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**“We Walked Around with Holes in our Sole and Souls”:
Men and Masculinity during the Great Depression in Canada**

by

Michael DiFrancesco Jr., B.A. Hons.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History
Carleton University
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Men and Masculinity during the Great Depression in Canada**

submitted by

Michael DiFrancesco Jr., B.A. (Hons.)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Dominique Marshall, Thesis Supervisor

James Miller, Chair

Department of History

Carleton University

20 May 2010

ABSTRACT

The Great Depression was a trying time for many working-class Canadian men and their families. In a society that had come to recognize and acknowledge the presence of the breadwinner ideal, the economic instabilities of the thirties pushed and stretched the family waged economy to the extreme. This study aims to engage with and reveal the experiences of working-class married men and their families during the 1930s, with a specific focus on masculinity. The collection of letters and testimonies illustrate the humiliation, shame, and disgrace that unemployment brought to many men and their families. It also shows to what extent all members of the family went to maintain the ideal, and the many beliefs associated with it. In doing so, it highlights why government policies based on the ideal remained popular and, maybe why, later on, the adoption and the maintenance of the welfare state remained such a contested affair. The study also demonstrates that if the depression-era was a time of hardship, challenge, and contradiction for government and society alike, the notion of the importance that the male breadwinner played within Canadian society showed a remarkable resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

In Western, industrialized, capitalist societies, definitions of masculinity are bound up with definitions of work. Whether it is in terms of physical strength or mechanical expertise, or in terms of ambition and competitiveness, the qualities needed by the successful worker are closely related to those of the successful man. As individuals, men are brought up to value work, as an end in itself, and to fix their personal identities around particular occupations. The roots of gender identity are interfused with expectations of achievement- 'becoming someone' through working, 'making something of yourself'. It is this personal identity that insists on 'the right to work', to be the breadwinner of the family, and which is threatened by layoff or redundancy.¹

This excerpt from Andrew Tolson's *The Limits of Masculinity* highlights a significant idea which acts as the premise for this study; the idea of a man's masculinity being 'bound up with definitions of work'. As such, a man's identity is 'interfused' with expectations of achievement and his 'personal identity' insists on a 'right to work [and] to be the breadwinner of the family'. For his identity, and connection to work is important; what makes this study captivating is what happens when that man, defined by his right to work and to serve as the breadwinner of the family, is faced with sudden unemployment, no longer able to provide and secure his families' well-being.

The Great Depression of the 1930s in Canada was a trying time for many working-class breadwinners and their families. As this study will demonstrate, for men who identified themselves as the provider and protector of their families, the sudden loss of work and the subsequent inability to ensure security and stability for his family through the earning of a wage was a challenging experience. During the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Canadian society had shifted from a predominately family-based agrarian economy, in which men, women, and children all played distinct but interdependent productive roles, to one featuring mechanized, male-dominated production a new emphasis had been placed on married

¹ Andrew Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, (Suffolk: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1977), 12.

men to provide and protect their families' well-being through the earning of a wage. By 1931, the majority of the population was urbanized: there were 10.7 million living in Canada, and of that approximately 5.5 million were living in urban areas, while 4.8 million Canadians resided in rural areas.² An effect of the shift in production from the fields to the workshop and then to the factory was to institute a new spatio-sexual division of labour; men were integrated en masse into market production, a new source of power in industrialized societies for these men, while women, especially married women, were relegated to the home from the fields, bringing into being the housewife, in the modern sense of the term.³ By the 1930s, according to John Beynon's cultural study of masculinity, "the traditional role of the man as a wage-earner and head of his family was at the heart of patriarchy. Breadwinning was the hallmark of the respectable working-class man, being central to his sense of masculinity".⁴ As this study will demonstrate, most quarters of Canadian society had come to identify with the breadwinner ideal. The Great Depression of the 1930s tested and stretched the limits of this model. The thirties was a trying time for many men and their families, and as will be seen, one full of challenges, struggle and contradiction for those who tried to uphold the breadwinner ideal.

From the Canadian government's part, there was also a desire to defend the breadwinner model and, as such, their approach to welfare policies for the destitute during the depression-era was gendered. Indeed, the primary concern of many government officials was to ensure the stability of the male breadwinner. According to Canadian gender and welfare historian Nancy Christie, "the Depression amplified previous notions that the male breadwinner was the economic head of his family. All welfare initiatives were thus aimed at protecting his ability to

² Statistics Canada, "Historical Statistics of Canada", http://www.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-bin/af-fdr.cgi?eng&loc=A67_69-eng.csv, (accessed May 15th, 2010).

³ Denyse Baillargeon, *Making do Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, trans by Yvonne Klein, (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1999), 10-11.

