. All such will find plenty to do and will be rewarded.²

A spirited sense of optimism accompanied and underpinned Calgary's rapid expansion in the early twentieth century. Local businessmen and politicians greeted with enthusiasm and civic pride each new publication heralding increases in population, growth of construction and accumulation of capital. Boosterism flourished in the city as it did throughout the prairie west, infecting even those who made only a fleeting visit to the city.³ One such visitor dubbed Calgary 'the Chicago of Alberta,' while

¹ Burns & Elliott. Calgary, Alberta, Canada, Her Industries and Resources (Calgary: Burns & Elliott, 1885), p. 24.

² Calgary City Council, Calgary, Land of Plenty (Calgary: Calgary City Council & Calgary Board of Trade, 1907), p. 19

³ See Alan F.J. Artibise, 'Boosterism and the Development of the Prairie Cities, 1871-1913,' Alan F.J. Artibise (ed.), Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), pp. 209-35; Max Foran, 'The Boosters in Boosterism: Some Calgary Examples,' Urban History Review, vol. 8, no. 2 (October 1979), pp. 77-82.

another characterised Calgarians as being "so vigorous, so hopeful, so proud of their city, so joyfully bent on making their fortune."⁴ The prominence in Calgary of a number of 'self-made men,' such as Pat Burns, A.E. Cross and Freddie Lowes, encouraged the popular notion that fortunes were there for the making, and that the success of the individual depended only upon his ability to work hard.⁵ Labour was included within this prognosis: collectively and individually, workers would indeed be rewarded with "unbounded prosperity."

Certainly many workers who came to Calgary shared in this optimism. Bricklayer Stanley Ferns recalled that upon his arrival Calgary appeared to be "a magic place unlike anywhere else and, for me, totally unforgettable....In terms of opportunity Calgary in 1910 was a bricklayer's

⁴ Leo Thwaite, Porter's Progress of Nations: Alberta (Chicago & New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1912), p. 163; Jane Pratt, 'Calgary: A Study in Optimism,' The Canadian Magazine, vol. 35, no. 6 (1910), pp. 486. See also J.W.C. Haldane, 3800 Miles Across Canada (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd., 1900), pp. 180-84; Eldred G.F. Walker, Canadian Trails Revisited (London: William Stevens, Ltd., no date), pp. 67-69; Rudyard Kipling, Letters of Travel, 1892-1913 (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1920), pp. 197-201.

⁵ Paul Voisey, 'In Search of Wealth and Status: An Economic and Social Study of Entrepreneurs in Early Calgary,' A.W. Rasporich & Henry Klassen (ed.), Frontier Calgary: Town, City and Region (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart West, 1975), pp. 221-41; Henry C. Klassen, 'Family Businesses in Calgary to 1939,' Max Foran & Sheilagh Jameson (ed.), Citymakers: Calgarians After the Frontier (Alberta: The Historical Society of Alberta, Chinook Country Chapter, 1987); Max Foran, 'Fred Lowes: Booster Extraordinaire and Symbol of an Era?' (unpublished paper, 1984).

paradise."⁶ An immigrant plasterer from Lancashire called it "the country for a working man," and praised the invigorating effect of the local weather.⁷ British immigrant workers were especially impressed by the levels of remuneration in the city. "Don't they pay blooming high wages out here!" was a commonly heard exclamation by new arrivals.⁸

In many cases, however, the lustre soon dimmed. In 1906 a leather worker wrote in a letter to the Albertan:

Much has been said and written lately about booming Calgary, a great deal of which is altogether beyond the truth. Calgary is going ahead very fast right now, but the average working man is not getting half the benefit that the speculator and capitalist is.⁹

Five years later, at the peak of Calgary's economic boom, a carpenter voiced similar discontent:

I might say that this great city, the city we are proud to call progressive is regarded by carpenters as the worst town

⁶ S.J. & H.S. Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada (Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing Co., Ltd., 1978), pp. 70-71.

⁷ Pratt, 'A Study in Optimism,' p. 487.

⁸ Calgary Morning Albertan (hereafter Albertan), 17 March 1912.

⁹ Ibid, 29 May 1906.

in the west, and many of our best men have left the city on that account.¹⁰

In certain respects, the very extent and nature of Calgary's boom had created problems for the city's labour force.¹¹ With a population rising from four to forty-four thousand in the ten years to 1911, and with immigrants entering the city at the rate of one thousand per month, there developed a severe housing shortage.¹² Throughout this period accommodation remained inadequate both in quantity and quality, and rents remained among the highest in Canada.¹³ This was especially the case in the depression of 1907-09, when construction in the city fell even further behind the demand for housing. A reporter for the Albertan during this slump claimed that "after searching the city from one end to the other" he had been "unable to find even a shack to rent."¹⁴

Tents "as numerous as flies in a restaurant" grew up on the banks of the Bow and by 1907 formed a virtual shanty

¹⁰ Ibid., 5 January 1911.

¹¹ See Mancur Olson, Jr., 'Rapid Growth as a Destabilizing Force,' Journal of Economic History, vol. 23, no. 4 (1963), pp. 529-52.

¹² Population figures for 1901 and 1911 quoted in Max Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1978), p. 176.

¹³ Department of Labour. Board of Into Cost of Living: Report of the Board, vol.1 (Ottawa: J. de l. Tache, 1915), p. 489. See also Glebow Museum Archives (hereafter GMA), Ruth Lindsay diary, entry for 29 June 1913.

¹⁴ Albertan, 27 February 1907, 21 May 1907.

town.¹⁵ Many newcomers simply set up temporary shelter on the main streets much to the authorities' annoyance, yet little was done to remedy the matter.¹⁶ Bob Edwards of the Calgary Eye Opener broke off his association with the Board of Trade in 1907 due largely to its refusal to tackle the housing problem.¹⁷

The changing size and nature of the city's manufacturing sector also had implications for labour. The decade saw a great influx of capital and the establishment of dozens of manufacturing firms. This process of capitalisation paralleled the closing of the frontier, and contributed towards emergence of a recognisably urban environment.¹⁸ The transition was a common one throughout the growing urban west, as noted by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA):

A new phase of development is just opening up for Western Canada - an industrial development which shall be complementary to the agricultural development of the preceding period....Now has come the second stage

¹⁵ Calgary Herald, 21 May 1907.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6 July 1907, 15 July 1907.

¹⁷ GMA, Robert C. Edwards papers, Edwards-Secretary Board of Trade, letter of resignation, 22 February 1907. See also, Eye Opener, 27 January 1912. For a discussion of Bob Edwards' support for labour, see Max Foran, 'Bob Edwards and Social Reform,' Alberta History Review, vol. 21, no. 3 (Summer 1973), pp. 13-17.

¹⁸ Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History, pp. 67-116.

of the process, the establishment of productive industries.¹⁹

The extent to which this 'second stage' took place in Calgary in the years 1903-12 was revealed in two tours undertaken of the city's manufacturers. In 1903, the CMA visited Calgary as part of its continental tour, and a two-hour trip "spent very pleasantly in driving about the city" was sufficient to leave the delegates with an impression of the "enthusiastic and progressive" nature of the economy.²⁰ Ten years later the Calgary Board of Trade made a similar survey of local manufacturing plants. There were now over seventy such firms to inspect, and as one surprised Board member told the Albertan, "to visit them all would occupy a full week, and a strenuous one at that."²¹

Calgary's manufacturing firms not only became more numerous in this period, but also more heavily capitalised. In 1900, labour and capital accounted for 18.9 and 46.8 percent respectively of total production costs. By 1910, the

¹⁹ Industrial Canada, January 1912, p. 698. See also Thwaite, Alberta, p. 61; Don Kerr & Stan Hanson, Saskatoon: The First Half-Century (Edmonton: NeWest, 1982), pp. 69-145; and John G. Niddrie, 'The Edmonton Boom of 1911-12,' Alberta Historical Review, vol. 13, no. 2 (Spring 1965), pp. 1-6. For a good methodological study of the development of industrial capitalism in a different context, see Bryan D. Palmer, A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), pp. 3-31. More generally, see J. Smucker, Industrialization in Canada (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), pp. 59-168.

²⁰ Industrial Canada, November 1903, p. 218.

²¹ Albertan, 28 September 1913.

corresponding figures were 8.1 and 67.7 percent.²² Calgary firms were clearly becoming less labour intensive. On average, each firm in 1900 employed thirty-one employees and \$43,000 of capital investment. In 1910, the average workforce was forty-six, or an increase of only 48.4 percent, which compared with a capital sum of over \$284,000, an increase of 561.3 percent.²³

Calgary's manufacturing growth in the years 1903-12 was thus characterised by a shift in the capital-labour ratio in favour of the former. Operating under the disadvantageous economic conditions established in the west by John A. Macdonald's national policy²⁴ and facing rising capital costs, employers sought to minimise their major variable cost: labour wages. In 1901, the average annual income for a factory or manufacturing worker in Calgary was \$570. In 1911 it was \$736, an increase of only 29.1 percent in a decade

²² Calculated from statistics quoted in Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History, p. 174. See also Prairie Province Census, 1916, p. xviii.

²³ Ibid., pp. 186 & 192. See Appendix I for table of figures.

²⁴ For example, T.D. Regher, 'Western Canada and the Burden of the National Transportation Policies,' David J. Bercuson (ed.), Canada and the Burden of Unity (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), pp. 115-41. See also Paul Phillips, 'The National Policy and the Development of the Western Canadian Labour Movement,' A.W. Rasporich & H.C. Klassen (ed.), Prairie Perspectives 2 (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973), pp. 41-62; and Bryan D. Palmer, 'Class, Conception and Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labor and The Working Class Rebellion, 1903-22,' Radical Review of Political Economy, 7 (1975), pp. 31-49.

which saw local retail prices increase in the region of thirty-seven to forty percent.²⁵

By 1911, factory workers were clearly one of the worst paid groups in the city. Their weekly wage of \$17.10 compared unfavourably with every other trade that reported wage levels to the Labour Gazette.²⁶ Even builders' labourers, who similarly lacked a specialised skill, received wages twenty percent greater than those of factory workers.²⁷ Thus despite the great expansion of Calgary's manufacturing establishments, those who worked on the factory floor and in the packing plants did not receive an equitable share of the wealth generated by their labours. Were such workers an exceptional case, or were they an indication of a more general economic experience of labour in Calgary? An analysis of wage movements and real wages provides an answer to this question.

The building and metal trades dominated the Calgary labour movement during the boom years.²⁸ The city's

²⁵ No statistics on prices are available for Calgary in the years before 1910. Retail price figures are available for Alberta, however, and provide a fair indication of the magnitude and direction of price movements in Calgary. Cost of Living Report, pp. 141, 209, 210, & 212.

²⁶ Department of Labour, Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1901-1920 (Ottawa: J. de L. Tache, 1921), pp. 4-25.

²⁷ Ibid., p.10. See Appendix II.

²⁸ For details, see Elizabeth Taraska, 'The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-1920' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975), pp. 1-28. See also, Brian P. Melnyk, Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905-1914 (Alberta: Alberta Culture/Canadian Plains Research Centre,

burgeoning construction industry and railway workshops ensured that demand for these craftsmen would be high and that they would be at the forefront of wage improvements. The growth of newspapers and the vast number of booster publications formed an intrinsic part of the immigration and economic boom, and created a substantial demand for a third group of skilled workers - pressmen and compositors.²⁹ Together, the building, metal, and printing trades accounted for almost thirty-nine percent of Calgary's entire labour force in 1911.³⁰

The various craft unions formed by these trades provided leaders for the Calgary Trades and Labour Council (CTLC) throughout this period, and led the way in strike activity in the city.³¹ Members of organisations such as the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA), the Bricklayers and Stonemasons International Union (BSMIU), and the International Typographical Union (ITU) led labour's struggle for better wages, fewer hours and the

1985); Ogden Whistle (Calgary: Ogden Area History Committee, 1975), pp. 11-27; and Robert M. MacIntosh, Boilermakers on the Prairies (Winnipeg: Lodges #146 & #555, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers, 1979), pp. 21-57.

²⁹ In addition to the Herald and Albertan, this period also saw the establishment in Calgary of the Eye Opener, Calgary New-Telegram, Calgary Daily News, and the Optimist.

³⁰ Census of Canada, 1911, vol. 6, pp. 342-50. This figure excludes white collar workers.

³¹ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' *passim*. There were approximately thirty strikes in Calgary in this period: only eight did not involve the building or metal trades. Albertan and Labour Gazette, 1903-12, *passim*.

closed shop. They also gave financial and moral support for smaller unions. Given their numbers, bargaining power vis-a-vis employers, and organisational strength, construction workers, machinists and printers serve as a barometer for the fortunes of labour in Calgary. If any workers in the city were in a position to turn the boom conditions to their own advantage, they were these craftsmen.

With the single exception of the stonecutters, the seven building, five metal and two printing trades all made gains in money wages in the years 1903-12.³² Indeed, gains in hourly wage rates were sufficient to compensate for significant reductions in the length of the working week.³³ Bricklayers, for example, saw their weekly wages increase from \$24.30 in 1903 to \$30.80 in 1912; carpenters from \$18.90 to \$27.50. Workers in the metal and printing industries made similar gains. Excluding the singular case of the stonecutters, these gains ranged from thirteen percent (boilermakers) to sixty-five percent (painters).

However, once the increased cost of living over the decade is taken into account, a different picture emerges. Even if the lower inflation figure of thirty-seven (rather than forty) percent is used, only six of the fourteen trades

³² See Appendix II. The declining fortunes of the stonecutters were related to a long-running jurisdictional dispute with the city's stonemasons. See Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 6-7.

³³ The typical working week in 1903 comprised sixty hours. In many cases, this figure was down to forty-eight or even less by 1912. Wages and Hours of Labour, pp. 4-17.

managed to achieve an advancement in real wages.³⁴ And in the case of electricians, whose wages increased a mere 1.7 percent over and above inflation, this advance was negligible.

To regard the decade as a whole, however, is to overlook certain possibilities that might alleviate this apparently pessimistic picture of real wages. For example, it is possible that wages remained low in the early years of the boom but increased rapidly later on. In such a case it might be argued that although labour's share in the prosperity of the boom was delayed, towards the end of the period real advances were being made. Alternatively, it is possible that the depression of 1907-09 temporarily reversed an earlier trend of rising wages and that the subsequent period saw a return to that trend. It might then be argued that the underlying movement of real wages during the boom was upwards, regardless of the state of affairs in 1912. In other words, a simple comparison of 1912 with 1903 may conceal as much as it reveals.³⁵

To overcome such problematic qualifications, the years 1903-12 have been sub-divided into three smaller periods: 1903-06; 1906-09; and 1909-12. These sub-divisions roughly correspond to the years of early growth, depression, and

³⁴ Carpenters, electricians, painters, sheet metal workers, compositors and pressmen.

³⁵ On the economic fluctuations of this period, see Keith A.J. Hay, 'Early Twentieth Century Business Cycles in Canada,' Canadian Journal of Economics, vol. 32, no. 3 (August 1966), pp. 354-65.

'real' boom: they thus provide a more detailed profile of real wage movements.³⁶ Focusing on the years 1906, 1909 and 1912 in relation to 1903, it is possible to produce a more refined interpretation of Calgary labour's economic experience.

By 1906, four of the seven building trades had made real wage gains in the region of fifteen percent, while carpenters, electricians and stonecutters had suffered losses of between seven and eighteen percent. Three of the four metal trades had made real gains, with the machinists and metal workers falling behind inflation by two and seven percent respectively. Both pressmen and compositors had secured increases in real wages of six percent.

In 1909, the picture was similar. By this time, the electricians and stonecutters were the only building craftsmen in a position worse than that of 1903. Among the metal trades, machinists and sheet metal workers were once again the only trades that had not kept pace with the rising cost of living. Printers, on the other hand, now saw their real wages more than sixteen percent above the level of six years previous.

It was in the final three years, from 1909 to 1912, that widespread set-backs first occurred. Bricklayers, plumbers and builders' labourers saw their gains of earlier years wiped out, while stonecutters saw their wages further reduced to two-thirds of their 1903 value. Thus, of the

³⁶ See Appendix III.

seven building trades, only three were better off in 1912 than they had been in 1903. In the metal trades, the sheet metal workers had reversed their earlier decline and now earned real wages almost fifteen percent greater than in 1903. In contrast, however, each of the other four crafts was in a position that compared unfavourably with nine years previous. Only in the printing trades had wages remained, across the industry, ahead of inflation. Yet in even this case, the years 1909-12 saw a decline in real wages.³⁷

Of the fourteen trades examined - among the strongest trades in the city - only six had managed to procure and secure an increase in real wages in the period 1903-12.³⁸ Neither the construction boom nor the expansion of the city freightyards and railway workshops had been translated into wholesale, unequivocal material gains for labour. Moreover, the three years of so-called 'real' boom had brought a general worsening of the situation rather than an improvement.³⁹

³⁷ These figures would appear to support Hugh MacLeod's conclusion in his study of tax arrears in Calgary, that there are "doubts as to whether, indeed, there was a true boom in Calgary...between 1910 and 1912 at all." H.L. MacLeod, 'Properties, Investors and Taxes: A Study of Calgary Real Estate Investment, Municipal Finances, and Property Tax Arrears, 1911-1919' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1977), p. 4.

³⁸ For a comparison with wage movements in Winnipeg, see Bryan D. Palmer, Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980 (Toronto: Butterworths, 1983), p. 194.

³⁹ In 1909, a total of ten trades received real wages greater than those in 1903, compared with only six in 1912.

In itself, a study of the movement of real wages provides only limited information. That bricklayers, for instance, suffered an eight percent loss in real wages over the course of ten years does not reveal anything about their actual standard of living. Nor is it possible to infer from comparative losses the relative prosperity of different trades. Stonecutters, for example, experienced a loss in real wages of more than thirty percent. Painters made gains of almost twenty percent. Yet despite this closing of differentials, a stonecutter's weekly wage in 1912 of \$28.60 was still sixteen percent greater than that of a painter.⁴⁰

The mathematical movements of real wage figures can be placed firmly within their historical context only by approximating the actual purchasing power of those wages in a given year. From 1910 onwards, the Department of Labour collated information on prices from each major urban centre in Canada, including Calgary, and produced from these a representative weekly budget.⁴¹ This budget comprised the staple diet, fuel, and rent outlay for a family of five.⁴²

⁴⁰ Appendix II, and Wages and Hours of Labour, pp. 7 & 9.

⁴¹ Cost of Living Report, pp. 81-92, 130-41.

⁴² The components of this budget received a thorough scrutiny by Bertram and Percy in their attempt to reconstruct a national price index for Canada in the period 1900-26. Despite some reservations, they did not produce substantive objections regarding the veracity of this evidence as a basis for calculations. Gordon W. Bertram & Michael B. Percy, 'Real Wage Trends in Canada 1900-26: Some Provisional estimates,' Canadian Journal of Economics, vol. 12, no.2 (May 1979), pp. 299-312.

It did not include such items of expenditure as clothing, furniture, transport, health insurance, or entertainment. To make allowance for these omissions and others, the Department suggested that its own estimate accounted for only sixty-five percent of a family's total budget.⁴³

The month of December 1911 has been chosen as a sample, to indicate the standard of living for each trade.⁴⁴ This choice is, if anything, biased in labour's favour. The year 1911 was close to the peak of Calgary's economic boom. The choice of December precludes the budgetary distortions of later winter months, when fuel and food costs were generally at their highest. Nevertheless, even with these marginal advantages in labour's favour, the overall comparison of prices and wages produces a far from optimistic picture.

The budgetary requirement for a family in December 1911 was \$82.60, or \$127.08 when adjusted to take account of omitted items.⁴⁵ Not one of the fourteen trades studied received an income sufficient to meet this level of monthly

⁴³ Cited in Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' p. 36. See also Michael J. Piva, 'Urban Working-Class Incomes and Real Incomes in 1921: A Comparative Analysis,' Social History, vol. 16, no. 31 (May 1983), p. 159.

⁴⁴ See Appendix IV for calculations. For other historians' use of these figures and for discussions of their limitations, see Joseph Harry Sutcliffe, 'The Economic Background of the Winnipeg General Strike' (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972), pp. 68-74; Michael J. Piva, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto - 1900-1921 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 27-60; and Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1974), pp. 30-43.

⁴⁵ Appendix IV.

expenditure. Even the bricklayers, the highest paid craftsmen in 1912, received a reported wage equivalent to only \$123.20 per month.⁴⁶ At the other extreme, builders' labourers received only \$67.20, virtually half of the recommended budget.⁴⁷ Other groups of workers fared little better. Factory workers and CPR telegraphers each earned less than eighty dollars per month; street railwaymen earned less than one hundred dollars.⁴⁸ Even workers in the lower professions failed to meet the Department of Labour's minimum budget. Nurses earned at best sixty-five dollars per month; bank clerks, fifty; police constables, seventy; and firemen, between seventy and ninety.⁴⁹ Even allowing for a generous twenty percent margin of error in the Department of Labour's calculations, this would still leave hundreds if not thousands of workers and their dependents in dire economic straits in 1911.⁵⁰

It therefore seems that standard assumptions about labour's share in Calgary's wealth are unsubstantiated and over-optimistic, and are in need of revision.⁵¹ However, it

⁴⁶ Wages and Hours of Labour, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 18, 21, & 25.