⁴ John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 158.

maintain his family. During the 1930s the work ethic became identified entirely with the status of the male breadwinner; and for this reason, waged labour occupied a privileged place in the calculations of policy experts and government officials. It was primarily to protect the morale of men that clearly rights-based welfare policies were initiated”.⁵ Thus, gender played an essential role when one examines the attempts of the Canadian government to deal with the problem of unemployment.

Adhering to such gender roles defined the manner in which both government officials and society approached the administration of welfare policy during the early twentieth century and into the 1930s. According to Canadian welfare historian James Struthers, the importance that gender played in the administration of welfare in Canada is such that gender analysis of the welfare state constitutes one of the most recent and important forms of interpreting welfare policy.⁶ To take a gendered approach when examining social policy in Canada forces many historians to “re-examine many familiar programs and policies, the division of labour within the welfare state, and the boundaries separating public and private life in completely new ways”.⁷ For Struthers, the most important dimension of the gendered way that social welfare adopted in Canada during the early decades of the twentieth century was the emphasis placed on shoring up “a family-wage model that viewed women and children principally as dependents of male wage-earners”.⁸ It is this eye for gender, but applied to a wider field that becomes the basic approach of this study.

The Purpose of this Study

⁵ Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 247.

⁶ James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

As for Struthers and Christie, the use of gender analysis will be essential for my own study of welfare policies during the 1930s. My critical examination of the literature of social policies adopted by the Bennett administration during the early part of the depression, with a specific focus on masculinity, shows that whether it was relief works projects or the administration of direct relief to those in need, gender and the maintenance of the male breadwinner proved to be at the forefront of welfare decisions. But if the social policies of Canada are important to this study, they are not its focus. Rather, they serve as a subtext in this study.

It is the personal dimension of gender, specifically of the maintenance of the breadwinner ideal, which is of interest to me. The idea that a man is defined by his work abilities and that in consequence, his personal identity insists his being the breadwinner of his family is something that the men in this study and the members of their families took seriously. The breadwinner ideal was an ideal rooted in the larger working-class culture, to which most of the men I have studied belonged, and which encouraged a strong work ethic and independence. Being able to provide for one's family in such a fashion brought with it pride and respectability, for all family members, characteristics that will become evident as one moves forward in this study. Thus, of importance when discussing the ideal, is how the values associated with breadwinning were not limited to men, rather they represented an ideal that both women and children recognized and tried to uphold. With the economic instabilities of the 1930s, upholding the breadwinner ideal became very important to men, women, and government alike, as new and old attempts were made to ensure the continued viability of this model in front of many tensions.⁹

⁹ There was a tendency for society to favour the male breadwinner and his dependents over everyone else, single women, widowed women with dependents, and single men. Much of the literature comments on the value that society and government placed on the married male and as such, this study will focus on married males and their families.

Key to this study are the comments on the Great Depression presented by Canadian gender and family historian Cynthia Comacchio in her work *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940*:

Because the most 'deserving' applicants were male heads of families, this responsibility centred on the material support of wives and children. After waiting in line for hours, in church basements, fire halls, and other public buildings, applicants had to answer a list of personal questions and swear to their own destitution, a public admission of their inability to provide. 'I've seen tears in a man's eyes,' reported one relief administrator, 'as though they were signing away their manhood and their right to be a husband and sit at the head of a table.' In the context of contemporary ideals about gender and family, they were. These men could no longer perform the functions that secured their status. Disempowered by their inability to provide and protect, they became something less than true men.¹⁰

Her work has led me to explore two main hypotheses; first is the notion that the men of the 1930s 'were something less than true men'; secondly, is the suggestion that the letters and testimonies used in this study use language and ideas that show that there was a shared belief, within Canadian society during the 1930s, in a man's and a woman's 'proper sphere'.

For Comacchio, statistics demonstrate the difficult nature of the depression-era by 1933, for men to 'secure their status', when, "nearly 20 per cent of the labour force was officially classified as unemployed".¹¹ In addition to the plight of the unemployed, at the "nadir of the Depression, half the wage earners in Canada were on some form of relief. One Canadian in five was a public dependent. Forty per cent of those in the workforce had no skills; the average yearly income was less than five hundred dollars at a time when the poverty line for a family of four was estimated at more than twice that amount".¹² As the depression deepened and unemployment

¹⁰ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada 1850-1940*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 117.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression, 1929-1939*, (Canada: Canada Anchor, 1990), 9.

increased, more and more families were forced into dire poverty and eventual destitution. As a result, vast male unemployment became a defining feature within Canada.

During the depression a common theme became apparent; unemployment had become a defining characteristic for many married men. According to a study conducted in Ontario by Canadian social reformer Harry Cassidy during the early parts of the 1930s, “the majority of men had dependents, 19, 886 of them, or 54.4 per cent, being married, while 21,116 or 57.8 per cent of the total number [36,550] had others to support besides themselves. The average number of dependents per married man was almost three and the average number of dependent children was 1.4. The great majority of these married men, it appears, had full responsibility for bringing in the family income, for only a few of their wives worked”.¹³ Married men were relied upon heavily by their families. Comacchio comments that in a contemporary context, with the influence of ideals surrounding notions of gender and family, these men were ‘something less than true men’. After consulting a variety of sources, the question of these men of the 1930s being ‘something less than true men’ is not easily settled.

Unlike Comacchio, I intend to argue that these men of the 1930s were not ‘something less than true men’ not only because of the circumstances they faced within Canadian society, as she suggests, but also because of the way they and their kind understood their circumstances. Chapter one will highlight the change in the economy from a predominately agrarian to industrial waged economy which placed more strain and responsibility onto these men as provider and protector to provide for their dependents. The depression-era placed these men into a situation that did not allow them to fulfill the expectations that now accompanied fatherhood. Many came to see that the dire circumstance of the depression-era was no fault of their own, as the analysis

¹³ H.M. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929-1932*, (Toronto: JM Dent & Sons Ltd., 1932), 36.

of various letters and testimonies written by such men shows, and in their own eyes, they were not ‘something less than true men’.

The second area of examination relates back to Comacchio’s comments regarding ‘the context of contemporary ideals about gender and family’, specifically, contemporary ideas of the separate spheres ideology. I am fully aware that these men and women would not have understood their situations, at the time, in terms of a ‘gender divide’ between the breadwinner and the housewife. I am attentive to the fact that I am placing the ideas of separate spheres and ‘contemporary’ gender theory onto the sources; however, the language and ideas around work and the recognition and acceptance by men and women of the role of the husband that presents itself in various primary documents, suggests strongly that there was a wide belief in a man’s and woman’s ‘proper place’ within society.

Gender Studies: Where my Study Fits into the Historiographical Debate

During the course of this dissertation to understand and present men’s experiences during the depression-era I will examine the relationship that men had with the notion of providing for their families through waged-labour and how they reacted and coped with the increased problem of unemployment. In order to see how men understood themselves, this study uses private and intimate sources. My work builds upon the study of Denyse Baillargeon in *Making Do: Women, Family, and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression* which is based on thirty oral interviews of working-class women who lived during the depression.¹⁴ Although she is concerned with the issues of women’s experiences, and uses a means of investigation that is seldom available to researchers of the era today because of the age of the informants, Baillargeon addresses an issue which will be fundamental to my work: the working-class lived experiences of

¹⁴ Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, Trans by Yvonne Klein, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999).

those most affected by the 1930s. Most often the political and economic dimensions of the 1930s are discussed with very little attention to the daily lives, concerns and emotions of those who had a firsthand experience of the deepest troubles of those times. As will be discussed below, the sources used for this study present the experiences of the ordinary Canadian in a well organized and detailed manner. My study complements Baillargeon's by examining the effects of the depression on working-class men.

Another important aspect of my study, which is similar to Baillargeon's, is how the sources are the main object of the work. I keep the letters, memoirs and oral testimonies as the main focus. These sources provide a great deal of insight into the 1930s and I did not want to place them behind theories of welfare or gender, nor did I want to make them a secondary story in my work. Rather the primary sources for this dissertation are the focal point, and all theories and concepts derived from the secondary literature are used in a complementary manner. In many cases, questions surrounding gender, welfare, politics, the depression, religion, and industrialization present themselves in the primary literature. The order in which I discuss these themes and of many others is derived from the letters, memoirs and oral testimonies themselves. Since the primary sources are crucial to this work, it becomes necessary to introduce these documents in more detail.

Primary Source Analysis

Why did I decide to use letters, memoirs and oral testimonies for this study, and what problems can arise while using them? The sources used can be broken down into three main types; autobiographies, letters, and transcribed oral interviews compiled into a book. All allow me to gain an intimate insight into the lives and experiences of the men, women and children who had a firsthand experience with the difficulties of the depression. Studying actions and

beliefs at this personal level has been a goal of mine since the beginning of my graduate studies. I thought that using such documents would allow some access to the emotions and experiences of men, women and children on a different level than official government documentation, newspaper accounts, social surveys, and other more commonly used sources. More precisely, these sources provided the best way to analyze how the breadwinner ideal operated within the family and eventually how family members interacted with and responded to the lack of employment for the male breadwinner. Finally, they allowed me to examine the dynamics of the Canadian family from the perspective of the male breadwinner and his family.