⁴⁹ Albertan, 5 July 1913, 5 July 1911, 25 December 1911. GMA, Calgary Fire Department papers, box 1, f. 3.

⁵⁰ It is not easy, for example, to accept the Department of Labour's belief that a family of five required fifteen pounds of meat, ten pounds of flour and fifteen pounds of bread in a single week. See Appendix IV.

⁵¹ For example, see Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History, p. 84; and Henry C. Klassen, 'Life in Frontier

would be an error to revise such views too far in the other direction. The picture of potential mass poverty must be qualified. The key to so doing lies in the nature of the wage statistics themselves. The weekly and monthly wage calculations were extrapolated from the reports of union hourly rates sent to the Labour Gazette. As such, these deductive calculations do not necessarily correlate to an individual's take-home pay on Friday night. A number of factors account for this discrepancy.

In Calgary's prospering economy overtime work was always a possibility, and certainly a means of augmenting a worker's basic wage. Moonlighting, too, was a frequent occurrence and another method of bringing in additional dollars.⁵² Unions understandably frowned upon such activities, as both practices countered their own efforts to exert some control over the local market in the face of massive immigration. Enforcing a limited hour day was a key to the unions' success in bargaining with employers. As a result, union members who breached overtime bans faced punishment in the form of fines or even expulsion.⁵³ Non-union members risked ostracism by their union co-workers, and could be placed on a union blacklist that might stay in

Calgary, A.W. Rasporich (ed.), Western Canada: Past and Present (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), pp. 47-48.

⁵² GMA, Bricklayers and Stonemasons International Union #2 minutes (hereafter BSMIU mins), 19 August 1903, 4 October 1905, 6 March 1907. Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada, p. 71.

⁵³ BSMIU mins, 4 October 1905, 13 May 1907.

effect for years.⁵⁴ However, in an ever-expanding labour market, such regulations were difficult to enforce, and in any case the nominal fine of one dollar often failed to act as a deterrent, especially when the potential gains were great.⁵⁵ For instance, in 1910, a number of carpenters were reported as working fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, despite having recently wrung from employers the concession of an eight-hour day.⁵⁶

Another obvious qualifying factor was that whereas the Department of Labour designed its budget for a family of five, a substantial proportion of Calgary's labour force was young, single, and without immediate dependents.⁵⁷ As such, many workers required an income much lower than that recommended to meet their basic needs. (Of course, this was of little help to those men and women who did have a family of five or more to support.)

Other factors necessitating a revision of the pessimistic view may be mentioned briefly. In a city where most workers rented rather than owned their accommodation, a working man or woman who did own property could always supplement his or her income by taking in boarders.⁵⁸ Many families had more than one regular income. The constant

⁵⁴ Ibid., 12 April 1912.

⁵⁵ Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada, p. 71.

⁵⁶ Albertan, 16 July 1910.

⁵⁷ See below, p. 44

⁵⁸ GMA, Jean MacDonald papers, f. 1, pp. 33-41.

demand for domestic servants, for instance, provided the opportunity for young wives to supplement their husbands' income. Children, too, often entered the labour market at an early age, much to the consternation of local unions and philanthropic societies alike.⁵⁹ Finally, it was often possible for a working man to grow his own vegetables, or even to keep a few chickens in order to circumvent the often prohibitive retail prices for fresh produce.⁶⁰

In opposition to such alleviants, however, there were a number of factors which could prevent a craftsman from receiving even the inadequate basic wage. For the building trades in particular, there was always a likelihood of a hiatus between jobs, one which might stretch to days or even weeks. Of a more serious nature was the fact that the construction industry was highly susceptible to weather conditions, and the cold winters in Calgary could result in the closure of building sites all over the city for three or four months.⁶¹ In September 1906, for example, UBCJA president Arthur Henderson informed the Albertan that a carpenter could consider himself fortunate if he could find full-time work for even one week in the course of three months.⁶² The general unemployment situation worsened

⁵⁹ GMA, City of Calgary papers, box 25, f. 213.

⁶⁰ Ibid., f. 176; GMA, John Gillespie diary, entries 21 May 1893, 24 July 1901; Kipling, Letters of Travel, p. 198.

⁶¹ Gillespie diary, entry for 7 January 1909. Albertan, 1 January 1912.

⁶² Ibid., 8 September 1906. Throughout this period carpenters suffered from the double handicap that employers

considerably during the 1907-09 depression. Throughout this period there were approximately ten to fifteen percent of the city's labour force out of work, with as many as fifteen hundred unemployed at any one time.⁶³ During the winter of 1908-09, the Labour Gazette reported ninety percent of the city's bricklayers and sixty percent of the carpenters to be idle.⁶⁴ Unemployment was thus a common experience and an ever-present threat to Calgary workers, skilled and unskilled alike. As a result, the gains made in good times could easily be cancelled out in a prolonged period of austerity.

Three generalisations may be made regarding the question of labour's standard of living in this period. First, labour as a collectivity clearly did not enjoy the share in wealth that it had been encouraged to expect. Certainly there were cases of individuals accumulating wealth via wage labour, but these were the exception rather than the rule. Second, the situation was actually worse by the end of the boom than it had been at the turn of the century. Assuming that most workers came to Calgary with expectations of success and prosperity, the psychological

did not regard them as highly skilled workers and that collectively they generally exceeded the demand for their services. Warren Caragata, 'The Labour Movement in Alberta: An Untold Story,' David Leadbeater (ed.), Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1984), p. 108; Albertan, 1 October 1906.

⁶³ Labour Gazette, vol. 9, p. 844.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 884.

impact of their experience must have been greater than the cold figures themselves indicate. Finally, it is clear that the onset of depression in 1913 and the outbreak of war a year later did not end a 'golden period' for labour; rather, they intensified the already existing problems of low wages and unemployment.

Workers in Calgary were not, however, passive agents in the events which shaped and determined their economic experience. Instead they developed a variety of active responses designed to meet the changing conditions, responses which helped to foster an emergent collective identity. In the pragmatic struggle for better wages, and greater job security, Calgary workers forged the first bonds of class consciousness.

The first general response of workers to poor economic conditions was a high degree of occupational and geographical mobility. A stonemason, for instance, who found his own trade oversupplied with labour might turn to a related craft. Such actions, however, did not constitute a real solution, as they inevitably led to demarcation disputes and conflicts over jurisdictional rights, such as that which marred relations between stonemasons and stonecutters through this period.⁶⁵ Similarly, craftsmen who faced a temporary lull in their trade during the winter months often re-entered the labour market as unskilled

⁶⁵ See above, note 32, and BSMIU mins 2 May 1906, 19 December 1906, 6 March 1907.

labourers, competing with others for street sweeping, ditch digging and other low-paid work.⁶⁶ While such a recourse benefitted the individual in question, from the point of view of labour collectively it merely passed the problem of an overcrowded labour market from the skilled to the unskilled.

Rather than temporarily abandon his nominal trade, a craftsman might instead try his luck in Lethbridge, Edmonton, British Columbia or across the border in Washington or Montana.⁶⁷ The number of travel cards regularly presented to Calgary locals reflected the fact that it was not only the unskilled members of the Industrial Workers of the World who crossed the prairies of western Canada in search of work.⁶⁸ Skilled workers too formed part of a generally mobile western labour force. Once again, however, there were limitations to the effectiveness of this response. In times of severe and widespread austerity,

⁶⁶ In harsh times, some skilled workers even resorted to begging. GMA, International Typographical Union #449 minutes (hereafter ITU mins, 30 December 1912.

⁶⁷ Labour Gazette, vol. 9, p. 259; GMA, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #348 correspondence (hereafter IBEW), box 2, f. 7, Frank H. Blue-A.W. Cooper, 20 July 1913; B. Dresser-A.W. Cooper, 10 September 1913; GMA, Arthur J. Turner papers, f. 7, *passim*.

⁶⁸ ITU mins, 25 February 1911. Ross McCormack, 'The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada, 1905-1914,' Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers (1975), pp. 167-90.

unions would send locals in neighbouring cities orders for such 'tramping artisans' to stay away.⁶⁹

As a second general response, some workers preferred simply to remove themselves from the local labour market altogether, rather than take work they viewed as unsuitable or demeaning. When offered relief work loading rocks in early 1908, one carpenter refused, saying he would rather starve. His friend joined him in this refusal, commenting that he "had never been accustomed to such work and would not start on the job."⁷⁰ Urban workers who had come west in the hope of eventually cultivating a homestead would use the 'opportunity' provided by periods of enforced unemployment to fulfil any necessary residency requirements.⁷¹

The third option was to join one of the local unions and stay in Calgary to face the situation. Unions were the most obvious manifestation of labour's potential collective strength, and in the period 1903-12 all the major trades formed organisations along craft lines. The first workers to form an enduring union in Calgary were the railway machinists in 1898, who three years later also took the

⁶⁹ BSMIU mins, 22 May 1908. For a general discussion, see E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Tramping Artisan,' E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour, sixth impression (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1964), pp. 34-63.

⁷⁰ Albertan, 7 January 1908.

⁷¹ IBEW, box 2, f. 7, R.W. Ricky correspondence, February 1914; Arthur J. Turner papers, *passim*. Albertan 20 July 1910.

initiative in forming the CTLC.⁷² By 1903 there were fourteen craft unions in the city with an aggregate membership of around fifteen hundred.⁷³ The following decade was one of extension and expansion for organised labour, and by the end of 1911 there were some forty locals with a combined membership of nearly five thousand - a respectable twenty-three percent of the entire workforce.⁷⁴

By the summer of 1912 Calgary was the ninth most unionised city in Canada, and accounted for more than forty percent of all union members in Alberta.⁷⁵ Unionism in this period was later characterised by CTLC president Thomas Riley as "a fighting, aggressive movement, always aiming at a better and fuller life for its members, and higher ideals for the whole community."⁷⁶ At the very least, Calgary unionism was notable for the outspoken and hearty support it

⁷² Alberta Labor News, 3 September 1921. For the early unions in Calgary, see Caragata, 'The Labour Movement in Alberta: An Untold Story,' pp. 99-115.

⁷³ Alberta Labor News, 3 September 1921 and Bond of Brotherhood, 12 June 1903.

⁷⁴ Albertan, 28 February 1912. For details on individual union growth, see Calgary Trades & Labour Council, Souvenir of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the Trades and Labour Council (Calgary: 1911), *passim*. The 1911 census reported a total labour force of 21,320, including managers, agents and white collar professionals. Census of Canada, 1911, vol. 6, pp. 342-50. If professionals are excluded, the proportion of the labour force which was unionised rises to almost thirty-six percent.

⁷⁵ Labour Gazette, vol. 12, p. 1157; John Blue, Alberta Past and Present: Historical and Biographical, vol. 1 (Chicago: Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1924), p. 391.

⁷⁶ Alberta Labor News, 3 September 1921.

received from the local press. In 1908 the Albertan declared:

This is essentially the age of labor unions. Unionism is daily growing stronger and more powerful....Not only are the unions becoming stronger but they are becoming better understood, and as they become better understood they become more popular.⁷⁷

Thus in their struggle for an equitable share of the wealth produced during Calgary's years of boom, workers developed a variety of responses. Some of these responses, such as the decision to switch trades temporarily or to change location, were clearly individualistic in nature, reflecting each worker's own attempt to adjust to the rapidly changing economic conditions. Other responses, notably the formation of craft unions and the celebration of Labour Day, were characteristically more collective and represented an emergent sense of common interest.

This common interest was, of course, first and foremost identified with a particular craft or trade. There were certainly many instances of craft factionalism and inter-trade animosity in this period.⁷⁸ Yet equally, there were instances of unions supporting one another during times of strike, either directly or through the co-ordinating body of

⁷⁷ Albertan, 7 September 1908.

⁷⁸ For example, the rift between the BSMIU and the General Labourers' Union in 1907. BSMIU mins, 19 December 1906, 6 March 1903.

the CTLC.⁷⁹ In the process of so doing, a specifically craft-related strike became part of a greater collective experience. The carpenters' strike of 1906 serves as an illustration.

On 18 September 1906, the three hundred members of UBCJA #1779 took advantage of a current shortage of labour and struck for a higher wage rate.⁸⁰ Several non-union carpenters joined the strike and helped man the picket line which had been established at the city's CPR depot in order to deter incoming strike-breakers.⁸¹ On 28 September, the conflict widened when three hundred bricklayers, plumbers, plasterers and other construction workers struck in support of the carpenters. The employers attempted a compromise with an offer to consider a new wage scale in the new year. This offer was flatly rejected by the UBCJA, who well realised that by then the winter shortage of work would steal from themselves their present advantage. As an impasse was reached, the Albertan surveyed the situation: "Not in the history of Calgary have labor conditions been as bad as they

⁷⁹ Ibid., 26 June 1908. In 1913 the CTLC sent striking Vancouver miners almost three hundred dollars in support. GMA, Calgary Trades and Labour Council minutes, 29 May 1913.

⁸⁰ For details of this strike, see Labour Gazette, vol. 7, p. 500. The carpenters were encouraged in taking their action by a successful strike by builders' labourers and trench diggers in the previous month. Ibid., pp. 102 & 302.

⁸¹ Albertan, 20 September 1906.

are now. They could not be worse. This is not only a strike, but it is a labor war." ⁸²

The strike dragged on inconclusively for a total of eighteen days before a compromise was finally reached. An *ad hoc* arbitration board consisting of representatives from the employers' Builders' Exchange and the workers' Building Trades Council thrashed out an agreement. It was not clear from this settlement who had won or lost. The UBCJA had won an increase in their scale of wages, but failed to recover the closed shop they had lost in their previous strike of 1903.⁸³ Moreover, the strike action had cost the union more than \$20,000 in lost wages.⁸⁴ However, for those who had taken part in the strike, perhaps the most notable aspect was not the wages issue but the sense of solidarity it had inspired. As the Albertan commented:

Of one thing they are assured, and that is that the strike will prove to have been a great benefit to the labor world in Calgary as it showed that the laboring classes of people are a factor here that must be considered and dealt with....[T]hey have achieved a victory not only for themselves but for the labouring class of people in general.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., 28 September 1906.

⁸³ Settlement details in Labour Gazette, vol. 7, p. 500. For details of 1903 strike see Bond of Brotherhood, 5, 12, 19, 26 June, 3, 10, 17 July 1903.

⁸⁴ Albertan 6 October 1903.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The writer touched on an important point. Class and craft were neither antithetical nor mutually exclusive experiences for Calgary workers, but were instead part of a common experience.⁸⁶ Class bonds were forged through the medium of craft unions; craft unions operated in relation to a wider collectivity, the working class. The world of unions and economic struggle was, however, but a part of the emergent identity of class in Calgary. The bonds of brotherhood formed at the workplace were simultaneously reinforced, re-shaped and redefined by the social, political and cultural experiences of labour in the years 1903-12.

⁸⁶ In contrast, in her study of craft unionism in Calgary Taraska argued that the dichotomy between craft and class experience disappeared only under the stress of World War One. Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 88-89.

Chapter II

Calgary, 1903-12: The City of Possibilities?

The day has long since gone by when capitalists could afford to ignore or treat with contempt the vast bodies of men who have assembled together under one common banner, with one common purpose and with the one lofty ideal of helping one another in the struggle for existence.¹

The most conservative party in a western city would in other countries be considered radical, if not socialistic, and the party which governs Calgary to the satisfaction of its citizens, so far from being conservative, would be considered advanced even in the West.²

To a great extent, accommodation rather than alienation characterised labour's social and political experiences in Calgary from 1903 to 1912. This was the case, at least, for the white, Anglo-Saxon worker of British origin. Throughout this period, Calgary remained one of the most 'British' cities in Canada, resulting in a body of relatively homogeneous social, political and cultural beliefs and habits. The divergence between the economic and cultural experiences of labour resulted in something of a paradox: the more labour was identified, and identified itself, as a distinct interest, the more it became integrated into or

¹ Calgary Morning Albertan (hereafter Albertan), 31 August 1907.

² Leo Thwaite, Porter's Progress of Nations: Alberta (Chicago & New York: Rand McNally & Co., 1912), p. 167.

accommodated within society. Thus, even with the development of a discriminatory, capitalist society, labour was clearly 'a part of' rather than 'apart from' society.³ To appreciate fully this development, it is necessary to consider the subjective process of the 'making of a class,' and the extent to which other elements in society acknowledged and assisted this development.⁴

Although Calgary's population expanded at a phenomenal rate during the city's boom, its composition remained remarkably stable. In 1901, eighty-three percent of the 4,500 population were of British origin. More specifically, two out of every five Calgarians claimed English as their nationality.⁵ As late as 1916 these figures remained all but unchanged, despite the city's growth to over fifty-six thousand.⁶ The preponderance of Anglo culture and ethnicity

³ For comparison and contrast, see Standish Meacham, A Life Apart: The English Working Class, 1890-1914 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

⁴ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 1986 reprint (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), H. Clare Pentland, 'The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada,' Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol. 25, no. 4 (November 1959), pp. 450-61. See also two essays by Eric Hobsbawm: 'The Transformation of Labour Rituals,' and 'The Making of the Working Class, 1870-1914,' both reprinted in E.J. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Limited, 1984), pp. 66-82 & 194-213, respectively.

⁵ Census of Canada, 1901, vol. I, pp. 392-93.

⁶ Census of Prairie Provinces, 1916, p. xxi.

was noted by several contemporaries, including London News correspondent James Dickinson in 1902:

Calgary is distinctively and very decidedly English. It is English in the substantial [*sic*] stone buildings; it is English in its social life; it is English in sentiment [*sic*]; it is English in its Ranchman's Club, and English in many other respects.⁷

The ethnic or cultural homogeneity of Calgary's population had implications for the collective experience of labour. The fact that the overwhelming majority of workers could identify with the dominant political and social forms facilitated a sense of association or accommodation rather than alienation. Ethnic and cultural considerations thereby partially mitigated the adverse economic experiences that produced a separate, class identity for labour. Three examples underline the diluent effect that culture had on class consciousness.

For one thing, the common culture provided points of reference that cut across, or rather transcended, emergent barriers of class. The British empire, monarchy and other political institutions were respected and sometimes revered

⁷ Albertan, 25 February 1902. See also Glenbow Museum Archives (hereafter GMA), Minnie Proctor Northrup diary, entries for September 1902, p. 15; and Lewis G. Thomas, 'The Rancher and the City: Calgary and Cattlemen, 1883-1914,' Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, vol. 6, series 4 (June 1968), pp. 203-15.

by a great many immigrant workers.⁸ A considerable number of Calgary working men volunteered to fight in the Boer War at the turn of the century, and again during the Great War.⁹ Furthermore, war brought the city's different classes together by stressing their common heritage. For example, ten thousand amassed people in Victoria Park in 1916 to send off Calgary's Eighty-Second Battalion.¹⁰ As John Herd Thompson has suggested, as far as the west was concerned the conscription crisis of 1916-17 has been over-emphasised by historians.¹¹ In Calgary, there was little sign that the issue provoked the sort of reaction seen elsewhere in Canada.¹²

⁸ L.G. Reynolds, The British Immigrant (Canada: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 213. See also, Ross McKibbin, 'Why Was There No Marxism in Great Britain?', English Historical Review, vol. 99, no. 391 (April 1984), pp. 310-14.

⁹ Albertan, 26 April 1902. For a general discussion of class, ethnicity and enlistment in the Boer War, see Carmen Miller, 'A Preliminary Analysis of the Socio-Economic Composition of Canada's South Africa War Contingents,' Social History, vol. 18, no. 16 (November 1975), pp. 219-37. See also Richard Price, An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War, 1899-1902 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

¹⁰ GMA, McCallum family papers, f. 3.

¹¹ John Herd Thompson, The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978), pp. 116-18. The standard work on labour and conscription remains Martin Robin, 'Registration, Conscription, and Independent Labour Politics, 1916-1917,' Canadian Historical Review, vol. 48, no. 2 (June 1966), pp. 101-18.

¹² See below, pp. 97-100.

Even in times of peace, working people in Calgary often went to considerable lengths and expense to demonstrate an attachment to their ethnic or national institutions. In order that his sons might attend the local procession to commemorate the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, stonemason John Gillespie had to borrow twenty dollars with which to purchase two new suits. In addition, he expressed his disgust with the mayor for the lack of preparations made for the event, calling him a "poor figurehead for Calgary."¹³ Working-class respect for the monarchy was seen again nine years later. When local socialist MLA Charles O'Brien referred to the recently deceased Edward VII as "a man who worked little and ate well," he was roundly condemned by workers in the city.¹⁴

As a second result of Calgary's cultural homogeneity, the individual worker stood to gain little by stressing his own Britishness. In particular, it did not provide him a marginal advantage in the search for work within an overcrowded labour market. This deliberate emphasis of identity has been noted in the case of other cities, notably Winnipeg, where British workers faced greater competition

¹³ GMA, John Gillespie diary, entries for 22, 30 January 1901.

¹⁴ Albertan, 27 May 1910, and A. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 64. Labour was also a strong supporter of the Victoria Day celebrations. Albertan, 6 May 1902.

from other nationalities.¹⁵ The collective British identity in Calgary rendered such practices redundant, as the Albertan suggested in 1909:

An advertisement with 'No Englishman Need Apply' would be nearly as much out of place as an advertisement with the limitation that 'No Canadian Need Apply.'¹⁶

The third and final feature was that working people shared many of the racist prejudices displayed by society at large.¹⁷ Carpenters walked off a building site rather than work alongside a Black; typographical workers enshrined anti-Chinese sentiments in their union's constitution; bricklayers and stonemasons passed a motion that "coon barber shops" be run out of business; and even socialist candidates opposed the presence of Asian labour on racist as

¹⁵ A. Ross McCormack, 'Networks among British Immigrants and Accommodation to Canadian Society, 1900-1914,' Social History, vol. 17, no. 34 (November 1984), pp. 357-74; 'Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada, 1900-1914,' Jorgen Dahlie & Tissa Fernando (ed.), Ethnicity, Power, and Politics in Canada (Toronto: Metheun, 1981), pp. 38-55.

¹⁶ Albertan, 29 November 1911.

¹⁷ Even the liberal and normally progressive Albertan called for an 'all-white' Alberta, referring to Blacks, Asians and native people as "undesirable citizens of the worst kind." Albertan, 6 April 1911. Howard Palmer discusses the complexity of provincial racism in Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), pp. 5-60.

well as utilitarian grounds.¹⁸ In this respect at least, the bonds of brotherhood were conspicuous by their absence.

In addition to a common cultural heritage, other aspects of Calgary's population retarded the process of class polarisation. Although this period has been identified as the 'closing of the frontier,' Calgary retained some characteristics typical of a frontier society.¹⁹ First, men continued to outnumber women although the gap was narrowing, from 5:3 in 1901 to 5:4 in 1911.²⁰ Second, the population remained predominantly youthful. The census of 1906 revealed that over one-third of Calgarians were aged between twenty and thirty-five, while less than one-tenth were over fifty.²¹ Recalling his time in the city, newspaperman Leonard Nesbitt noted that "it was a young man's town, you never saw a greybeard at that time and it was an electrifying place."²²

¹⁸ Labour Gazette, vol. 12, p. 39; GMA, International Typographical Union #449 minutes (hereafter ITU mins), 30 May 1905; GMA, Bricklayers and Stonemasons International Union #2 minutes (hereafter BSMIU mins), 3 April 1907; see comments made by socialist candidate Frank Sherman in Albertan, 17 October 1908.

¹⁹ Max Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1978), pp. 25-116.

²⁰ Census of Canada, 1901, vol. I, p. 131; ibid., 1911, vol. I, p. 2. The Calgary police census of 1907, however, suggested a ratio of 3:1. Albertan, 19 July 1907.

²¹ Census of the North West Provinces, 1906, pp. 80-85.

²² GMA, Leonard Nesbitt interview, pp. 6-7. See also GMA, Alex Calhoun interview, p. 3; and S.J. & H.S. Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada (Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing Co. Ltd., 1978), p. 70.

Finally, single men and women far outnumbered married couples and families. Moreover, the proportion of men within this unwedded population was actually increasing as the decade progressed.²³ Despite the closing of the frontier, then, Calgary apparently remained in this period a place for the young single man to seek his fortune.

This demographic composition had significance for labour's experiences, and for the creation of a working-class identity.²⁴ Entrepreneurial ambitions and aspirations were strong among much of the city's workforce. Men and women had come west to better their economic status, and few were completely satisfied with the prospect of remaining indefinitely in the class of wage-earners. Many tried their hands at setting up small business establishments - printing shops, contracting firms, pool halls and the like - and several risked what small savings they could amass in the booming real estate game.²⁵ Not all shared such aspirations,

²³ Census of Canada, 1901, vol. I, p. 131; *ibid.*, 1911, vol I, pp. 176-77. The figures for single men and women in 1901 and 1911, respectively, are: 1,828 and 1,258; and 24,104 and 12,374. In 1911 only one person in five was part of a family unit in Calgary.

²⁴ Elizabeth Taraska has suggested certain structural, as opposed to cultural, factors that shaped the particular collective identity of labour in Calgary. Elizabeth Taraska, 'The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-1920,' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975), pp. 1-2.

²⁵ GMA, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #348 correspondence (hereafter IBEW), box 2, f. 7; W.R. McCutcheon-J. Cunningham, 12 March, 29 August 1913; GMA, Thomas B. Riley interview, p. 10; GMA, A. Turner Bone papers, 'Calgary 1900-1910: As Seen By A Child' (unpublished MS), p. 4; Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada, pp. 73-74. See also Foran, Calgary: An Illustrated History, p. 84.

and not all accepted the totality of capitalism, but there were plenty who viewed it as their route to prosperity.

Possibly as a result of such aspirations, many workers were reluctant to indulge in the sort of rigid class polemic normally associated with turn-of-the-century industrial Britain.²⁶ It has been suggested by a number of labour historians that British immigrant workers brought with them class traditions as part of their 'cultural baggage,' but it is far from clear that this was the case in Calgary.²⁷ Class attitudes among workers in Calgary were formed anew through collective experience, and essentially reflected conditions met in Calgary. They were not something that immigrants unpacked and donned upon arrival.

It appears, then, that labour in Calgary shared many of the ambitions, preferences and prejudices exhibited by other groups in society. To an extent these counteracted the economic inequities collectively experienced by labour, and so masked the emergent lines of class. Nevertheless, in the period 1903-12 labour did develop a distinct and separate

²⁶ For instance, see E.H. Hunt, British Labour History, 1815-1914 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981), pp. 304-24; Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, third edition (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), pp. 93-122; Eric Hobsbawm, 'The "New Unionism" in Perspective,' Eric Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1984), pp. 152-75.

²⁷ A. Ross McCormack, 'British Working-Class Immigrants and Canadian Radicalism: The Case of Arthur Puttee,' Canadian Ethnic Studies, vol. 10, no. 2 (1978), pp. 22-37. Wayne Roberts questioned the strength of imported attitudes in 'Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Trade Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914,' Labour/Le Travailleur, 1 (1976), pp. 92-121.

identity that set it apart from other social groups or classes. At the heart of this development lies a number of questions. Did possibilities of advancement exist, beyond the rhetoric of boosters and the aspirations of the individual? How was labour as a distinct interest group perceived and assimilated by others? And what did working people themselves do to define, formulise and publicise their interests?

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, many newcomers to Calgary sought to emulate the early pioneers by making the transition from employee to entrepreneur. Some did succeed in this attempt, but they were far outnumbered by those who failed or otherwise remained behind. Behind this question of success or failure was the fact that the possibilities open to would-be entrepreneurs in the years 1903-12 were qualitatively different from those experienced by the city's early pioneers.

As both Paul Voisey and Max Foran have shown, those businessmen who amassed wealth and status in the quarter-century following Calgary's incorporation did so partly because they enjoyed certain advantages then present in Calgary's economic structure.²⁸ Despite millionaire Freddie

²⁸ Paul Voisey, 'In Search of Wealth and Status: An Economic and Social Study of Entrepreneurs in Early Calgary,' A.W. Rasporich & H.C. Klassen (ed.), Frontier Calgary: Town, City and Region (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart West, 1975), pp. 203-20; Paul Voisey, 'Calgary: Economic Growth of a Frontier City,' (unpublished paper, no

Lowe's later exhortation that "The futures are on the land, waiting to be picked up," requiring only "sound judgement, moderate capital, and a confident belief in the limitless future of the Dominion," opportunities for success in the years 1903-12 were far more restrictive.²⁹

Nineteenth-century pioneers in Calgary such as Pat Burns, William Roper Hull, A.E. Cross and Donald McLean, owed their rapid and impressive success to more than their undoubted capacity for hard work and an eye for a good deal. The timing was crucial. They entered business in a market that was practically free from competitors. They received substantial grants, exemptions and subsidies from a municipal council eager to attract capital and commerce. They could select from a labour market that was unorganised and without collective strength. And they benefitted from a complementary network of social, commercial and political connections.³⁰ As a result, by the turn of the century Calgary was dominated by a loose oligarchy of influential men who also ran civic politics first and foremost according to their industrial and commercial interests.³¹

date); Max Foran, 'The Boosters in Boosterism,' Urban History Review, vol. 8, no. 2 (October 1979), pp. 77-82.

²⁹ Illustrated London News, 28 December 1912.

³⁰ Voisey, 'In Search of Status and Wealth,' *passim*; Max Foran, 'The Civic Corporation and Urban Growth: Calgary 1884-1930' (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, 1981), pp. 97-98.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-21. For further social implications of the rise of this group of 'nouveaux riches' see Robert M. Stamp, 'The Response to Urban Growth: The Bureaucratization

The situation that faced men arriving in Calgary after 1903 was markedly different. The city's economy was increasingly dominated by firms bringing in capital from the United States, Britain and eastern Canada, firms that had the reserve capacity to withstand lean economic times, such as the 1907-09 recession.³² Again by the end of the century, labour had begun to organise itself into craft unions and was often able to force higher levels of remuneration for its services. As a result the newly-arrived lone entrepreneur met substantial difficulties in establishing a secure basis for his enterprise.

Machinist Thomas Riley tried his hand at a number of small ventures, only to face such problems. After a number of failed attempts to set himself up as an independent businessman, he eventually returned to his former trade working at the Ogden railway shops. It had been the prospect of such a fate that had originally inspired Riley's entrepreneurial ambitions.³³

Stanley Ferns was more successful, although ultimately his fall was all the greater. Ferns arrived in Calgary in

of Public Education in Calgary, 1884-1914, Rasporich & Klassen, Frontier Calgary, p. 159.

³² For example, see The Story of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Progress - Resources - Opportunities (Calgary: 1914), pp. 43-63; Prosperous Calgary (Calgary: 1908), passim; Calgary: The Land of Plenty (Calgary: Calgary City Council & Calgary Board of Trade, 1907), pp. 52-54; Industrial Canada, January 1912, p. 698; ibid., January 1913, p. 852.

³³ Riley interview, p. 10.

1910 and gained employment as a bricklayer. He soon ran into trouble, however, with the Bricklayers and Stonemasons' Union (BSMIU) for moonlighting on weekends. This dispute ended with Ferns giving the union official his membership card and telling him "to do with it what is indicated by a reverse V-sign."³⁴ Along with friend Ed Humphries, Ferns then set about forming a small contracting partnership that prospered over the next two years.

Only the boom in building kept their business afloat, however, for as Ferns himself admitted he placed short-term gains over long-term prospects.³⁵ The firm remained a vague partnership with unlimited liability, whose profits were increasingly fed into a series of real estate speculations. When the economic crash came in 1913, Ferns was left holding worthless undeveloped lots and a range of debts which he could repay only through further borrowing. By 1915 he had sent his wife and son back to her parents in Ontario and, with a dollar to his name, re-entered the labour market as a harvest worker.³⁶

Others succeeded with more lasting effect. Richard Brocklebank, John Gillespie, Lester Peers and James Hornby each established a reasonably successful contracting firm in the construction industry.³⁷ Adoniram Samis made a

³⁴ Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada, p. 71.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 79-82.

³⁷ Sources for each are as follows. Brocklebank: Why Go To Canada? (Calgary: Calgary Herald, 1910), p. 23, and

substantial fortune through real estate and business deals.³⁸ The case of David Black, however, serves as the clearest example of the remaining possibilities for success, and also of the factors crucial in determining that success.

David Ernest Black was born in Westport, Ontario in 1880, the son of a farmer. Upon graduation from high school he apprenticed for three years as a watchmaker, working for his brother-in-law George Castle.³⁹ He soon became restless, however, and was keen to move west where he believed there lay greater opportunities for the ambitious young man. This ambition might have remained unfulfilled but for two fortunate contacts. First, Calgary businessman William Wing was a friend of Black's mother, and was aware that the city's main jeweller's, L.H. Doll, was seeking a trained watchmaker. In 1903 he contacted Black, advising him there was a position for him if he could make his own way west.⁴⁰

Calgary News Telegram, 7 July 1916. Gillespie: GMA, City of Calgary Civic Government papers, f. 94. Peers: conversation with his great-grandson, Douglas M. Peers, and Henderson's Calgary Directory, 1910, p. 480. Hornby: GMA, James Abel Hornby papers.

³⁸ GMA, F.W. Samis, 'We Sought A Country' (unpublished MS), pp. 94-100.

³⁹ Details on David Black were drawn from the following sources: GMA, David Ernest Black papers, f. 4; GMA, D.E. Black clippings file; GMA, William Wing interview; Elsie C. & P.N.R. Morrison, Calgary 1875-1950: A Souvenir of Calgary's Seventy-Fifth Anniversary (Calgary: Calgary Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 107 & 246; City of Calgary Yearbook, 1919, p. 69.

⁴⁰ Wing interview, p. 13 .

The second contact made this move possible. Westport minister A.L. Bryan, another family friend, loaned Black forty dollars - a generous sum in 1903 - to cover the cost of the journey. He also gave him the advice, "Take your time to pay back and don't embarrass yourself - hope you have a safe and pleasant trip to Calgary - and that the positive exceeds your expectations."⁴¹

Black's expectations certainly were exceeded. After two years with Doll he had formed sufficient capital and contacts to go into business on his own, establishing a small watch repair shop on Eight Avenue East. Over the next decade the business prospered, both diversifying its range of services and cornering the market in specialised services such as diamond mounting. Black was soon able to repay his loan and to send money back to his parents in Ontario. For Christmas 1912, he sent his mother a set of thirty gramophone records, and gave his father sufficient money to pay off all his debts, to buy fuel for the winter, and after that to deposit three hundred dollars in the bank.⁴²

By 1913 Black was advertising his shop - then with a staff of sixty-two and occupying a substantial new premises - as 'The Largest Jewellers in Canada.'⁴³ In 1920 Black crowned his success when he accepted an offer of

⁴¹ David Ernest Black papers, f. 4, Bryan-Black, 21 September 1903.

⁴² Ibid., letters of 16 September 1906, 26 May 1907, 7 December 1907, 29 December 1907, and 25 December 1912.

⁴³ Albertan, 23 August 1972.

amalgamation from the national concern, Henry Birks & Sons. He retained his position as manager of the Calgary works, and eventually became director and then president of Birks' western division.

Black's experience was not unique, although it was perhaps singular in the extent of its success. What it underlined were the conditions and factors that made possible the transition from employee to employer: the contact with someone already established in business in Calgary; the access to some initial capital - however small⁴⁴ - that allowed movement from the wage system; and the possession of a specialised trade or talent that was not in direct competition with existing, heavily capitalised firms.⁴⁵

The experiences of those who did not succeed reinforce this picture. Thomas Riley put the failure of his short-lived machinists' shop down to trying "to do too much on too little"; brothers Jack and Sam Hackman had to send what little they could save back to their father, and so "were cut off from drawing out any capital for any business enterprise"; and Arthur Turner worked at various trades throughout this decade without ever managing to escape the

⁴⁴ A.J. Samis claims he entered upon his successful career in real estate investment by pawning his broken typewriter! Samis, 'We Sought A Country,' p. 78.

⁴⁵ The building trade was an obvious exception to this. Conditions were sufficiently buoyant for many new entrants to establish small businesses, although as suggested such firms would be the first to go under in the event of a financial depression.

confines of the wage system, despite an ambition equal to that of Black.⁴⁶

Despite ambition and aspiration, then, for many it was simply impossible to make the transition that Cushing, Cross and Burns *et al* had made with seeming ease in the nineteenth century. Structural problems in the changed nature of Calgary's economy were exacerbated by the city council's approach to new investments and businesses during this period. Understandably, city officials were eager to attract large, heavily-capitalised branch plants: the arrival of such firms, however, further reduced the 'small' man's chances of success. The council also passed a number of by-laws that effectively discriminated against the newly-arrived or transient entrepreneur.⁴⁷

Other labourers, despite the experience of economic hardship, simply did not aspire to become entrepreneurs. Instead, they sought improvement in their lives *as working people*, demanding a greater share of the wealth that labour produced in Calgary. When candidate Richard Brocklebank addressed a Labour Party meeting in 1906, he recommended that each working person purchase a cheap lot of land, in order to become enfranchised for the municipal election. One

⁴⁶ Riley interview, p. 10; S.J. & H.S. Ferns, Eighty-Five Years in Canada, pp. 72-5; GMA, Jack Hackman papers, p. 28; GMA, Arthur J. Turner Papers, *passim*.

⁴⁷ Foran, 'The Civic Corporation and Urban Growth,' pp. 96-104; City of Calgary papers, box 17, f. 101; Albertan, 18 May 1912.

member of the audience snorted in disgust that he "refused to be a capitalist even to the extent of one lot."⁴⁸

Despite the continuing encouragements voiced in booster publications, the years 1903-12 were a period of closing possibilities for those who came to Calgary seeking their fortune. Workers who regarded wage labour as a temporary situation had to adjust their ambition to the fact that success depended as much upon a convergence of favourable circumstances as it did upon sheer application.⁴⁹ The pattern of Calgary's economic development determined the lines that divided classes in the city: in this respect, membership in the working class was not a matter of choice for the individual. However, there were more subjective processes which shaped the nature and contours of that class and which shaped workers perception of same. In particular, the press and local politics helped produce a distinct labour identity, one that was recognised both by labour itself and by society at large.

Of the many newspapers produced in Calgary from 1903-13, only three covered the entire decade. The Calgary Herald, Albertan and the Eye Opener⁵⁰ commented on local

⁴⁸ Ibid., 14 November 1906.

⁴⁹ Henry Klassen has also written on the emergence of class differences despite the survival of an "open and fluid society." 'Life in Frontier Calgary,' p. 44.

⁵⁰ Bob Edwards' Eye Opener first made its appearance in 1903 in Calgary, and was published continually until his

social, political, and economic concerns, and together provide a useful source as they reflect three different attitudes towards labour. As one historian has argued, the Herald represented the "somehow interrelated Trinity of the British connection, the Conservative Party and the Canadian Pacific Railway."⁵¹ As such, it continued to espouse the pioneer ethos of free enterprise and self-help, and was the voice of the established business-political community.

The Albertan was the Herald's main local rival, and reflected the progressive concerns and interests of its editor, William Davidson.⁵² Although it expressed partisan support for the Liberals at election time, more generally the paper expressed independent and sympathetic views on labour issues.

Finally, Bob Edwards published a one-man independent scandal sheet, the Eye Opener, in which an idiosyncratic support for the Conservative party was balanced by a fierce determination to root out and expose social and economic injustices. The magazine Saturday Night captured the essence of the Eye Opener when in 1930 it commented that "it was...essentially an expression of its creator, the rapid

death in 1922, except for a brief hiatus from April 1909 to January 1911.

⁵¹ Max Foran, 'Bob Edwards and Social Reform,' Alberta Historical Review, vol. 21 (Summer 1973), p. 13.

⁵² For Davidson's political beliefs, see Anthony Mardiros, William Irvine: A Prairie Radical (Toronto: James Lorimer & C., 1979), p. 36.

unfolding and expansion of an exceptional, brilliant mind reflecting the changing environment of the opening west."⁵³

The Albertan and the Eye Opener championed labour's interests both indirectly and directly. For example, both papers endorsed and advocated an extension of municipal control, arguing that this would provide working people a fairer deal and better services.⁵⁴ They also, along with the Herald, focused public attention on Calgary's housing problem, especially after 1907 when conditions deteriorated dramatically. The press also made a connection between the presence of slum housing and the prevalence of contagious diseases within the city.⁵⁵ In an unequivocal editorial, the Eye Opener called for municipal health care for all who were "willing to pay BUT WHO CANNOT AFFORD IT, and whose sickness...[was] due to the criminal lack of sanitary precautions on the part of the civic authorities."⁵⁶

Provision of better sanitation, better health care, a municipally-owned public market, adequate social services, and unemployment relief were all issues that Davidson and Edwards addressed with genuine concern. In calling for such

⁵³ Saturday Night, 22 February 1930. For biographical details on Bob Edwards, see Grant MacEwan, Eye Opener Bob: The Story of Bob Edwards (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Arts Ltd., 1957).

⁵⁴ Albertan, 11 May 1907; Eye Opener, 11 March 1905, 7 October 1905.

⁵⁵ See the Calgary Annual Report, 1907-13, for the medical health officer's reports on disease in Calgary.

⁵⁶ Eye Opener, 30 September 1905, Albertan, 26 August 1908.

provisions, the press emphasised the existence of conditions and problems that were common to labour as a collective body. More directly, however, local papers also supported labour's struggle for better wages and working conditions, and defended the labour movement's claims for recognition.

Unions involved in labour disputes used the Albertan as a medium to publicise their own arguments and to defend their position.⁵⁷ The same paper, without solicitation, often expressed principled support for striking unions.⁵⁸ Davidson consistently supported the right of trades to organise and fervently recommended to workers to join their own organisations. In doing so, he refused to make a sharp distinction between the interests of labour as a movement and labour as a section of society:

...under present conditions the labour unions are not only necessary for the labouring man, but they are beneficial for the community. They keep up the standard of living and improve the product of the labouring man.⁵⁹

The Albertan therefore called upon working people to defend the city's unions, even if they were not members themselves. "The laboring man who is not a labor unionist is

⁵⁷ GMA, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America #1779 minutes (hereafter UBJCA mins), 10 June 1903.

⁵⁸ See above, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Albertan, 4 October 1906.

both unwise and ungrateful," argued Davidson in 1907.⁶⁰ If anything, the Albertan's support for labour became more voluble as the years passed, even to the extent of supporting the closed shop, arguing that if this did amount to "a form of coercion...no great principle is violated on account of it."⁶¹

The Eye Opener was less consistent in its support for labour. For example, while it championed the principle of organised labour and criticised the police's handling of local free speech demonstrations, it also opposed Brocklebank's electoral campaign in 1904.⁶² Nevertheless, if Edwards' support for labour was selective, there can be no doubt that it was genuine. In 1905 he even went as far as to place himself before the Typographical Union for selection as their labour candidate.⁶³

The local press also drew to the public's attention the existence of various events which underlined the growing sense of labour autonomy and accommodation. For example, the CTLC had organised a local union football league, whose

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6 September 1907.

⁶¹ Ibid., 28 October 1907. During the war, the Albertan supported the civic employees' bid to unionise claiming that they "do not need a union in order to keep up their wages, but they certainly need a union to protect themselves against the 'hob-nailed heel of despotism' which holds autocratic sway there [at city hall]." Ibid., 30 September 1915.

⁶² Eye Opener, 21 September 1907, 10 February 1912, and 7 May 1904.

⁶³ ITU mins, 4 October 1905.

results were covered regularly by the Albertan.⁶⁴ For a time the same paper also ran a page entitled 'Wage Earners' Symposium' that attracted local correspondence on social and political events of interest to labour. The notion that labour was distinct from the rest of society, but nevertheless had a clear position within that society was perhaps most clearly expressed in the papers' coverage of Labour Day.

Calgary celebrated Labour Day - the first Monday in September - from 1902 onwards, following the establishment of the CTLC the year before. That first year eleven unions took part in the procession; by 1908 there were thirty-five participating organisations. Within a few years of their inception, Labour Day celebrations followed a fairly standard pattern. In the morning union representatives - together with civic officials, local politicians, and other dignitaries - marched through the town in a procession that usually ended at Victoria Park, where a barbecue or similar refreshment was provided. The afternoon saw a full programme of competitive sports, with workers participating on an individual and union basis. In the evening there was usually a ball or concert arranged at one of the city's opera houses or theatres, although individual unions also staged their own smokers which often proved as attractive.

⁶⁴ GMA, Calgary Trades & Labour Council minutes (hereafter CTLC mins), 29 May 1913; BSMIU mins, 26 April 1912, 24 May 1912.

As the local press pointed out, what had originated as a general celebration of labour was quickly commandeered by the organised labour movement.⁶⁵ Again, however, it would be a mistake to draw too sharply a distinction between the two.⁶⁶ Practically all works and shops, whether organised or not, closed for the day, and the spectators along the procession route would run into the thousands. The procession itself could extend one or two miles.⁶⁷

This level of participation notwithstanding, it is difficult to gauge what sense of brotherhood may be inferred from Labour Day. Union attendance was 'encouraged' by the imposition of fines upon absentees, and action was sometimes taken against those stores which failed to observe the holiday. In 1907, for example, the CTLC moved that punitive action be taken against 'Baker the Dry Foods Man' for keeping his business open on the day.⁶⁸ It is also notable that the CTLC made little effort to solicit the participation of non-Anglo workers, who tended to carry on normal business as a result.

⁶⁵ The clearest example of this came in the 1906 celebrations, when 225 striking railwaymen were given place of honour in the procession in order to publicise their cause. Albertan, 8 September 1906.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6 September 1909.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5 October 1910.

⁶⁸ ITU mins, 30 August, 27 September 1904, 29 August 1905, 29 September 1906; BSMIU mins, 3 August 1904, 6 September 1907.

Both the Albertan and the Herald, almost without fail, produced Labour Day editorials eulogising the virtues and contributions of the 'Knights of Labour.'⁶⁹ The Herald referred to the occasion as "unreservedly a day in which labour's divinity rules supreme," while the Albertan claimed that "Calgary for its size has the best labor demonstration in all Canada."⁷⁰ Somewhat ironically, Calgary's labour had become one more element in the city's boosterism.

In the context of this study, Labour Day was of great symbolic importance: it was the clearest occasion on which the city consciously reflected upon the nature, strength and place of labour within society. If, as Elizabeth Taraska has argued, in this period labour was divided by craft (as opposed to being united by class) and was isolationist in temperament, then Labour Day was especially important as it stressed features and interests held in common.⁷¹

The involvement of politicians, businessmen and civic officials served to emphasise the dual processes of accommodation and differentiation which characterised the experience of labour. In their presence, speeches, and appeals for support and co-operation, these representatives of capitalism acknowledged the interests and concerns of

⁶⁹ Calgary Herald, 6 September 1905.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6 September 1904; Albertan, 4 September 1906.

⁷¹ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 88-89.

labour as a distinct class *as well as* one part of society.⁷² Second only in size to the week-long Dominion Exhibition celebrations, Labour Day was in this period resonant with implication.

Although Calgary labour received substantial coverage and support in the local press, it was felt by some that a more independent and informed labour paper was needed. There were some areas on which the CTLC felt that not even the sympathetic Albertan could be trusted to report with accuracy.⁷³ For example, the city's press were not admitted to the regular meetings of either the unions or the CTLC itself. Various attempts were therefore made to establish an independent labour paper.

The first of these was James Worsley's Bond of Brotherhood, which ran for one year from May 1903 to June 1904.⁷⁴ A founding member of the CTLC and of the General Labourers' Union and later a prominent figure in the Alberta Federation of Labor, Worsley sought to provide a quasi-Marxist interpretation of Calgary's development and to encourage political action in support of labour's aims.⁷⁵

⁷² In a letter to the Albertan, one Calgary worker commented critically on the absence of certain employers from the Labour Day celebrations. Ibid., 4 September 1906.

⁷³ BSMIU mins, 1 June 1911.

⁷⁴ Henry C. Klassen, 'The Bond of Brotherhood and Calgary Workingmen,' Rasporich & Klassen, Frontier Calgary, pp. 267-71.

⁷⁵ Bond of Brotherhood, *passim*; A.J. Heide (ed.), Union Label Guide of Calgary (Calgary: 1928), p.17. See also Worsley's obituary in Calgary Herald, 16 August 1948.

Although it is difficult to assess the paper's impact it is not clear that the Bond was ever, as one historian has argued, "a source of disunity within the labour community."⁷⁶ The year 1903 was one of great labour strife and industrial unrest, and at most the paper was an overstated reflection of these troubles.⁷⁷

The Bond ceased publication after thirteen months due to financial difficulties, a lack of political response, and Worsley's departure from Calgary.⁷⁸ None of the other three attempts to set up a labour paper was any more successful. The Standard, published under the aegis of socialist Robert Burgess, appeared briefly in 1907, but collapsed after a mere seven months, again due to financial pressure. Five years later, the Western Labour Review fared no better. Under the guidance of Harley Whitebread (member of the local Labour Party) and William Bancroft (vice-president of the CTLC), an editorial committee was established with instructions to give prominence to "the science of labour, women's issues and technical training."⁷⁹ Several unions gave their tentative support to the venture. However, within a year those same unions were attacking the Review "as being

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

⁷⁷ Bond of Brotherhood, 1903, *passim*, and Weekly Albertan, 1903, *passim* for details of the local strike wave in that year.

⁷⁸ Klassen, 'Bond of Brotherhood and the Calgary Working Man,' p. 268.

⁷⁹ Albertan, 25 November 1911.

a disgrace to organized labor" and were "of the opinion that the sooner it was suppressed or placed in competent hands...the better for unionism."⁸⁰

Obviously dissatisfied with these efforts, the CTLC took direct control of the next publication, the Alberta Federationist which appeared from 1912 to 1913. Yet even under the business-like charge of L.T. English, the Federationist met the same end as its three predecessors, again folding within a year.⁸¹

The ambivalence shown by labour towards the establishment of an independent press was mirrored in its attitudes towards the question of independent political action. The faltering attempts to form a local electoral labour party in the years 1903-12 met persistent obstacles. Partyism was entrenched among much of the voting workforce; union locals were often averse to the prospect of funding political campaigns; and franchise requirements, in terms of income, property and residency, effectively excluded large numbers from the democratic process.⁸² Nevertheless, some

⁸⁰ ITU mins, 31 August 1912. It is not clear why the Review received such animosity from the unions. In terms of editorial policy, there are suggestions that unlike its two predecessors, it leaned more towards straight labourism than socialism. BSMIU mins, 10 November 1911.

⁸¹ English had previously attempted to salvage the Review. ITU mins, 28 September 1912.

⁸² Foran, 'The Civic Corporation and Urban Growth,' pp. 91-93.

advances were made and these helped shape labour's own perception of itself as a class.

Three separate groups courted the workingman's vote in this period. First, there were what have been termed 'workingmen's friends,' politicians who while not labourers themselves posed as allies and spokesmen for the emergent working class. Second, there were 'true' labourites, men who ran for office as working craftsmen seeking ameliorative reforms. Finally, there was a small but vocal group of socialists, whose position vacillated between the endorsement of labourism and the advocacy of 'class war.'⁸³

In his pioneering work on politics and Canadian labour, Martin Robin characterised the two types of 'workingmen's friends' as 'foxy' and 'by proxy.'⁸⁴ The former paid only lip-service to the support of labour, and "did not believe in class distinction and class legislation or anything remotely related thereto" but were simply after a few marginal votes.⁸⁵ The latter were those politicians whose

⁸³ Good discussions of labour politics in this period include: Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, pp. 79-103; McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries, pp. 53-97; Craig Heron, 'Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,' Labour/Le Travail, vol. 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 45-76; H. Clare Pentland, 'The Western Canadian Labour Movement, 1897-1919,' Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, vol. 3. no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1979), pp. 53

⁸⁴ Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, pp. 1-18. For a similar discussion in the context of mid-nineteenth century Toronto, see Gregory Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), *passim*.

⁸⁵. Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, p. 4.

attachment was more genuinely motivated, either through their erstwhile status as labourers or through principled concern for labour conditions and welfare.

In Calgary, R.B. Bennett was a classic illustration of a 'foxy' friend. A successful lawyer and rabid conservative, he nevertheless attempted to woo the labour vote early in his political career by expressing concern for the city's workers. In July 1902 he attended a meeting held in support of striking carpenters, at which he stated his belief that if trade organisation was good for lawyers and doctors then it must also be good for labour. Furthermore, he declared:

So long as I live, I will give my best efforts to any labour organisation which endeavours to uphold the right causes, makes better the homes of the people and tends to build up a strong reliant race.⁸⁶

Bennett's lifelong pledge was soon found to be wanting, however. In the reciprocity election of 1911 the Albertan drew readers' attention to his record on labour legislation, detailing for instance his opposition to the Workmen's Compensation Act.⁸⁷ Earlier in the same year, rumours that Bennett's campaign organisers had attempted to coerce civic workers into voting for him gained sufficient credence that

⁸⁶ Albertan, 18 July 1902. See also 1912 comments in Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁷ Albertan, 11 November 1911.

the mayor was compelled to issue a statement reassuring employees that their vote would be safeguarded.⁸⁸

Although vast numbers of workers maintained their support for such Conservative or Liberal allies, many were sceptical of the credentials claimed by same. At a Labour Party meeting in 1906, lawyer and alderman C.A. Stuart appealed for support, claiming that he already had adopted most of the party's platform. The crowd remained unimpressed, and jeered him off stage with cries of "anything to get our vote" and "looking for insurance."⁸⁹

Other figures were regarded with more favour. These were commonly those middle-class politicians who, despite having made the transition from labourer to employer, retained personal links and an ideological affinity with labour. The instances of A.J. Samis and A.G. Graves serve to illustrate.⁹⁰

Adoniram Judson Samis came to Calgary in 1906, aged thirty-two. An Ontarian Baptist minister's son, Samis was largely self-educated and worked at a number of trades before moving into the teaching and journalist

⁸⁸ Ibid., 14, 15 September 1911.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 14 November 1906.

⁹⁰ M.C. 'Mike' Costello, a typographical worker who became a practicing doctor and then mayor in 1915, retained the support and admiration of many workingmen. ITU mins, 30 November 1912. However, there were also signs of criticism of Costello in some quarters. IBEW, box 2, f.12, Pearson-Broeckx, 8 April 1915, and Ritchie-Broeckx, 12 April 1915.

professions.⁸¹ A successful venture into real estate enabled him to abandon these and concentrate on municipal politics, which had long interested him.

Political success came quick for Samis. He was elected alderman twice, in 1907 and 1910, before becoming a commissioner in 1912. He was also a founding member of the Calgary Citizen's League and Reform Party. In all his political activities he fought for a city free from corruption and graft, for the municipal ownership of all public utilities, and for a more efficient form of local government. He was instrumental in the success of the city's electric light plant, and in 1913 he intervened on behalf of the municipal labour bureau, which at the time was threatened with closure.

Arthur Garnett Graves was of similar age and disposition to Samis. Born in Lincoln, England in 1877, this educated farmer's son came to Canada in 1897 where he worked first as a builder and then as a machinist, becoming a member of the local boilermaker's union.⁸² He was elected alderman for the first time in 1905, whereupon he directed

⁸¹. He had previously established the short-lived Olds Oracle. For further biographical details, see: Samis, 'We Sought a Country'; A.O. MacRae, History of the Province of Alberta, vol. II (Canada: Western Canada Co., 1912), pp. 1014-15.

⁸² Calgary Yearbook, 1919, p. 67 and Riley interview, p. 11. For further biographical details, see: GMA, A.G. Graves interview, *passim*; MacRae, History of Alberta, vol II, pp. 640-41.

the municipal water and electric departments until 1908.⁹³ In 1915 when the city street railwaymen struggled to organise in the face of opposition led by Superintendent McCauley, it was Graves who intervened on their behalf, ultimately forcing the removal of McCauley.⁹⁴ In the years 1903-12, Graves was elected alderman more times than any other individual, in part due to the continuing support he received from working men.⁹⁵

This tradition of genuine 'workingmen's friends' culminated in 1913 with the election of H.A. Sinnott as mayor, and Samis and Graves as commissioners.⁹⁶ Yet there were clearly limitations to such men's ability to represent labour, and consequently to labour's acceptance of them. Samis, for instance, upheld a complaint that city workers should not be allowed to roll their own cigarettes on the job, on the grounds that this cost Calgary ratepayers the estimated princely sum of \$500 per year.⁹⁷ Workers began to

⁹³ For details of this, see W.E. Hawkins, Electrifying Calgary: A Century of Public and Private Power (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1987), pp. 96-99. See also Max Foran, 'Electric Power and Natural Gas in Calgary, 1880-1940: The Fruits and Follies of Institutional Pragmatism,' (unpublished paper, 1982).

⁹⁴ Albertan, 2 September, 8 October 1915.

⁹⁵ Ging G.G. Wong, Calgary's Civic Government: A Structural History (Calgary: Glenbow Archive Institute, 1978), pp. 26-29; Riley interview, p. 11.

⁹⁶ Calgary Annual Report, 1913, p. 3; Alberta Federation of Labor, Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Convention, Calgary, 12-14 October 1914, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Albertan, 14 October 1913.

turn against Graves in later years when "he gradually lost all respect for the labour men because from being a boilermaker he became a professional commissioner."⁸⁸ Eventually labour mounted an organised opposition to him and Graves was 'deposed' in 1930.

The shortcomings of representation by proxy were noted by union leader John Pearson in 1906 at a meeting of the Calgary Labour Party:

...the men of the so-called working class in Calgary were divided into two classes, those who had come here as working men and had become capitalists and those who had come here as capitalists and become grafters. Their [the party's] choice belonged to neither of these classes.⁸⁹

Pearson, along with others in the labour movement, argued for the rejection of partyism and the establishment of independent representation.

Labour politics in Calgary, 1903-12, may be roughly divided into three periods. In the first, 1903-05, the Labour Party was little more than a political club, with no electoral machinery. The central figure in these years was Richard A. Brocklebank, the party's president and a prominent official in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America #1779 (UBCJA).

⁸⁸ Riley interview, p. 11.

⁸⁹ Albertan, 14 November 1906

In 1903 Brocklebank ran successfully for alderman in the municipal elections, although as an independent rather than a labour candidate. He had rightly calculated that by doing so he would gain support from both workers and businessmen alike.¹⁰⁰ In 1905, Brocklebank was re-elected alderman, this time as a labour candidate, and in this year the Labour Party also sponsored a candidate in Alberta's first federal election. A.D. MacDonald, again a carpenter, fought with the backing of several unions but failed badly to consolidate labour support. He received just 328 votes, it being claimed by the Herald that most labouring men had stood by the Liberal candidate, William Cushing.¹⁰¹

The next three years were a period of failure and stagnation for the party. In 1906 Brocklebank rather reluctantly ran for the office of mayor only to be beaten by grocer John Emerson.¹⁰² Such was the subsequent demoralisation among party activists that only eleven supporters turned up to hear Brocklebank's post-election

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4 December 1906. In all, Brocklebank served six terms as a 'labour' alderman, in 1903, 1905, 1909, 1910, 1911, and 1912. Ging G.G. Wong, Calgary's Civic Government, p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Calgary Herald, 9 November 1905. For details on Cushing as another 'workingman's friend,' see Foran, 'The Civic Corporation and Urban Growth,' p. 89.

¹⁰² For details on Emerson, see Jean Leslie *et al.*, 'Good Morning, Your Worship,' Past and Present: People, Places and Events in Calgary (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), pp. 129-33.

address.¹⁰³ A call from the Lethbridge TLC for Calgary unions to support a provincial labour party was roundly rejected. On a more positive note, the local party was in these years re-organised as a purely electoral body.¹⁰⁴

The final phase ran from 1908 to 1912. It was in these years that labour politics became more clearly distinguished from those of other parties, and developed more definite objectives. At the same time, however, it must be stressed that labour support for non-labour candidates continued to undermine the Labour Party's fortunes.¹⁰⁵ Also, the political apathy which had marked the earlier years persisted. When aldermanic candidates were invited to address the CTLC in the 1911 elections, they all but outnumbered the audience.¹⁰⁶ Finally, this was also the period in which the local branch of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) made its first tentative entry into electoral politics.

Although Brocklebank would twice more be elected as a nominal labour candidate, it was clear that he had moved considerably to the right during the 1906-08 hiatus. In large part this reflected his transition from carpenter to

¹⁰³ Albertan, 14 November, 11 December 1906, 27 February 1907.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 4 August 1906; BSMIU mins, 18 July 1906.

¹⁰⁵ For example, a significant number of workers supported John Mitchell in the 1910 mayoralty election. Albertan, 2 February 1911.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1 December 1911.

contractor, taking over Thomas Underwood's construction firm in 1907.¹⁰⁷ The issue of the Carnegie Library highlighted this switch of loyalty.

In 1906, Brocklebank had followed CTLC policy and told members of the UBCJA that he resolutely opposed the building of a public library if a grant from millionaire Andrew Carnegie was to be the primary source of funds:

...it would be better for Carnegie to help support the widows and orphans of the men who were killed every year in the steel works of Pittsburgh than to donate his money to free libraries.¹⁰⁸

Yet just three years later Brocklebank had few qualms when his own firm was awarded the \$67,000 contract to build the same library.¹⁰⁹ Brocklebank's diminishing associations with labour were underlined in 1911 when he was elected president of the Builders' Exchange, an employers' organisation. His political links with labour finally ended when in 1912 he again failed to be elected mayor, and a year later when he lost his seat as alderman. Brocklebank's

¹⁰⁷ C.W.Parker (ed.), Who's Who, and Why, vol. 3 (Toronto: International Press, 1913), pp. 84-85.

¹⁰⁸ Albertan, 20 March 1906.

¹⁰⁹ Rev. J.A. Clark, 'Calgary's Carnegie Library,' Why Go To Canada (Canada: Calgary Herald, 1910), p.73; Albertan, 26 February 1910.

transition was completed around the same time, when he became a member of the local Conservative party.¹¹⁰

The relationship between the Labour Party and the Calgary branch of the SPC was at best unstable, ranging from the socialists' support for labour candidates during municipal elections to their attempt in 1913 to force the selection of their candidate T. Berg in place of labourite Alex Ross.¹¹¹ For a number of years the Calgary SPC, like the Labour Party, was more a political club than an electoral organisation. As such it had managed to attract fairly substantial audiences to its meetings and lectures, and the local press in these years often carried extensive correspondence and features debating the merits of socialism.¹¹²

Among the most active and vocal socialists were James Worsley - the party's organiser in Calgary prior to his departure in 1904 - and Robert Burgess. Leading union officials such as Arthur Masters and George Howell were also

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1 June 1911, 10 December 1912; Parker, Who's Who, and Why, p. 85. By this time, Brocklebank had also become a leading opponent of the spread of 'international' unionism in Calgary, and opposed the unionisation of the city's street railwaymen. Ibid., 12 January 1912, 12 April 1912.

¹¹¹ See Robert Burgess letter to the Albertan, 20 November 1906; on the 1913 conflict, see ibid., 25 March 1913.

¹¹² Ibid., and 9 August 1906, 15 December 1906. In 1909 socialist Charles O'Brien addressed a Conservative Party election meeting and received a sympathetic hearing from the audience, who according to the Albertan were "open-minded to the verge of rebellion." Ibid., 12 October 1909.

committed to the cause, and there are indications that many other union members were attracted to the party.¹¹³ In 1908, twenty-one out of sixty-two members of the BSMIU voted for the CTLC to adopt a socialist platform; a year later BSMIU president Alex Ross had to use his deciding vote to prevent the same union from funding the SPC candidate; and in 1914 the CTLC gave its full blessing to the socialists' campaign for universal suffrage.¹¹⁴

However, a number of popular conceptions of the SPC limited the potential support for the local branch. For example, the public often associated socialism with 'foreigners' and 'idlers.'¹¹⁵ A young stenographer, whose revelations of life in Calgary were published in the Albertan in 1914, wrote of her friend 'Mr Stoop' and his belief in socialism:

He did not believe in work, but had a theory that the world owed him a living. He put this theory into practice on every possible occasion. For an hour at a time he would sit with his feet on his desk, his chair tilted back, a cigarette in his mouth, and his eyes shut, dreaming his socialistic dreams, and I

¹¹³ CTLC mins, 7 August 1914.

¹¹⁴ BSMIU mins, 10 April 1908, 5 March 1909; CTLC mins, 24 July 1914.

¹¹⁵ Albertan 7 September 1908, 13 May 1909. The 'foreigners' jibe was not totally without basis: the Socialist Convention in Calgary in 1911 was attended by a disproportionate number of mid- and east-Europeans. *Ibid.*, 7 May 1911. However, the party leaders, such as George Howell, Arthur Masters, John Harrison and Robert Burgess, were all good Anglo-Saxons of British origin.

used to wonder if the time were far distance [sic] when he would be given a bit of sound advice and escorted to the door.¹¹⁶

Socialism was also accused of being "destructive to family ties, private property and to religion."¹¹⁷ Here the party did itself few favours when, in 1909, it sought to prohibit religious instruction from public schools.¹¹⁸ Its 'revolutionary' reputation was further enhanced in 1908 when Louis Riel's former secretary, Will Jackson (by then known as Honoré Jaxon), became an active committee member.¹¹⁹

The SPC's opposition to, and criticism of, the British Empire may also have limited its appeal to a predominantly British labour force.¹²⁰ The historical 'un-Britishness' of socialism in this period certainly caused otherwise sympathetic editors to offer only guarded approval.¹²¹ The

¹¹⁶ Hugh A. Dempsey (ed.), 'Confessions of a Calgary Stenographer,' Alberta History, vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1988), p. 9. See also GMA, Jean MacDonald papers, f. 1, pp. 42-43

¹¹⁷ Albertan, 16 March 1908.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 28 June 1909.

¹¹⁹ Donald B. Smith, 'Rip Van Jaxon: The Return of Riel's Secretary in 1884-1885 to the Canadian West, 1907-1909,' F. Laurie Barron & James B. Waldram, 1885 and After: Native Society in Transition (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986), p. 217.

¹²⁰ Albertan, 10 May 1909

¹²¹ See Henry Collins, 'The Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation,' Asa Briggs & John Saville (ed.), Essays in Labour History, 1886-1923 (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1971), pp. 47-69. See also, Albertan, 7 September 1908; Eye Opener, 3 June 1911.

Albertan supported some of socialism's principles, but remained sceptical of the worth or relevance of a political party based on same:

In Calgary the strength of the organisation is not to be considered at present: they have but little support among the members of organized labor and until great changes are made in their platform, or ideals...the trade unionist and the socialist can have but little in common.¹²²

Throughout this period the Albertan maintained that the Socialist Party should perform a purely educational function by drawing people's attentions to problems and possible solutions. Its entry into electoral politics would serve only to split the labour vote.¹²³

Finally, it appears that the local police may have discriminated against the SPC because of its radical reputation and ethnic composition. In 1908 Serbian miner Alec Susnar was arrested while attempting to organise foreign workers at an open air meeting. Although charges were pressed and a conviction was achieved, Susnar's innocence of any genuine offence was later confirmed when he was acquitted.¹²⁴ Fred Hyatt, the city's SPC organiser, accused officers of conducting a programme of harrassment,

¹²² Albertan, 10 February 1912. See also Eye Opener, 14 July 1906 and 3 June 1911.

¹²³ Albertan, 28 Februray 1902.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 8 September 1908, 2 March 1909.

which included the tearing down of the party's notices from lamp posts, despite the fact that those of the Salvation Army and the city's Young Men's Club were left in place.¹²⁵

The socialists had practically no electoral success in Calgary. The party's first major electoral venture in 1909 ended in disappointment and disgrace. Candidate Charles O'Brien quit the local campaign halfway through in order to run in the Rocky Mountain constituency, blaming this on a lack of funds and support in Calgary.¹²⁶ Frank Sherman, president of District 18 of the United Mine Workers, stood as a socialist candidate in another Calgary ward. Before the election day, however, the Albertan ran a story that he had privately endorsed the candidature of Liberal rival W.H. Cushing.¹²⁷ Despite Sherman's explanation that this support had been a tactical move, intended to maintain good future relations with a potentially useful ally, he was eventually expelled from the SPC for his duplicity.¹²⁸ Even with union backing and sporadic support from the Albertan, no socialist candidate in this period was able to garner more than six or

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 18 March 1909. O'Brien won the Rocky Mountain contest by thirty-three votes. See also Warren Caragata, 'The Labour Movement in Alberta: An Untold Story,' David Leadbeater (ed.), Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1984), p. 113.

¹²⁷ Albertan, 29 March 1909.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 20 April 1909.

seven hundred votes in a city whose labouring population numbered tens of thousands.¹²⁹

In the years 1903-12 the Calgary SPC thus retained the nature of a sect rather than of an effective political force.¹³⁰ As in Saskatoon, labourism remained the dominant indigenous ideology among Calgary workers.¹³¹ Yet even in the case of labourism large-scale positive commitment remained fragile and tenuous. Party organisers frequently complained of the apathy that characterised local elections. Even the CTLC suffered from such ennui. In 1911, a delegate from the ITU reported back to his union the details of a particularly frustrating meeting. Having listened to an exhaustive debate on the seating arrangements provided in the labour hall, he relayed his opinion that:

...there were more chairs than members present, [and] consequently he could not understand why the demand for more chairs - he was of the opinion that it was cheers that was wanted to instill more vim in the T & L Meetings.¹³²

¹²⁹ The city voters' list for 1909 stood at 8,996, or approximately one quarter of the entire population. By 1913, the total of 33,875 eligible voters represented more than forty-two percent of same. Calgary Annual Report, 1913, p. 9.

¹³⁰ In 1909 the estimated membership of the party was only thirty. McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries, p. 68.

¹³¹ Glen Makahonuk, 'Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers,' pp. 189-204.

¹³² ITU mins, 29 July 1911.

Labour's entry into politics in Calgary's expansionary period cannot be considered an unequivocal success. The only successful candidate, either labourite or socialist, in any election was Richard Brocklebank; and certainly after 1908 it is doubtful whether many workers considered him a true labour representative.

Despite this lack of direct and tangible success in local politics, the process of electoral contests, the debates over platforms and principles, and the affirmation of an independent political interest did help to shape labour's perception of itself.¹³³ Pride and independence formed important elements of this identity. In a letter to the Albertan in 1913, a correspondent signing herself 'A Working Woman' angrily rejected recent comments made by Miss Boulton to the Daughters of Empire organisation. Boulton had apparently told the meeting that the promise of "a good feed" would be sufficient to attract "the lower classes" to Canada. The correspondent retorted that:

...we have inhaled too deeply the pure free air of the prairies to submit to patronage from anyone and we have resources enough...to throw back in scorn any such insulting invitation from any organization that will tolerate annoyance, pretension and snobbishness.¹³⁴

¹³³ UBCJA mins, 28 September 1905.

¹³⁴ Albertan, 3 June 1913.

Pride and independence did not preclude a continuing desire for integration into and accommodation within society. Indeed, one of the main arguments of the above writer was that local clubs and societies should adopt a more open attitude towards membership. She believed that "exclusiveness [would] only create divisions and disturb harmony."¹³⁵ The conscious and unconscious processes that developed labour's collective identity and awareness did not take place at the expense of other, assimilative processes. On the contrary, the two were complementary, one reinforcing the other. In the case of Labour Day, for example, the unique experiences and interests of labour were stressed by workers, speech-making politicians and the local press. At the same time, however, it was argued that these interests were harmonious with those of society. At the least it was assumed that they could be accommodated without jeopardising Calgary's existing social fabric.

Labour played an important role in a number of collective or co-operative measures that reinforced this sort of belief. For example, there was strong labour participation in and support for the Associated Charities Association, the Children's Aid Society, the municipal labour bureau and the Consumers' League. In each case organised labour acted out of self-interest, but was seen to be assisting wider social movements.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 22 May 1913 for details of the Consumers' League. See also Sheila Moore Johnston, 'Giving Freely of

Labour also loaned its support to the introduction of technical education in the city, for the development of municipal ownership of utilities and services, and for the extension of library hours on Sundays.¹³⁷ At the same time, however, workers collectively continued to forge an autonomous and separate identity. Despite initial lacklustre support and many financial problems, the city's labour movement finally managed to establish a labour temple in 1912. The working class had erected a monument to its own arrival and status within society.¹³⁸

The development or making of a working class in Calgary's period of capitalistic boom was thus a complex, fragmentary and often contradictory process. Economic, cultural, and political factors combined and reacted to form, for want of a better term, a social matrix within

Her Time and Energy: Calgary Public Women, 1910-1930' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1988), pp. 20-26. Representatives of the league had previously canvassed the city's unions for financial and moral support for this attempt to provide low-cost food. Such support was granted. ITU mins, 23 October 1913; BSMIU mins, 5 December 1913.

¹³⁷ Technical education: BSMIU mins, 8 February 1911; ITU mins, 24 September 1910; CTLC mins, 17 April, 1 May 1914. Municipal ownership: ITU mins, 30 November 1912; BSMIU mins, 16 February 1912. Public library: ITU mins, 25 January 1913.

¹³⁸ GMA, Calgary Labour Temple papers, *passim*. There had been an abortive attempt to establish a labour temple in 1906, which was eventually abandoned in April 1908 due to a lack of financial and organisational support. This failure led many locals to be wary of investing in the second, more successful endeavour. BSMIU mins, 2 May, 16 May 1906, 24 May, 2 August 1912; ITU mins, 25 April 1908, 17 August 1912. See also Alberta Report, 5 December 1980.

which working people lived from day to day. It was not a closed world: wider social interaction remained possible and actual. Yet as far as movement from one form of economic existence to another was concerned, this was a period of closing possibilities. It is against this background that the experience of depression, war and alleged post-war revolt must be assessed.

Chapter III

Calgary, 1913-1919: The City of Certainties?

We are living at a time when the fates are busy nurturing destiny. The life below looks but confusedly at the surface, but there can be no uncertainty as to its meaning....The fresh point of view - that of the man who labors for a living - is approaching questions of religion, politics, administration and is hammering out its principles, and expressing needs which are pressing themselves upon the attention of every country under Heaven. Will Calgary lead or follow?¹

Nineteen-nineteen saw neither revolution nor revolt in Calgary, nor even a significant display of radicalism. The fabled summer of that year witnessed instead a confirmation of the objectives, principles and beliefs that labour had established over the preceding two decades. Certainly the experience of five years' depression and war had an effect, but it was an effect that has been much misunderstood and overstated by historians. For those men and women who formed Calgary's working class the events of 1919 were not a denouement, but part of a much longer and more influential experience, one that stretched back to the turn of the century and forward across the following decade.

¹ Calgary Morning Albertan (hereafter Albertan), 3 December 1915.

The standard interpretation of Calgary labour's experience in the years 1913-19 is clear and uncomplicated.² The depression of 1913 ended the alleged prosperity of the boom; the war which quickly followed "created a new spirit of militancy" and "sparked a radical consciousness heretofore unknown to local organized labour."³ Smouldering economic discontent was given a political focus in 1916-17 by the Borden government's introduction of conscription; and allegations of profiteering made against certain of Calgary's manufacturers sharpened a sense of class-consciousness. The growth of labour radicalism became evident in 1918 with a number of sympathy strikes held in support of the city's freighthandlers, and again in 1919 when workers struck in support of the Winnipeg general strike. Only after the defeat in Winnipeg and the return to work of Calgary strikers did the so-called 'conservative' leaders regain control of the Calgary labour movement.

This interpretation has become orthodoxy, dovetailing satisfactorily as it does with existing studies of Winnipeg and other strike centres.⁴ However, it is weakened by a

² Elizabeth Taraska, 'The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-1920' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975), pp. 46-87; Alimohamed Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism: The Calgary Labour Movement, 1919-1924' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1987), pp. 50-111. Warren Caragata, Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979), pp. 29-81. All three agree on essentials.

³ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. 46.

⁴ David Jay Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg: Industrial Relations and the General Strike (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974). See also, for example, Tom Mitchell, 'Brandon, 1919: Labour and Industrial

number of defects, which together cast significant doubt on the underlying thesis that war-time radicalism and tensions between supporters of craft and industrial unionism culminated in a labour revolt in 1919.

First, the timing of events is itself problematic. The worst of the war-time crisis came in 1915-16, with no resultant revolt by labour. By the spring of 1916 a majority of trades were reporting satisfactory conditions to the Calgary Trades and Labour Council (CTLC), and the local correspondent to the Labour Gazette recorded a similar improvement.⁵ By the time of the Winnipeg strike in 1919, the situation regarding real wages, unemployment and trade prospects was generally better than it had been in 1916. The course of labour's development, 1913-19, cannot therefore be explained as a spiralling growth of radicalism in response to deteriorating economic conditions.

Second, the *a priori* assumption that events in Calgary were a response to, and must thus resemble, events in Winnipeg has spawned a forced interpretive framework.⁶ The situation in Calgary was not that of Winnipeg writ small, but was the product of its own particular influences and tensions. The specific experiences of Calgary labour must be

Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike,' Manitoba History (Spring 1989), pp. 2-11.

⁵ Glenbow Museum Archives (hereafter GMA), Calgary Trades and Labour Council minutes (hereafter CTLC Mins), ff. 1-6, *passim*; Labour Gazette, 1913-19, *passim*.

⁶ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 62-81; Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 55-89.

considered within their own context if an accurate pattern of development is to be drawn.

Third, the recent historiographical debate whether or not labour in the west was, *per se*, more radical than that in central and eastern Canada has led to further unsubstantiated conclusions.⁷ Historians who have argued that the west was more radical have focused mainly on Winnipeg, the coal fields of southern Alberta, and British Columbia.⁸ No evidence has been offered to show that prairie urban centres such as Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton or Calgary shared in this tradition of radicalism.⁹ Calgary's mere

⁷ David J. Bercuson has argued most forcefully for the existence of western radicalism: 'Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1897-1919,' Canadian Historical Review, vol. 48, no. 2 (June 1977), pp. 154-77; 'Regionalism and 'Unlimited Identity' in Western Canada,' Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 121-6; 'Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writings,' Labour/Le Travailleur, 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 95-112. For an opposing view, see Gregory S. Kealey, 'Labour and Working Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s,' Labour/Le Travailleur, 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 67-94; '1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,' ibid., 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 11-44. A tentative middle ground was suggested by A. Ross McCormack in 'The Western Working-Class Experience,' W.J.C. Cherwinski & Gregory S. Kealey (ed.), Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1985), pp. 115-26. For a more general discussion, see Garth Stevenson, 'Canadian Regionalism in Continental Perspective,' Journal of Canadian Studies, vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 1980), pp. 16-27.

⁸ Bercuson, 'Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier,' and A. Ross McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

⁹ Recent work by Glen Makahonuk on Saskatoon has suggested the contrary: 'Class Conflict in a Prairie City: The Saskatoon Working-Class Response to Prairie Capitalism,

geographical location should not be used as a ready explanation of political and industrial events.

Finally, a recurrent confusion between 'radicalism' and 'militancy' has marred much recent labour historiography.¹⁰ In a 1977 article, David Bercuson emphasised the need to distinguish between the two: radicalism denotes particular political and social *aims*; militancy characterises the *tactics* employed to achieve those or any other aims. The two terms should not be treated synonymously.¹¹ Despite this warning, many historians have continued to use the terms interchangeably, and in result have described militant attempts to realise orthodox objectives as instances of radicalism. This especially has been the case in Calgary as far as the events of 1918 and 1919 are concerned.¹²

Standard interpretations of Calgary labour have thus suffered from a confusion of terminology; a vague, unsubstantiated economic determinism; and a whiggish view of history that has all events leading inexorably to an

1906-19,' Labour/Le Travail, 19 (Spring 1987), pp. 89-124; 'Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers: A Case Study In Saskatchewan Labourism, 1906-1919,' Prairie Forum, 1985, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 189-204.

¹⁰ Both Marxist and non-Marxist labour historians have erred in this fashion.

¹¹ Bercuson, 'Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier,' pp. 155-6.

¹² Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 46, 56, 62. This confusion reached its peak in Damji's study of Calgary, where he noted the existence of a "labour radicalism...quite moderate in nature" and even coined the phrase, "conservative labour radicalism." Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 50, 58.

outburst of radicalism in 1919. The historical evidence itself, however, suggests a different interpretation, in which 1919 was one stage in longer term developments rather than a critical juncture in labour's history.

On 1 May 1919, the Royal Commission established to "enquire into Industrial Relations in Canada" rolled into Calgary as part of its transcontinental tour. Over the course of the next three days, twenty-seven witnesses aired their grievances, described social and economic conditions in Calgary, and offered chairman T.G. Mathers their opinions as to the causes of local unrest.¹³ Coming just three weeks before the Winnipeg strike, the evidence given in Calgary has been scoured by historians to provide proof of radicalism within the city's labour movement.¹⁴ On the contrary, closer examination of the given statements reveals a far more complex and less certain state of affairs.

Behind the Commission's general mandate to inquire into the nature of industrial unrest lay a more specific aim. This was to gain support for the federal government's proposed worker-employer councils, inspired by and modelled

¹³ Canada, Evidence given to the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, 1919 (Calgary: 1-3 May 1919).

¹⁴ Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' p. 54; Gregory S. Kealey, '1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,' p. 15. David Bercuson discusses the limitations of the 1919 Commission as evidence in a new chapter for the forthcoming republication of Confrontation at Winnipeg. I thank Dr. Bercuson for an advance copy of this chapter.

on the British Whitley councils.¹⁵ This objective directed the board's questioning, and in Calgary each witness was pressed to respond with his or her opinion on the efficacy of such councils. All the employers and managers interviewed - with the exception of W.H. Cushing - gave their endorsement of the proposed scheme.¹⁶ Of the seven local union members who gave evidence, five indicated their support, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Postal worker Clifford Nicholls saw such councils as "a stepping stone" towards better industrial relations, while telegrapher J.J.H. Booth believed "that Industrial Councils...would tend towards, not only harmony in the industry, but it [*sic*] would tend to efficiency, that is, the men would feel they knew what they were working for."¹⁷

Strong opposition to the mediatorial councils was voiced only by Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) members Robert Parkyn and George Sangster, Unitarian minister William Irvine, and Rev. A.E. Smith, a left-wing Methodist from Manitoba with little knowledge of the situation in Calgary. Jean McWilliam and Mary Corse, women delegates to the CTLC, also expressed reservations regarding the

¹⁵ For details of the Whitley Councils, see Canada, National Industrial Conference, 1919: Official Report of Proceedings and Discussions (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1919), pp. 18-23.

¹⁶ 1919 Royal Commission, testimonies of J.R. Brodie, A.E. Cross, James H. Garden, W. Henderson, R.C. Marshall and John K. Thomas.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, testimonies of J.J.H. Booth, Mrs George Corse, Clifford Nicholls, Walter Smitten, and F.J. White.

proposition. Each of these individuals argued for more substantial changes to the existing economic system, although they established no consensus as to what those changes should be.¹⁸

Not only did the majority of witnesses endorse the Commission's proposed solution to industrial unrest, but they also agreed that the war itself had not created new grievances; rather, it had aggravated pre-war tensions. Low wages, high prices, and periodic unemployment were identified as such - the same problems that had characterised the years 1903-12. Alberta MLA Louise McKinney claimed that "our unrest is not new. We had it here before the War, and the day was simply put forward a bit by the advent of the War," a statement which gained corroboration from the evidence of McWilliam, Sangster, Nicholls, and Mayor Robert Marshall.¹⁹ A year earlier, Marshall's predecessor, M.C. Costello, had made much the same observation:

...most of our financial difficulties have for their tap root the pre-war conditions...and to a very large extent the day of reckoning has been merely

¹⁸ Ibid., testimonies of Mrs G.L. Corse, Rev. William Irvine, Jean MacWilliams [sic], R.H. Parkyn, George Sangster, and Rev. A.E. Smith.

¹⁹ Ibid, testimonies of MacWilliams, R.C. Marshall, Nicholls, and Sangster.

postponed and threatens when it comes to be just so much more dire.²⁰

The evidence given by Calgarians to the Mathers Commission, then, suggests that most people who were prepared to voice publicly their complaints were satisfied with the non-radical proposal of industrial councils; and further that their main concerns were the long-established ones of low real wages and unemployment. These facts in themselves, however, raise the question: had the war really worsened labour's economic position, or had it only sharpened people's perception of such matters?²¹

Of the seventeen trades that reported wage movements on a regular basis to the Labour Gazette, not one experienced a rise in real wages in the period 1913-16. Even the most successful group, the boilermakers, achieved an overall increase in money wages of 11.1 percent, compared with an increase in the prices of staple foods, fuel, and rent of 14.25 percent.²²

Prices rose a further twenty percent between 1916 and the end of 1918. In the same period virtually all groups of workers, except for the building trades, received wage

²⁰ Quoted in John Herd Thompson, The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1978), p. 58.

²¹ Mary Corse in her evidence to the 1919 Royal Commission had indicated such a distinction. 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Corse.

²² See Appendix V for details of wage and price calculations.

increases above this rate of inflation. Most significantly, machinists, boilermakers, iron moulders, and blacksmiths - those trades most directly involved in the 1919 strike - all received higher real wages in 1919 than they had in 1913 or 1916; whereas it was the building trades - those who rejected the strike call - which had suffered the greatest loss.²³ Wage levels were generally still low in 1919, and grounds for complaint, but were not in themselves the cause of industrial unrest.

Labour's other main grievance, the fear and reality of unemployment, also reached a peak well before 1919. From early 1913 to the end of 1915 there was a solid core of some three to four thousand unemployed in the city.²⁴ In June 1914 the Associated Charities Association declared itself "overtaxed in caring for the destitute," and by March 1915 was spending over \$8,000 per month on relief.²⁵ The situation was probably at its worst in late 1914 when seven thousand walked the streets in search of work.²⁶

²³ Ibid. For problems of using this evidence, see Joseph Harry Sutcliffe, 'Economic Background of the Winnipeg General Strike: Wages and Working Conditions' (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972), pp. 68-102.

²⁴ Albertan, 1, 24 January 1914.

²⁵ Labour Gazette, vol. 14, p. 949; ibid., vol. 15, p. 1173.

²⁶ Labour Gazette, vol. 13, pp. 1069, 1368; ibid., vol. 14, pp. 34, 142, 258, 1278. Albertan, 1 January 1914, 24 January 1914, 15 January 1915. Report of Unemployment Conference at Calgary, ibid., 6 November 1914, *passim*.

It was indeed in this period, rather than in 1919, that the problem of unemployment presented a radical threat. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the SPC helped organise a local League of the Unemployed, which in early 1914 marched on City Hall with banners declaring 'Work, Starve or Steal' and 'Why Starve in a Land of Plenty?'²⁷ The 350-strong procession disintegrated into a riot that ended with the police making several arrests. William McConnell, who allegedly had incited marchers to "take what you want for yourselves...go where there is plenty and take plenty," became the first man in Canada to be tried and convicted for sedition.²⁸

Reports on the state of unemployment made by the local Labour Gazette correspondent and by union locals to the CTLC reveal that once again the worst was over by 1916. In February of that year, the civic labour bureau was deemed to have served its purpose and was closed down indefinitely.²⁹ The Associated Charities Association reported a similar improvement. In August 1915 it assisted a total of 238 cases; a year later, relief was claimed by a mere fifty

²⁷ Albertan, 3 January, 8 January 1914.

²⁸ Ibid., 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15 January 1914, 18 February 1914.

²⁹ Labour Gazette, vol. 16, p. 884. While the bureau could only locate work for the unemployed, and not create jobs, its success was nevertheless considerable, having placed seven thousand in work by the end of 1914. Albertan, 4 December 1914.

families.³⁰ By July 1916 "there appeared to be but few unemployed in the city."³¹

A number of factors assisted the relief of unemployment during the war. A combination of patriotism and desperation caused thousands in Calgary to enlist well in advance of the introduction of conscription.³² Fifteen hundred men signed up in the first month of the war, and by May 1916 the Albertan claimed that ten thousand had responded to the call.³³ Such a figure cannot be substantiated and is doubtless an exaggeration, but the extent of enlistment should not be underestimated. Fire Chief James Smart saw fifty-six of his crew enlist between August 1914 and March 1916, and was consequently unable to respond to a request from Mayor W.G. Gillett of Prince George, B.C., for a replacement senior officer:

Before the war it would have been a very easy matter to send you just the man you need but I have lost so many good men through enlistment that I find it difficult to spare such a man as I would recommend for the position.³⁴

³⁰ Labour Gazette, vol. 16, pp. 165, 1458.

³¹ Ibid., p. 1354.

³² Albertan, 9 September 1914, 20 March 1916.

³³ Labour Gazette, vol. 15, p. 363; Albertan, 2 May 1916.

³⁴ GMA, Calgary Fire Department papers, box 3, f. 59, Smart-Gillett, 8 December 1916.

Entire unions enlisted, and up to sixty percent of all union men put on the uniform.³⁵ In 1916, Labour Day celebrations had to be cancelled because, the Albertan claimed, "so few men remain in the city, and so many are marching on the grim parade that leads to the battleground."³⁶

Whilst enlistment eased the unemployment situation during the war, many people feared that the end of the war would throw thousands of workers back into an overcrowded labour market and thus create havoc.³⁷ Labour leaders feared in particular that returning soldiers might be used as strike-breakers, as indeed they were in the case of the motion picture operators' dispute in 1916.³⁸ Again, however, such tensions have been overstated. The CTLC sought to re-educate returning men and to ease them back into work through co-operation with the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA).³⁹ The GWVA actively supported the CTLC's bid to establish a provincial labour bureau, and returning veterans were regular attendees at labour meetings.⁴⁰

³⁵ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. 46; Nutcracker, 17 November 1916; Labour Gazette, vol. 16, p. 165.

³⁶ Albertan, 2 September 1916.

³⁷ 1919 Royal Commission, testimonies of Marshall and Parkyn.

³⁸ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. 50.

³⁹ CTLC mins, 18 January 1918.

⁴⁰ Albertan, 7 October 1918, 19 January 1918. See also CTLC mins, 16 March 1917, 3 January 1918. The CTLC in 1917 passed a motion that "all returning enlisted men should be

Other factors alleviating war-time unemployment included: the availability of harvest work in the summer months; work provided as a result of the war effort; new public works initiated by the city council; job-sharing schemes whereby shorter shifts were introduced; the return of whole families to Britain; and the expansion of charitable organisations.⁴¹ Unemployment certainly remained a problem in 1919, but to far less an extent than in 1914 or 1915. In particular, the spring of 1919 was a mild one and enabled outside works to re-start unusually early.⁴² Unemployment, like low wages, was not in itself a significant factor in the behaviour of Calgary labour in that year.

The events of May 1919 cannot, therefore, be interpreted as a reaction by labour to worsening economic conditions. The overall situation had been far worse in 1916, yet even then labour had showed little sign of overt radicalism. Nor can it accurately be said that the introduction of conscription in 1917 radicalised the city's labour movement.⁴³ That conscription did not spark a crisis

reinstated in their jobs if they so wished." Ibid., 19 January 1917.

⁴¹ Labour Gazette, vol. 14, p. 258; ibid., vol. 15, p. 165; ibid., p. 790, Albertan, 2 May 1915, 16 May 1915, 25 December 1913, 19 September 1914, 28 June 1916.

⁴² 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Parkyn.

⁴³ Martin Robin, 'Registration, Conscription, and Independent Labour Politics, 1916-1917,' Canadian Historical Review, vol. 47, no. 2 (June 1966), pp. 101-18.

in Calgary was due in large part to the extent of working-class support for the war.

As seen, union men had been at the forefront of enlistment. Workers had also been generous contributors to the Patriotic Fund in 1914:

It was quickly demonstrated that the people of Calgary did not have a great deal of money to spare and the individual contributions were small....[I]t was noticeable that the most liberal givers, in proportion to their means, were working men and people in moderate circumstances. Men out of work managed to find something and widows who had hard work to get along at all, were glad of the opportunity of doing something.⁴⁴

The CTLC passed motions supporting national service as long as it was accompanied by "the mobilization and use of Natural Resources and Utilities of this Country for the direct benefit of the State," but took no stronger action on the matter.⁴⁵ In June 1917, a request from the Vancouver SPC to take part in a general strike should conscription be enforced was filed by the CTLC without comment.⁴⁶ Nor did local unions show any sign of taking the initiative.⁴⁷ This

⁴⁴ Albertan, 16 September 1916.

⁴⁵ CTLC mins, 5 January 1917; Albertan, 17 August 1917.

⁴⁶ CTLC mins, 22 June 1917.

⁴⁷ GMA, International Typographical Union #449 (hereafter ITU mins), 30 August 1917; GMA, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #348 correspondence

lack of organised opposition stood in contrast to the enthusiasm for conscription displayed by 'Johnnie Canuck Mechanic,' a correspondent to the Albertan in 1915. Having failed to pass the enlistment medical on three separate occasions, he vented his frustration in a vitriolic letter:

...when I turn to my trade I find the positions are filled with apparently able-bodied men, who are working for whatever the boss wishes to hand them on pay day, and a great many of these are old country yellow streaked individuals. I think a little conscription judiciously applied would remove a considerable amount of dissatisfaction now existing among good loyal Canadians.⁴⁸

Thus the orthodox interpretation of Calgary labour in the years prior to 1919 is undermined by much of the available evidence. Events and developments during the war did not foreshadow any revolt: this is hardly surprising, as Calgary did *not* see a labour revolt in 1919. Both the referendum vote on the One Big Union (OBU) and the sympathy strike in support of Winnipeg workers make this clear.⁴⁹

The referendum on the OBU was initiated at the Western Labour Conference in Calgary, March 1919, and held two (hereafter IBEW), box 4, f. 19, correspondence of 15 August 1917.

⁴⁸ Albertan, 30 September 1915.

⁴⁹ For details on the OBU and Winnipeg strike, see Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, and Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1978).

months later in May.⁵⁰ Although the CTLC voted in favour of the new organisation in principle, Calgary locals displayed little interest or approval. Twenty-four unions did not even bother to register a vote; fourteen were unanimously opposed to the organisation; and the remaining twenty voted with some equivocation.⁵¹ All in all, only 728 individual votes were recorded in favour of the OBU. The total labour force at the time was in the region of twenty thousand.⁵²

The response to the Winnipeg general strike of 1 May 1919 was similarly limited.⁵³ When the CTLC strike committee eventually organised sympathy action, no more than fifteen hundred workers came out in support.⁵⁴ The strike gained additional momentum only when it became confused with a separate dispute involving city postal workers, at which time the building trades entered the fray for the first

⁵⁰ For details of this conference, see Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour (Kingston: Queen's University Industrial Relations Centre, 1968), pp. 173-77; and McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries, pp. 157-58.

⁵¹ For example, all 142 members of the ITU voted against both the OBU proposal and the recommended general strike in support of the six-hour day. ITU Mins, 26 April 1919. See also GMA, Sheet Metal Workers union #254 minutes (hereafter SMW mins), 1 May 1919.

⁵² Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 68, 168. See also Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, p. 179.

⁵³ Ibid., and Warren Caragata, 'The Labour Movement in Alberta: An Untold Story,' David Leadbeater (ed.), Essays on the Political Economy of Alberta (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1984), p. 119.

⁵⁴ Even the size of the strike in 1919 was not without precedent. In July 1912, 1,200 carpenters struck in the city. Albertan, 5 July 1912.

time.⁵⁵ For those who did join the strike, the motive was often no more revolutionary than the hope of redressing some long-standing complaint. On the eve of the metal trades' walk out, CPR freighthandler Frank Grier rationalised the action in pragmatic terms:

The different trades all have grievances, small and large, such as the miners and the railwaymen and others, and if these different trades struck separately, no doubt they would lose out, so that our forces might as well be combined and make one issue out of the whole strike, thereby getting the respective grievances settled once and for all.⁵⁶

The strike in Calgary was eventually called off on 26 June, "with considerable dissension amongst the strikers."⁵⁷ This so-called revolt had achieved nothing, and moreover had been rejected or ignored by more than ninety percent of the city's workforce. Even those historians who argue that the war did in fact radicalise the Calgary working class are forced to admit that Calgary's sympathetic strike was the least impressive of all those staged in the west.⁵⁸ What is

⁵⁵ SMW mins, 11 May, 5 June 1919.

⁵⁶ GMA, Alimohamed Damji file (uncatalogued). Report by J.W. Spalding, RNWMP Inspector, Calgary Sub-District, 21 May 1919 (reference PAC RG 27, vol. 313, f. 151A).

⁵⁷ Ibid., 24 June 1919.

⁵⁸ Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' p. 89. Only 200 Calgary workers turned up at Mewata Park in May 1919 to hear a speech by H.L. Rogers of the Winnipeg TLC. Calgary Herald, 28 May 1919.

in greater need of explanation is why so few signs of revolt occurred in Calgary in 1919.

In three important respects, continuity rather than change marked labour's development in the years 1913-19. First, the war did not mark a significant change in the attitudes, principles and objectives of the existing craft-based unions. The established concerns of wages, hours, working conditions and the closed shop remained intact. Second, organised labour's central body - the CTLC - was not taken over by a group of radical leaders, but instead continued to reflect a diversity of opinion. Finally, society did not polarise along class lines. Instead, cross-class political links with middle-class sympathisers continued through the war.

The records of the CTLC and local unions during the war indicate that the majority of organised workers did not wish to see activities extended beyond the range established in the pre-war period.⁵⁹ Certainly the suggestion that "a small core of politically minded machinist leaders" determined the direction of the council is an overstatement.⁶⁰ On the issue of conscription, for instance, the machinists' motion that Calgary workers "refuse to sign the National Service Cards until a Rational scheme of National Service is presented to

⁵⁹ CTLC mins, *passim*; ITU mins, *passim*; IBEW, *passim*.

⁶⁰ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' p. 56.

the Country" was voted down by other delegates to the CTLC.⁶¹

Unions continued to seek to improve the economic position of their members through wage-bargaining and strikes, but did not develop more radical responses. Financial and moral support was given to other striking trades - notably the freighthandlers in 1918 - but no union jeopardised its own existence for the sake of class brotherhood.⁶² Thus although twenty-two unions supported the CTLC's campaign for a general strike in support of the freighthandlers, it is more significant that not one chose to risk prosecution by realising this threat.⁶³

In 1919, the building trades did not support the Winnipeg strike with which they felt few direct links, but they did support local postal workers in their dispute with the government. In this respect, many unions in Calgary held a view close to that of the Herald, which argued that "a sympathetic strike is not only morally and economically unsound, but is diametrically opposed to the highest

⁶¹ CTLC mins, 22 December 1916.

⁶² Unlike in 1903, when the carpenters risked and lost their recently-won closed shop and entire union when they struck in sympathy with city teamsters. See Labour Gazette, vol. 4, pp. 140-43; GMA, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America #1779 minutes, 24 March 1904.

⁶³ IBEW, box 4, f. 23, IBEW Information Bulletin, September 1918. Taraska claims that only nineteen unions announced their support. Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 69-70. It is difficult to accept Taraska's own conclusion that the following strike mounted by the railway crafts "appeared to effectively test labour's ultimate weapon." Ibid., p. 71.

principles...for which the best leadership and confessed objects of trade unionism has always stood."⁶⁴ For some, the bond between employer and worker actually proved stronger than that between working-class brothers. For example, electrician E.A. Garrett echoed the Herald's beliefs when he refused to obey his union's order to strike in 1918, arguing that his contract with the CPR was not merely an economic agreement but also a matter of honour:

You might say what would the Company do if they wished to dispense with my services. [T]o that I make reply that they have fulfilled their part of the bargain and now it is up to me to fulfill mine.⁶⁵

There was no significant left-ward turn within the unions, then. The extent to which the rise of carpenter Robert Parkyn and metal workers George Sangster, Andrew Broatch and Robert Tallon represented the ascendancy of a radical labour leadership has also been exaggerated.⁶⁶ Certainly such men had links with the SPC, were keen to commit the CTLC to political action, and in 1919 were supportive of the OBU and the general strike.⁶⁷ But at the

⁶⁴ Calgary Herald, 28 May 1919.

⁶⁵ IBEW, box 4, f. 22, correspondence of 10 December 1918.

⁶⁶ Taraska, 'Calgary Craft Union Movement,' pp. 46-57.

⁶⁷ For connections with the SPC see Damji file, report of RNWMP Detective-Corporal, 27 May 1919. For details of

same time, they had many similarities with the more 'traditional' or 'conservative' labourites, notably Alex Ross, Fred White and Walter Smitten. Each owed his position to the continuing support of craft union membership; each shared a common British culture; and each viewed political and industrial action as twin components of labour's struggle.

It should also be noted that machinists and socialists had always been important within the labour movement. James Worsley, a machinist and a Marxist, was one of the CTLC's co-founders in 1901. Similarly, socialists such as George Howell and Arthur Masters were influential officials within the Bricklayers and Stonemasons' union in the years before 1912.⁶⁸

The attitudes of Ross and Broatch over the question of the OBU reflect the extent to which so-called 'radicals' and 'conservatives' shared a common outlook. At the Western Labour Conference in March 1919, Broatch accepted his nomination for the central committee by declaring, "I am heartily in favour of the One Big Union and have been all my life."⁶⁹ Yet he viewed with increasing alarm the vagueness

Andrew Broatch, see Calgary Herald, 6 December 1919; Robert Parkyn, ibid., 13 June 1939.

⁶⁸ Bricklayers and Stonemasons International Union #2 minutes (hereafter BSMIU mins), 17 April 1907, 8 November 1909.

⁶⁹ The Origin of the One Big Union: A Verbatim Report of the Calgary Conference, 1919 (Winnipeg: OBU, 1919), p. 40.

with which other western delegates discussed the plans for the new organisation, and he displayed genuine consternation at the suggestion that the OBU should entirely reject political action:

[T]he law will still exist, and the chambers where law is made will still be a part of our social life....To my mind we are only storming the citadel from one angle, and that angle materially affects ourselves. When we call a general strike under this form of organisation we disrupt the means of production and distribution whereby we leave the other man holding the strings of the bag; having control of what is already produced. He has the advantage of us in that way.⁷⁰

Ross had earlier expressed similar - and somewhat prophetic - reservations about the effectiveness of the general strike weapon, if used alone:

The sympathetic or general strike has never come up to the expectations of its ardent supporters because it is so difficult to get the unity of action and purpose necessary to carry a strike to a successful issue....The sympathetic strike is somewhat crude, it can only be regarded as a step in the development of labour organizations, the next is industrial unionism.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 46. Calgary socialist J.S. Hooley supported Broatch's stance.

⁷¹ Alberta Non-Partisan, 6 November 1918.

His reference to the OBU as "one dinky little union" did not reflect principled opposition to industrial unionism. On the contrary, he was supportive of the idea but wished to see craft unions retain their separate identities within the greater organisation.⁷²

If Ross was perhaps more cautious and circumspect than Tallon, Broatch and Parkyn, this does not appear to have affected his standing with the rank and file membership. By 1917 he was by the far the most powerful figure within the Calgary labour movement. In that year he was re-acclaimed Labour Temple director and faced no challengers in the election for the CTLC presidency. In June he underlined his position by becoming Alberta's first labour MLA.⁷³ When Tallon replaced Ross as president a month later, it was the result of the latter's resignation due to the pressure of work rather than of any ideological victory.⁷⁴

The third and final element of continuity was the lack of class polarisation in the city. Established cross-class connections were, on the whole retained, and new ones were forged to meet the exigencies of war.

Elected middle-class officials such as Adoniram Samis, Arthur Graves and Michael Costello by and large retained the

⁷² Ross quoted in Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men, p. 112. For Ross's views, see also: Albertan, 29 March 1919; BSMIU mins, 15 July 1912.

⁷³ CTLC mins, 5 February 1917, 16 March 1917, 8 June 1917.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 22 June 1917, 20 July 1917

reputation of being workingmen's friends. Commissioner Graves stalwartly supported the street railwaymen's right to organise in the face of prolonged opposition from Superintendent Thomas McCauley. Commissioner Samis and Mayor Costello both supported the city hall staff in their bid to organise, and endeavoured to adopt a neutral stance during the 1918 freighthandlers' dispute. Robert C. Marshall, Costello's successor in 1918, also indicated his sympathy for local unions: "I may not agree with them at all times but I prefer to deal with organised labour myself."⁷⁵ Such support for labour was reciprocated in 1915 when a CTLC petition for the recall of Costello generated little interest among the rank and file membership.⁷⁶

The continuing co-operation between classes was also manifested in a number of newly-formed organisations, whose main aim was to alleviate hardship among working-class families. The Consumers' League continued its work in countering the high cost of living by establishing a public market, which offered goods and produce at substantially lower than existing retail cost.⁷⁷ The Albertan gave its unconditional approval of the venture claiming that the "only question now is how soon it will become a permanent

⁷⁵ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Marshall.

⁷⁶ CTLC Mins, 30 April 1915, 15 October 1915; Albertan 28 April, 29 April 1915.

⁷⁷ Labour Gazette, vol. 14, p. 35.

factor in the life of the city."⁷⁸ The Vacant Lots Club was formed with the similar intention of providing working people cheap land on which to grow their own vegetables.⁷⁹ The two organisations planned a merger in 1918.⁸⁰ The Local Council of Women - a middle-class philanthropic society - also took up issues relating to the well-being of working people, notably unemployment relief and the call for municipal control of the city's health services.⁸¹ All three organisations, primarily middle-class in origin and membership, formed official links with the CTLC.⁸²

It was in the various ventures of Unitarian minister William Irvine, however, that the continuing tradition of cross-class co-operation found its clearest expression.⁸³ Irvine had arrived in Calgary in 1916 to take up his ministry, and quickly immersed himself in the city's public affairs. He formed the People's Forum, an open discussion group that met on Sundays at the Empress theatre. This loose

⁷⁸ Albertan, 22 May, 29 May, 23 June, 28 June 1913.

⁷⁹ GMA, Calgary Vacant Lots Garden Club Local 69, Rules and Regulations (1943).

⁸⁰ Albertan., 28 April 1917.

⁸¹ Ibid., 15 September, 10 December 1914; CTLC Mins, 28 June 1916.

⁸² Ibid., and 28 May, 15 October 1915; 21 January, 18 February 1916.

⁸³ For details on Irvine's work in Calgary in this period, see Anthony Mardiros, William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979) and Howard Palmer, 'William Irvine and the Emergence of Political Radicalism in Calgary, 1916-1921,' Fort Calgary Quarterly, vol. 7, no. 2 (1987), pp. 2-19.

assembly was, according to Irvine's biographer, "a group of men, who, though covering a fairly wide spectrum of opinion, nevertheless shared an interest in social issues, were prepared to engage in public debate and were not afraid to express unorthodox views which they were prepared to translate into political action."⁸⁴

Adoniram Samis addressed the first meeting on 20 February 1916, with a discussion of the benefits of proportional representation. Although the talk was well received by those present the audience had been disappointingly small, and Irvine felt that the subject had perhaps been too esoteric. Later that week he and his associate Jack Ford visited the Ogden work shops in order to solicit the support of workers there. The following week machinist and CTLC president Harry Pryde spoke on the origins of British trade unionism to a packed auditorium, and labour's position within the forum was established.⁸⁵ This was later emphasised with the appointment of Robert Parkyn as forum president.⁸⁶

Irvine also championed the cause of labour in his three self-funded newspapers, the Nutcracker and its successors, the Alberta Non-Partisan and Western Independent. Unlike the

⁸⁴ Mardiros, William Irvine., p. 38.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 40. The SPC were also regular participants, finding the forum to be one of the few occasions on which they could freely and without hindrance address a sizeable audience.

CTLC's attempts to establish an independent labour press in the pre-war period, Irvine managed to achieve a respectable circulation of around eight thousand.⁸⁷ Alex Ross gave both his moral and financial support for these ventures, as a weekly columnist on the local labour situation and eventually as one of the three proprietors.⁸⁸

Finally, Irvine's Unitarian church itself provided another forum for the interaction of different classes.⁸⁹ Andrew Broatch and Adoniram Samis were both prominent members, as was public librarian Alex Calhoun, another figure who used his public influence to support labour.⁹⁰ Sisters Marion Carson and Rachel Coutts, who were influential in the forming of the LRL, were also fellow Unitarians.⁹¹ Irvine's activities as public debater, journalist and minister thus provided a focal point for the conjunction of Calgary's different classes. Unequivocally, Irvine advocated the supremacy of labour as both a social

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁸ Alberta Non Partisan, 6 November, 20 November 1918. Mardiros, William Irvine, p. 41.

⁸⁹ Irvine resigned his ministerial position in 1919, but was later a regular speaker at the People's Labour Church. To help fund this venture, and a Sunday school organised especially for the children of union members, Irvine approached the CTLC for financial backing. Ibid., p. 77; CTLC mins, 13 September 1918.

⁹⁰ For details on Calhoun, see Donna Lohnes & Barabara Nicholson, Alexander Calhoun (Calgary: Calgary Public Library, 1987). See also GMA, Alex Calhoun interview, *passim*.

⁹¹ Mardiros, William Irvine, p. 77.

and economic group. On one occasion, he even went as far as to declare that Labour Day would "soon be considered the most important day of the year," ahead of Easter or Christmas.⁹²

During the war, then, unions did not abandon established objectives; the CTLC was not captured by radical leaders; and the bonds between different classes were not replaced by class polarisation. This is not to say, however, that important changes did not take place. They did, but were not essentially in the direction of radicalism. Rather, they were responses to, and catalysts in, labour's gradually changing position within Calgary society. Four such changes may be identified: the extension of unionisation into previously unorganised occupations; the building of a stronger electoral base for labour candidates; the shift in emphasis in society from production to consumption; and the evolving position and importance of women within the labour movement.

Although the war did not inspire a challenge to the hegemony of craft unions in Calgary it did see a significant growth in unionisation in previously unorganised trades. Retail clerks, street railwaymen, hotel and restaurant employees, laundry workers, bartenders, bakers, bookbinders and city hall staff each formed a union for the first time

⁹² Albertan, 8 September 1916.

during the war.⁹³ It was in this period, too, that predominantly female-staffed industries, such as telephone operators and stenographers, acquired unions.⁹⁴ One particularly celebrated event was the formation of a housekeepers' union in 1916, which was heralded by Irvine as "the first sign in Canada of a revolt of domestic workers...against the indignities imposed upon maids by unthinking masters who regard their servants as chattel."⁹⁵

For the first time too the fire and police services won the right to organise, despite opposition from their employers and from the Herald.⁹⁶ In 1918, the recently-formed Federated Workers' Union (FWU) sought to fulfil its mandate, to "exclude no creed, breed or nationality," in an effort to organise all Chinese workers in the city.⁹⁷

This effort by the FWU was mirrored by craft unions' attempts to form limited industrial organisations. These were not intended to be all-embracing as in the case of the OBU, but were attempts at rationalisation which would meet

⁹³ Ibid., 18 September 1915, 16 April 1918; CTLC mins 30 April 1915, 13 April 1917, 11 May 1917, 12 April 1918, 30 August 1918.

⁹⁴ Calgary Herald, 28 May 1919. See also, Joan Sangster, 'The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers,' Labour/Le Travailleur, 3 (1978), pp. 109-30.

⁹⁵ Nutcracker, 17 November 1916. See also Albertan, 5, 17, 21 June 1916.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 21 June 1916. Nutcracker, 14 April 1917.

⁹⁷ Albertan, 5 March 1918, 26 March 1918.

the changing nature of production in Calgary. Alex Ross best expressed this vision of industrial unionism when he argued:

If we are to make any progress at all we have got to change our method of organization to meet the changing economic conditions. The change must be by absorbing the craft unions and not destroying them. To organize one big union in western Canada I consider to be dissipating our forces.⁹⁸

Five years earlier, in 1914, CTLC president Harry Pryde had similarly asked the question, 'Is The Industrial Union In Sight?' He answered with a clear affirmative, arguing that the old craft unions could not "retard the progress of the invention genii with their multifarious labor-saving devices."⁹⁹ That same year, eight building trades reformed the Building Trades Council in an effort to streamline collective bargaining and prevent the sort of jurisdictional disputes which had long marred relations between stonemasons and stonecutters. The Federation of Civic Employees, formed in 1918, was effectively an industrial union. Even archetypal craftsmen such as tailors abandoned their nineteenth-century journeymen's union in favour of an industrial union.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29 March 1919.

⁹⁹ Calgary Trades and Labour Athletic Association, Official Program and Souvenir of Labour Day 1914 (Calgary: CTLC, 1914).

¹⁰⁰ IBEW, box 2, f. 12, circular of 1915.

All these advances reflected improvements in the local economy after 1916. As unemployment eased numerous trades took advantage of the relative shortage of labour. The growth of unionisation also underlined the extent to which public opinion and even many employers readily accepted labour's claim to the right to organise.

Advances in unionisation were not made to the exclusion of political action. Indeed, the war years saw not only the election of labour candidates at the municipal and provincial level, but also the foundation of an enduring electoral base which survived into the 1920s.¹⁰¹ Labour platforms became identified with a progressivism that spanned class barriers, and for a while labour candidates even set the political agenda in the city.¹⁰² When in 1914 the CTLC ran candidates for the positions of alderman, school board and hospital board, the Albertan enthusiastically declared that, "men who do not carry a labor card, and who are not usually termed wage earners, will do well to cast their ballots for the labor candidates...."¹⁰³

Initially, labour's change in fortune was slow. Nevertheless, although the 1914 municipal elections saw only the election of Alex Ross to the school board, even defeated

¹⁰¹ Little has been written on Calgary labour in the 1920s. See Damji, 'Militancy to Passivism,' pp. 112-53; Caragata, 'The Labour Movement in Alberta'; and Alvin Finkel, 'The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-1942,' Labour/Le Travail, 16 (Fall 1985), pp. 61-96.

¹⁰² Albertan, 25 November 1914, 7 December 1914.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

labour candidates received respectable votes of around fifteen hundred, a feat which six-time alderman Richard Brocklebank had found difficult to achieve in earlier years. The war period saw the election of Robert Tallon and Andrew Broatch as aldermen, and other candidates to the school and hospital boards.¹⁰⁴

Despite this success, problems remained. No permanent party machinery existed: instead, policy was determined by *ad hoc* committees struck by the CTLC.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, lacking a party organisation, the CTLC found it difficult to overcome the working-class apathy which traditionally characterised Calgary elections.¹⁰⁶ The breakthrough in this respect came in 1917 when William Irvine encouraged his friend Ross, then president of the CTLC, to launch a new Labour Representation League.¹⁰⁷ The LRL was not itself a political party but rather the means to provide financial and organisational support for nominally independent candidates. Although the LRL was the creation of the CTLC as well as Irvine, it was intended to provide a political voice for labour that would

¹⁰⁴ Ging G.G. Wong, Calgary Civic Government: A Structural History (Calgary: Glenbow Archives Institute, 1978), p. 30. See also Albertan, 15 December 1914, 14 December 1915, 12 December 1916.

¹⁰⁵ Albertan, 27 November 1915.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11 December 1916; CTLC Mins, 9 July 1915, 18 January 1918.

¹⁰⁷ Mardiros, William Irvine, pp. 59-65.

extend beyond the unions, which until then had been the sole source of financial support for candidates.¹⁰⁸

The long-term importance of the LRL lay in the fact that it gave Calgary labour a focal point other than the CTLC. Certainly in this period, the bond between the two organisations remained intact - the CTLC was instrumental in getting Ross elected to the provincial legislature in 1917 - but tensions between the two were also soon evident.¹⁰⁹ For example, the CTLC soon found itself divided over the question whether or not it could endorse non-CTLC candidates even if they were supported by the LRL. These tensions came to a head in the spring of 1919 when the LRL's successor, the Calgary Branch of the Dominion Labour Party (DLP), caused a split in the ranks of the CTLC over which body had the right to select labour candidates. Supporters of the CTLC accused the DLP of being infiltrated by SPC and OBU members, and that it was an attempt to disrupt the union movement in Calgary. The DLP survived the attack, and later successfully ran candidates in municipal and federal elections. The CTLC, on the other hand, retreated from politics in the face of the 1920s' economic stagnation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Along with enlistment, which depleted the membership of many unions, the CTLC's support for candidates played a part in the demise of Labour Day during the war, as funds for the latter were regularly pillaged to support electoral ventures. CTLC mins, 18 October 1916.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 22 June 1917, 9 November 1917.

¹¹⁰ Mardiros, William Irvine, pp. 77-8. For details on the LRL and the DLP, see Patricia Roome, 'Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935,' Linda Kealey & Joan

The third change was a noticeable shift in public concern from production to consumption. The formation of the Consumers' League, public market and Vacant Lots Club were all reflections of the growing alarm over the rising cost of living. So too was the establishment of the Calgary Ratepayers' Association, a body formed to influence control of municipal expenditure. The Albertan reflected this change as early as 1913 when it commented critically on the upward spiral of prices. The city council, the paper argued, must realise that "the interests of the consumers in this city are paramount," and that:

The reduction in the cost of living to 80,000 Calgary citizens is of more importance than the interests of any number of people who may be slightly affected or who think that they are slightly affected.¹¹¹

Even the Calgary Board of Trade, the bastion of boom and boosterism, faltered in its optimism. One of the Board's officials, Mr Tweedie, "spoke strongly against 'boom' population and the getting of more people here than could be supported, just to make a big figure in the census."¹¹² The time for a change in attitude had come, he argued: "Let us have a city of 50,000 which we can support and let the city

Sangster (ed.), Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 89-117.

¹¹¹ Albertan, 10 October 1913.

¹¹² Ibid., 12 September 1914.

grow up with the province. Then we will have real development and prosperity."¹¹³

In conjunction with this new focus on consumption and the consumer came sharpened criticism of obvious disparities in wealth. In common perception, it was such differences in consumption rather than in economic productive relations that marked lines of class. Thus the Consumers' League advocated the introduction of school uniforms, "as a means of eliminating the rivalry between parents which led so often to expenditure on children's adornments so often beyond the resources of workingmen and low salaried people."¹¹⁴

More than anything else, the recent introduction of the automobile to Calgary served as a focus of discontent.¹¹⁵ Many of the testimonies given at the 1919 Royal Commission into industrial unrest touched on this matter. Mary Corse, a delegate to the CTLC, noted that "the children of the wealthy [were] going to school, some of them able to take their automobile and leave it parked all day, side by side with children of those parents who [were] drudging to give

¹¹³ Ibid. See also president's address of 1913. GMA, Calgary Board of Trade papers, f. 486.

¹¹⁴ Labour Gazette, vol. 15, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ Albertan, 13 February 1913; GMA, Dr. Donald M. Black papers, 'Calgary, 1909-1912' (unpublished MS), p. 2. For a general discussion, see Henry C. Klassen, 'Bicycles and Automobiles in Early Calgary,' Alberta History, vol. 24, no. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 1-8; Grant MacEwan, Calgary Cavalcade, second printing (Vancouver: Institute of Applied Art Ltd., 1958), pp. 132-36.

their children a High School education."¹¹⁶ Tory alderman James Garden echoed Corse's remarks:

I think probably one of the contributing factors [to the unrest] is the lavish exhibition of people who have wealth. I think these people rushing through with large automobiles have done a lot towards it....I think it would be an excellent thing, if there was...a maximum income that one should get and the rest should go to the State.¹¹⁷

Inequality of wealth had always been a feature of Calgary society.¹¹⁸ Nor was the war itself the cause of a consumer-oriented society. What the war did, however, was to accentuate the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty at the same time that people were being told that Canada was fighting for democracy and freedom.¹¹⁹ This was recognised in Calgary, as when the Albertan argued, "This is a Labor war and will be won by Labor men. Will Labor receive its proper reward when the war is over...?"¹²⁰ In this respect at least, the psychological effect of the war could be

¹¹⁶ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Corse.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., testimony of Garden. See also Black, 'Calgary, 1909-1912,' p. 2.

¹¹⁸ For instance, see Henry C. Klassen, 'Life in Frontier Calgary,' A.W. Rasporich (ed.), Western Canada: Past and Present (Calgary: McClelland & Stewart West, 1975), pp. 42-57.

¹¹⁹ Thompson, Harvests of War, pp. 12-26.

¹²⁰ Albertan, 1 September 1917.

great. Postal worker Clifford Nicholls contrasted the experience of different classes in Calgary:

Any bitterly cold morning in this city what will you see? You will see miserable, pale-faced men with drunken, weary-looking eyes, crawling out of their beds in the early hours...sitting down to an almost bare breakfast table and then crawling off to work with their dinner pails with a few little sandwiches in them....¹²¹

In contrast, Nicholls claimed, working people could see all around them

...men with their collars and ties on, with their fine women driving around in large McLaughlin or Studebaker cars, men [who] do not get up before 7.30, then sit down to a comfortable meal and get the morning's paper and then go down and recline in an office chair for four or five hours a day and then go home.¹²²

If it was consumption that drew most sharply the lines of class inequality, then it was women who were at the cutting edge of class experience in Calgary.¹²³ It was women who commonly had to stretch inadequate incomes to meet the needs of the household. It was the single working woman who

¹²¹ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Nicholls.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Paul Johnson, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain,' Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, fifth series, vol. 38 (1988), pp. 27-42

received the worst rates of pay.¹²⁴ It was the wife of the enlisted man who "found herself worse off when her husband was in the trenches than she did when her husband was at home and that was bad enough...."¹²⁵ And in 1919, it was the testimonies of Mary Corse, Jean McWilliam and Louise McKinney that expressed the greatest sense of grievance, resentment and radicalism. As McWilliam commented, "...if they ask us, 'Are we in favour of a bloody revolution,' why any kind of a revolution would be better than conditions as they are now."¹²⁶ Or as Corse put it just as bluntly, "Almost every day, women are being added to the ranks of, shall I say, the socialist party or those with socialistic inclinations...."¹²⁷ The increasingly active role within the labour movement played by women was one of the greatest changes that occurred in these years, and possibly the one genuine development of radicalism.¹²⁸

This increasing activism, or perhaps radicalism, was reflected in organisational developments. There was a move

¹²⁴ For instance, for details of nurses' pay, see Albertan, 5 July 1913, 21 July 1916.

¹²⁵ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of MacWilliams.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., testimony of Corse. Corse was Calgary's representative on the Alberta committee struck to organise the One Big Union locally. Albertan, 15 March 1919.

¹²⁸ This aspect of Calgary's labour history has received little attention. However, see: Roome, 'Amelia Turner,' and Heather Foran, 'Annie Gale: Reformer, Feminist and First Woman Alderman in Calgary,' Foran & Jameson (ed.), Citymakers: Calgarians after the Frontier, pp. 196-207.

away from the middle-class dominated, charitable organisations of the late nineteenth century (e.g. the Women's Hospital Aid Society), through class co-operative ventures (e.g. the Consumers' League and Businesswomen's League), to working-class based associations (e.g. Next-of-Kin Association and Women's Labour League).¹²⁹ This change was also seen in the growing criticisms of middle-class organisations made by working-class women. For example, the Local Council of Women was mocked for its philanthropic activities which left untouched the more basic problem of inadequate wages.¹³⁰

Women played a direct and often important role in the mainstream labour movement. Alex Ross considered the female vote a crucial factor in his 1917 election.¹³¹ The wives of labour leaders dominated the executive of the Consumers' League.¹³² The separate but related interests of women and labour came together most obviously with the formation of the LRL in 1916 and the Women's Labour League (WLL) in 1919. Marion Carson and Rachel Coutts had, along with Irvine and Ross, been founding members of the LRL, and Carson later

¹²⁹ Sheila Moore Johnston, 'Giving Freely of Her Time and Energy: Calgary Public Women, 1910-1930' (MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1987), pp. 6-51. See also GMA, Mary Pinkham papers, *passim*; Labour Gazette, vol. 14, p. 35; Roome, 'Amelia Turner,' p. 95. By 1913 there were forty-three separate women's organisations in Calgary. Albertan, 3 March 1913.

¹³⁰ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Corse.

¹³¹ CTLC mins, 8 June 1917.

¹³² Albertan, 28 April 1917.

became the WLL's first president. This latter organisation was the innovation of Mary Corse and Jean McWilliam, Calgary's two most outspoken female labour activists.¹³³

The life of Jean McWilliam may not have been typical or representative of all Calgary labour women, but it did highlight the process by which an aspiring pioneer became a defender of the working class. It marked the convergence of the economic, cultural, social, and political experiences, experiences which shaped the particular, and possibly unique, nature of Calgary's working class in the years 1903-19.¹³⁴

Jean McWilliam (nee MacDonald) was born in Ayreshire, Scotland in 1875, the daughter of a metal worker. The harsh conditions and long hours endured by her father in the blast furnaces at Waterside left a deep impression upon the young girl:

The type of work he did for the miserable pittance of twenty-eight shillings burned into my heart a determination to carry on as long as I lived in defence of the underdog.... [Als a child I received my first education of economics, at the early age of nine years....May God forgive them! I do, but I cannot forget my early life."¹³⁵

¹³³ Roome, 'Amelia Turner,' pp. 95-6.

¹³⁴ Details on the life of Jean McWilliam are taken from her unpublished memoirs. GMA, Jean MacDonald papers.

¹³⁵ MacDonald papers, p. 3.

She left school at the age of eleven and took a series of low-paid jobs as a domestic servant, before marrying struggling dairy farmer William McWilliam six years later. Married life brought Jean McWilliam little improvement in fortune. Three of her five children died in infancy due to the family's inability to afford even minimal health care. After the third death, she and her husband decided to abandon Britain and start a new life in Canada. Selling all their possessions, they sailed in 1907 with money only to last the journey.

McWilliam's early experience in Canada may be summarised briefly. Having moved to the west in 1908 to set up a homestead with her husband and family, she found the solitude intolerable and in 1910 she moved again, this time to nearby Calgary, with little more than a hundred dollars to her name. Upon arrival, she gained employment as a domestic servant and later as a matron at the police station, caring for arrested prostitutes. Her experiences in both jobs quickly taught her that the new west was neither a land of social equality nor of unlimited prosperity:

I had believed there was no class distinction in Canada, but here it was in full. I decided to be on the look-out for that type [of distinction] and found them aplenty. The exploitation I had left as I thought in Britain was right

here, with all the traits of snobbishness.¹³⁶

Two further experiences shaped McWilliam's social and political attitudes. First, having opened a boarding house for working men in 1911, she came into contact with many who were "socialist-minded," notably Jack Reed, one of those arrested along with McConnell in 1914. She became acquainted with the literature many of them kept in her house, and in reading it she developed a more radical viewpoint. Second, she played an increasingly active role within the labour movement, paying particular attention to the plight of working-class women during the war. She founded the Next-of-Kin Association in order to assist women whose husbands were at the front, she became a delegate to the LCW, and she helped to form the WLL. Along with Mary Corse, McWilliam helped determine that this latter organisation would become a virulently class-conscious and feminist organisation.¹³⁷ She was president of the WLL's Calgary Defence Committee, which raised funds for strikes; she opposed attempts to deport strikers under the Immigration Act; and she toured Alberta encouraging other women to form their own associations.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

¹³⁷ Roome, 'Amelia Turner,' pp. 95-98.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

If McWilliam embodied activism and radicalism in Calgary, she nevertheless retained amiable links with more moderate labourites, notably Alex Ross.¹³⁹ It is thus important not to overstate the strand of radicalism represented by the like of McWilliam, Corse, and Amelia Turner. Radicalism was not absent in the labour movement during the spring of 1919, but neither was it a dominant feature. United Mine Workers leader Dave Rees' disparaging comment that the Alberta Federation of Labour was a group of "Lloyd George coalitionists" may also be applied to the labour movement in Calgary.¹⁴⁰ Compromise and co-operation were still preferred to conflict, and labour still sought to keep as many options open as possible.

Lack of support for the OBU, for Winnipeg strikers, and for the local SPC emphasised the fact that few working people in Calgary were prepared or willing to mount a challenge to the economic or political basis of society. Their demands were much simpler. As even Mary Corse, one of the few radicals, testified, "We want some of the good things in life. We do not want to go to the movies, we do not want a few cents more an hour, but we do want to feel we have the right to some of the good things in life."¹⁴¹ For

¹³⁹ MacDonald papers, appendix by Mollie LaFrance, p. 64.

¹⁴⁰ Rees quoted in Bercuson, Fools and Wise Men, p.72

¹⁴¹ 1919 Royal Commission, testimony of Corse.

most workers, the chiliasm of the SPC and the utopianism of the OBU were not among those 'good things.'

What conclusions do the dual processes of continuity and change support, regarding the development of labour in the war years? First, the view that 1919 saw an eruption of radicalism brought about by war-time economic and political discontent simply does not fit the facts. Calgary's association with western radicalism is more accidental than actual. It was at the 1911 Dominion Trades and Labour Council (DTLC) convention in Calgary that a motion supporting industrial unionism was first passed; it was in Calgary that the breakaway Western Labour Conference was held; it was in Calgary again that the OBU was formally launched. In none of these instances did the majority vote reflect local sentiment.¹⁴²

Second, in organisational and political terms, the Calgary labour movement made significant advances during the war. That such advances were not in the direction of the OBU was due to the simple fact that the OBU made little sense in Calgary. Craft-based unions were not perfect, but when compared to the proposed alternative obviously many members thought it was a case of 'better the devil you know.' And as

¹⁴² It is notable, for instance, that in the election for the central committee to organise the OBU referendum in 1919, the two Calgary nominations - Andrew Broatch and Walter Smitten - occupied joint last position, receiving little support from the 235 voting delegates. Verbatim Report of the Calgary Conference, p. 42.

has been suggested here, craft unionism did not preclude the possibility of broader class co-operation.¹⁴³ The strict distinction between craft and industrial unionism in Calgary has become something of a historical red herring. Craft and class loyalties existed at the same time, within the same person: the two informed and influenced each other, and helped shape the individual's totality of experience.

Finally, the war emphasised the strength of various bonds which sometimes modified, sometimes counteracted the class bonds of brotherhood. The hegemony of British culture, and affection for symbols of the empire, ensured a reaction to the war at odds with the 'capitalist war' proclamations made by the DTLC in pre-1914 conventions.¹⁴⁴ If immigrant workers brought with them the cultural baggage accumulated in the Old Country, then this baggage included the acquiescence and social deference characteristic of Edwardian England as much as it did the radical new unionism principles of the 1880s.¹⁴⁵

To stress one final time the ambiguity of class relations in Calgary, the case of an anonymous metal trades worker in 1919 is perhaps revealing. According to the orthodox view of Calgary labour in this period, the metal trades and machinists were at the forefront of local

¹⁴³ CTLC mins, 26 June 1913, 19 July 1918.

¹⁴⁴ Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, p. 119.

¹⁴⁵ John Benson, The Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939 (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 141-66.

radicalism and were in the process of pushing the CTLC in that direction. Moreover, they were the group of workers that participated most prominently in the city's sympathy strike that year. Yet when this unnamed worker was informed in June of the recent arrest of Winnipeg socialist William Pritchard, his response exhibited anything but radicalism:

...it serves him bloody well right,
every one of your 'REDS' that is keeping
us from our work should be in jail and I
hope that you will all get it later or
sooner.¹⁴⁶

He spoke for himself, but he was also the voice of a class, a class forged by the experiences of two decades. Such, then, were the bonds of brotherhood in Calgary as they stood in 1919.

¹⁴⁶ Damji file, Report of RNWMP Detective-Corporal, 20 June 1919.

Conclusion

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.¹

Historians have applied Marx's dictum to a variety of historical situations: the experience of labour in Calgary may justifiably be added to the list. Thousands of immigrant workers - mainly of British origin - came to Calgary in the years 1903-19, seeking to make their own future. Some sought to create a new life in the opening west; others sought only to win a greater share of wealth in return for their labours. The circumstances they 'directly encountered' limited the possibilities of achieving either.

Labour's economic experience was conditioned, if not determined, by a paradox that underpinned Calgary's transformation from frontier settlement to urban metropolis. The key to the city's growth was its success in attracting immigrant workers and capital investment, and in establishing civic authorities committed to the 'businessman's view of government.' In each of these respects, the story of Calgary's growth was a tale of success. Yet it was the very extent of that success that

¹ Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, second edition, 1859 (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.

limited labour's prospects of sharing in the prosperity produced in those years.

As Calgary's manufacturing and industrial establishments became more heavily capitalised (the inevitable result of the city's entry into national and international markets), so it became more difficult for the individual worker to escape from the wage system and to fulfil his own entrepreneurial ambitions. The continuing influx of immigrants provided employers with an effective 'reserve army of labour,' one which helped preserve downward pressure on real wage levels even in the boom years. Some workers did, of course, make the transition from employee to employer and often sought to provide labour with a political voice at the municipal level. However, despite their good intentions the pressures of a highly competitive capitalistic economy eventually compromised the position of these parvenus and their ability to represent labour. With a sense of inevitability the gap between worker and employer widened.

Did this process result in the emergence of a working *class*, as opposed to a group of separate individuals? According to E.P Thompson:

...class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men

whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.²

By this definition, labour's collective economic experience in this period clearly became the experience of a distinct working class. Some workers continued to escape the confines of the wage system; others left Calgary and continued to tramp the west in search of their El Dorado. But those who remained in the city as part of the labour force shared common experiences and interests that set them apart from other groups or classes in society.

In objective terms, the emergence of a working class therefore lay in structural developments of Calgary's economy. Is it possible, however, to speak of a class-consciousness among Calgary labour? To cite Thompson again:

Class-consciousness is the way in which these [economic] experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms....Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way.³

In Calgary labour certainly established traditions and institutions which appeared to express a sense of class-consciousness, notably Labour Day and the Labour

² E.P. Thompson, The Making of The English Working Class, 1986 reprint (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), pp. 8-9.

³ Ibid., p. 9.

Temple. In other instances, however, a sense of class unity was the unconscious by-product of actions seemingly more individualistic or limited in scope.

Craft unions, for example, were ostensibly concerned with the material fortunes of the specific trade in question. However, they were also a medium for the recognition and support of wider class interests, for example when they gave moral, financial or physical backing for disputes in which they had no direct concern. In this fashion, strikes often provided a learning experience for workers of greater importance than the issue immediately involved. The 1906 carpenters' strike escalated into a dispute involving crafts from the entire construction industry, and in so doing underlined a unity of interest and a collective strength.

As a result, workers' perceptions of class interests were essentially pragmatic rather than dogmatic in nature. That is, there were few instances of labour attempting to nurture a sense of social or political alienation. The clearest expressions of working-class radicalism were the Bond of Brotherhood in 1903 and the Calgary Strike Bulletin in 1919. Both papers spoke in trenchant terms of class warfare and provided radical critiques of existing society; but each reflected a temporary crisis in labour relations rather than widespread and deep-rooted discontent. As a result, neither paper enjoyed a lengthy existence.

Labour's pragmatic approach to questions of class was reflected in its participation in local politics. Richard Brocklebank, six times alderman in this period, stood nominally as a labour candidate but stressed the need to appeal also to middle-class voters. Such cross-class appeal was crucial also in the election of Alex Ross as MLA in 1917. In this period, the labour movement never broke its personal and organisational ties with middle-class progressives, and toyed periodically with the idea of allying with the farmers' movement. The Labour Representation League marked an advance in labour's political development, but it did not amount to a political party of the kind found in Britain or Europe.

Pragmatism also characterised labour's participation in industrial disputes. While sympathy strikes were sometimes held in support of fellow Calgary workers, this sense of working-class brotherhood was not extended to labour in other cities. The lack of response to the Winnipeg strike of 1919 made this clear. With little to gain and plenty to lose, Calgary labour rejected both the general strike and the One Big Union.

Labour's attitudes towards political and industrial action, and its perception of class in general, were conditioned by the fact that the majority of Calgarians shared a common cultural identity. Respect for the law, affection for the monarchy, and support for the empire were not questions of class for Calgary workers. Patriotism ran

deep and strong in labour: the response to the war made this abundantly evident. Similarly, racial prejudice was not the preserve of the middle or upper classes. Anglo-Canadian workers assessed their Black and Asian brothers in terms of colour, not of class.

Cultural bonds encouraged the belief among workers that reform rather than revolt was the most effective course to follow. Moreover, these bonds reinforced the aspirant, pioneering nature of the workforce in Calgary. While more needs to be learned about the motives of emigrant workers at the turn of the century, it may be assumed that a great many viewed Canada in terms of the positive attributes it possessed, not least of which was the relative freedom from minute gradations in class and status. Thus, the working-class response to economic and social problems in Calgary was not to overthrow that society, but to reform its worst features. As a result, while many Winnipeg workers in 1919 submitted to the visions of socialist leaders and experimented with syndicalism, their counterparts in Calgary affirmed their belief in political reform and even accepted the corporatist proposals of the Mathers Commission. Those historians who continue to argue for the existence of a radical west must revise their interpretation in order to accommodate the experience of Calgary. And the experience of class in Calgary might not be unique.

Class-consciousness among Calgary workers echoed Oscar Wilde's views on re-marriage: it represented the triumph of

optimism over experience. Despite a generation of economic disillusionment and the denial of its claims, labour continued to place faith in political reforms and class co-operation. Through such means, it was believed, workers would eventually be rewarded with the wealth they had long been promised and had travelled far to receive. Carpenter and socialist Robert Parkyn's closing comments to the 1919 Commission illustrated the way in which experience and optimism merged in this manner. On behalf of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council, Parkyn politely told T.G. Mathers:

Although we have spoken against our present competitive system, and our present antagonistic system, as I think it is, we have not in any way thought of antagonism against you. I believe humanity is good at heart. We are all kin, we are all trying to create a better condition, and I believe that we will eventually come to it.⁴

The experience of labour in Calgary was the experience of a class, a class with its own interests, its own concerns and its own problems. But at the same time it was a class experience that aspired to accommodation rather than alienation. The bonds of brotherhood were not formed at the expense of broader family ties.

⁴ Canada, Evidence given to Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, 1919 (Calgary, 1-3 May 1919), concluding address of Robert H. Parkyn.

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Appendix I

LABOUR AND CAPITAL IN CALGARY, 1901-1911

	1901	1911	percentage increase
No. of firms:	10	46	360
No. of employees:	307	2,133	595
Wages \$(000):	175	1,570	797
Capital \$(000):	432	13,083	2,928
Raw materials \$(000):	316	4,680	1,381
Products \$(000):	599	7,751	1,194

Source: Census of Canada, 1911, vol. III, p. 351.

Appendix II

REPORTED WEEKLY WAGES: CALGARY 1903-1919

	BRICKLAYERS	CARPENTERS	STONECUTTERS
1903	\$24.30	\$18.90	\$30.00
1904	\$24.00	\$18.90	\$33.00
1905	\$26.40	\$18.90	\$26.40
1906	\$30.00	\$18.90	\$26.40
1907	\$30.00	\$22.14	\$28.80
1908	\$30.00	\$22.14	\$26.40
1909	\$30.00	\$24.30	\$27.50
1910	\$29.70	\$24.30	\$27.50
1911	\$29.70	\$27.00	\$28.60
1912	\$30.80	\$27.50	\$28.60
1913	\$30.80	\$26.40	\$28.60
1914	\$30.80	\$26.40	\$28.60
1915	\$30.80	\$24.75	\$28.60
1916	\$30.80	\$24.77	\$28.60
1917	\$34.10	\$29.70	\$28.60
1918	\$35.20	\$30.00	\$33.00
1919	\$40.70	\$33.33	\$37.40

Appendix II (cont'd)

	<u>PAINTERS</u>	<u>PLUMBERS</u>	<u>ELECTRICIANS</u>
1903	\$15.00	\$19.50	\$18.00
1904	\$15.00	\$22.50	\$18.00
1905	\$16.20	\$21.60	\$18.00
1906	\$18.90	\$24.30	\$18.00
1907	\$21.60	\$27.54	\$18.90
1908	\$21.60	\$29.16	\$18.90
1909	\$21.60	\$29.70	\$21.60
1910	\$22.50	\$26.40	\$21.60
1911	\$22.50	\$27.60	\$19.20
1912	\$24.75	\$26.40	\$25.20
1913	\$24.75	\$28.60	\$28.80
1914	\$24.75	\$28.60	\$28.80
1915	\$24.75	\$28.60	\$28.80
1916	\$24.75	\$27.50	\$28.80
1917	\$27.23	\$30.80	\$28.80
1918	\$27.23	\$35.20	\$28.80
1919	\$31.85	\$39.60	\$38.40

Appendix II (cont'd)

	<u>MACHINISTS</u>	<u>BOILERMAKERS</u>	<u>IRON MOULDERS</u>
1903	\$20.65	\$17.70	\$17.70
1904	\$20.65	\$20.65	\$20.65
1905	\$20.65	\$20.65	\$20.65
1906	\$20.65	\$20.65	\$20.65
1907	\$20.65	\$20.65	\$20.65
1908	\$23.60	\$23.60	\$23.60
1909	\$23.60	\$23.60	\$23.60
1910	\$23.60	\$23.60	\$23.60
1911	\$23.60	\$20.00	\$23.60
1912	\$26.55	\$20.00	\$23.60
1913	\$24.30	\$22.50	\$23.60
1914	\$24.30	\$22.50	\$24.30
1915	\$24.30	\$22.50	\$24.30
1916	\$27.00	\$25.00	\$22.50
1917	\$29.70	\$27.50	\$27.50
1918	\$35.00	\$34.30	\$35.00
1919	\$38.40	\$35.20	\$35.20

Appendix II (cont'd)

	<u>SHEET METAL WORKERS</u>	<u>COMPOSITORS</u>	<u>PRESSMEN</u>
1903	\$18.00	\$14.00	\$14.00
1904	\$18.00	\$16.00	\$16.00
1905	\$18.90	\$16.00	\$16.00
1906	\$18.90	\$16.00	\$16.00
1907	\$21.60	\$16.00	\$16.00
1908	\$21.60	\$17.00	\$17.00
1909	\$21.60	\$20.00	\$20.00
1910	\$22.95	\$20.00	\$22.00
1911	\$28.35	\$21.00	\$22.00
1912	\$28.35	\$21.00	\$22.00
1913	\$28.35	\$22.00	\$22.00
1914	\$28.35	\$22.00	\$22.00
1915	\$28.35	\$22.00	\$22.00
1916	\$28.35	\$22.00	\$22.00
1917	\$31.05	\$25.00	\$22.00
1918	\$32.50	\$25.00	\$30.00
1919	\$33.00	\$35.00	\$36.00

Appendix II (cont'd)

	BUILDERS' LABOURERS	FACTORY WORKERS	BLACKSMITHS
1903	\$13.50	---	\$17.70
1904	\$13.50	---	\$17.70
1905	\$14.40	---	\$17.70
1906	\$16.80	---	\$20.65
1907	\$15.60	---	\$23.60
1908	\$15.60	---	\$23.60
1909	\$16.80	---	\$23.60
1910	\$19.20	---	\$23.60
1911	\$21.00	\$17.10	\$23.60
1912	\$16.80	\$19.38	\$23.60
1913	\$16.80	\$15.68	\$24.30
1914	\$16.80	\$15.68	\$24.30
1915	\$16.80	\$14.25	\$24.30
1916	\$16.80	\$17.10	\$25.92
1917	\$19.20	\$21.00	\$29.70
1918	\$17.60	\$21.00	\$34.30
1919	\$24.20	\$22.31	\$35.20

Source: Department of Labour, Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1901-20 (1921).
 (Calculations are my own.)

Appendix III

REAL WAGES, 1903-12 [1903 = 100.0]

	1903	1906	1909	1912
BRICKLAYERS	100.0	114.5	100.6	92.1
CARPENTERS	100.0	92.7	104.2	105.7
ELECTRICIANS	100.0	92.7	92.7	101.7
STONECUTTERS	100.0	81.6	74.2	69.3
PLUMBERS	100.0	115.5	124.0	98.4
PAINTERS	100.0	116.8	117.3	119.9
LABOURERS	100.0	115.3	101.3	90.4
MACHINISTS	100.0	92.7	93.1	93.5
IRON MOULDERS	100.0	108.2	108.6	96.9
METAL WORKERS	100.0	97.3	97.7	114.5
BLACKSMITHS	100.0	108.2	108.6	96.9
BOILERMAKERS	100.0	108.2	108.6	82.1
COMPOSITORS	100.0	105.9	116.4	109.0
PRESSMEN	100.0	105.9	116.4	114.2

Source: Department of Labour. Wages & Hour of Labour in Canada, 1901-20 (1921).

_____. Board of Inquiry into the Cost of Living (1916).

(Calculations are my own.)

Appendix IV

WEEKLY BUDGET FOR A FAMILY OF FIVE, DECEMBER 1911

Item	Quantity	Price	Total
Beef, sirloin:	2 lbs	22c	44c
" chuck:	2 lbs	12.5c	25c
Veal:	1 lb	18c	18c
Mutton:	1 lb	22c	22c
Pork, fresh:	1 lb	20c	20c
" salted:	2 lbs	16c	32c
Bacon:	1 lb	25c	25c
Lard:	2 lbs	18c	36c
Eggs, new laid:	1 doz.	60c	60c
" packed:	1 doz	40c	40c
Milk:	6 qts	10c	60c
Butter, dairy tub:	2 lbs	35c	70c
" creamery:	1 lb	40c	40c
Cheese, new:	1 lb	25c	25c
" old:	1 lb	25c	25c
Bread:	15 lbs	3.5c	52.5c
Flour:	10 lbs	4c	40c
Rolled Oats:	5 lbs	6.5c	32.5c
Rice:	2 lbs	8.5c	17c
Beans:	2 lbs	8.5c	17c
Apples:	1 lb	12.5c	12.5c
Prunes:	1 lb	12.25c	12.5c
Sugar, granulated:	4 lbs	7c	28c
" yellow:	2 lbs	7c	14c
Tea, black:	1/4 lb	40c	10c
" green:	1/4 lb	35c	9c
Coffee:	1/4 lb	35c	9c
Potatoes:	2 pkts	135c	2 70c
Vinegar:	1/2 qt	15c	7.5c
Coal, anthracite:	1/16 cord	13 50c	84.5c
" bituminous:	1/16 cord	6 75c	42c
Wood, hard:	1/16 cord	7 00c	44c
" soft:	1/16 cord	5 75c	36c
Coal Oil:	1 gal	35c	35c
Rent: 6 rooms, with sanitation:			7 50c
Total weekly budget:			\$20 65

Source: Dept. of Labour. Cost of Living Report (1915),
pp. 137, 209.
(Calculations are my own.)

Appendix V

REAL WAGES, 1913-1918 [1913 = 100.0]

	1913	1914	1916	1918
BRICKLAYERS	100.0	98.4	87.5	83.4
CARPENTERS	100.0	98.4	82.1	82.9
ELECTRICIANS	100.0	98.4	87.5	72.9
STONECUTTERS	100.0	98.4	87.5	84.2
PLUMBERS	100.0	98.4	84.2	89.8
PAINTERS	100.0	98.4	87.5	80.2
LABOURERS	100.0	98.4	84.2	76.4
MACHINISTS	100.0	98.4	97.2	105.0
IRON MOULDERS	100.0	98.4	97.2	108.2
METAL WORKERS	100.0	98.4	87.5	99.5
BLACKSMITHS	100.0	98.4	93.3	102.9
BOILERMAKERS	100.0	98.4	97.2	112.5
COMPOSITORS	100.0	98.4	87.5	82.8
PRESSMEN	100.0	92.8	95.1	97.1
FACTORY WORKERS	100.0	92.8	95.1	97.1

Source: Labour Gazette, vols. 13-19, *passim*.

Department of Labour, Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1901-20 (1921), *passim*.

_____. Report of Board into Cost of Living, vol. 1 (1915), p. 137.

(Calculations are my own.)