This in mind, I must present my criteria for selecting sources that allowed me best to study masculinity amongst fathers and husbands during the 1930s. The sources needed to confirm that there was the presence in the author's family of a male breadwinner. The letters needed to be written either by a husband and father, who made explicit reference to having dependents at home, at least a wife and children, or by women who mentioned a husband and children at home. In the case of transcribed oral interviews, again reference needed to be made to the fact that the informant was married prior to the depression, and had children within the household. Autobiographies also spoke of situations where a male breadwinner and dependents within the home at the start of the decade. It must be noted at this point, that many letters and interviews I came across did not present such a situation. Thus, the households I am presenting are not a reflection of the entire Canadian landscape.¹⁵ Not everyone in the letters and testimonies of the collections I viewed lived in a male-headed household. As the third chapter will discuss, there were female headed families, single parents, widowed parents, and married couples with no children. What I am looking at is a specific trend within society and how this

¹⁵ I choose to examine a specific trend, male breadwinners; I did not choose to include sons who lived at home during the decade. I am aware they did exist, but I did not use them in this study.

trend was interpreted and understood amongst those who started the depression in conformity with that pattern. Thus, this selection of sources will influence my conclusions that the values of the breadwinner ideal were important to many men and their families.¹⁶

The first source used in this study is the autobiography of James Gray titled, *The Winter Years: the Depression on the Prairies*, published three decades after the period.¹⁷ James Gray was born in Whitemouth, Manitoba. A reporter on the *Winnipeg Free Press* and editor of two Western magazines, he lived in Winnipeg during the depression years. He was a man who stood in line for relief vouchers to support his young family and, with other men ‘picked dandelions’ as he wrote, in city parks. James Gray’s autobiographical text like other autobiographical texts, seeks to draw “us into itself without reservations and one which we are invited to read as being sanctioned by a ‘metaphysics of presence’, its formal nature being belied by the intimacy and truthfulness with which it seems to address”.¹⁸ By reading autobiographies, we are expected to feel as though the experiences presented to readers were done so by a living person.

Additionally, one should sense that the author was not only present while writing, but that the account of the experiences is presently occurring while reading. Therefore the autobiography “represents an effort made by those who write it at the integration of their past lives and present selves: the autobiographer wishes to stand forth in print in the form of a whole”.¹⁹ Thus they are similar to a portrait or a self-portrait, as a self-portrait offers its viewers a story; the autobiography wills the unity of its subject.²⁰ The autobiography is an especially “inviting literary kind because it purports to be straightforwardly mimetic of life; it is charged with turning

¹⁶ It must be noted that life outside the breadwinner ideal was not explored in detail. For example, how the Great Depression affected single men, women headed households, single mothers, people with no families before the depression-era was not studied.

¹⁷ James Gray, *The Winter Years: the Depression on the Prairies*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada Ltd., 1966).

¹⁸ John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

life into a Life”.²¹ The manner in which this life is transformed is through the use of language. It is through this use that one is able to draw parallels between autobiography and narrative.

Gray’s account of the 1930s, he writes, “might be described as a personal history of the depression”.²² Gray is quick to mention what his book is not, and that is a definitive history of the Great Depression. For Gray definitive histories are not “written by participating witnesses and no exception is claimed for these observations on the follies of the 1930s. Also definitive histories are mainly concerned with the long-term growth and decline of great political forces, economic developments, and social revolutions”.²³ The life story which Gray is trying to convey to readers is one that recounts not only his own experiences but also the experiences of others. His text is a book about “people and their problems, about a lot of ordinary, cantankerous, friendly, selfish, helpful, disenchanted, and irresponsible people on and off relief”.²⁴ The portrait being offered to readers is one that entails both the jubilations and hardships experienced by the ordinary men and women in Western Canada during the Great Depression.²⁵ According to Gray, the depression “was a decade that destroyed men’s faith in themselves, mocked their talents and skills, blighted their initiative, and subverted their dedication to the cultivation of their land. It shattered the morale of our inland empire, replaced a whole people’s proud search for success with a dispirited search for security”.²⁶ His comments that the ‘decade destroyed men’s faiths in themselves’, is intriguing because one can see how, in his own eyes, men of the thirties were ‘something less than true men’. While Gray provides a detailed insight into the hardships that he

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gray, 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

and his family experienced during the depression, there are some issues that need to be kept in mind as one engages with this source.

According to historian of childhood Mona Gleason, “historians are well aware of the problems and limitations associated with autobiographical sources and have offered detailed investigations of them”.²⁷ The issues and cautions in using autobiographies as a source relate mainly to their reliability. They include; the fallibility of memory, the artifice of literary convention in written accounts, and the tendency to ‘re-construct’ rather than ‘re-present’ a life.²⁸ As Gray wrote about his experiences several decades after the 1930s, issues such as memory loss may distort the image Gray is trying to present to readers. In addition trying, as he states explicitly, to present a history that is appealing to readers leads to the kind of ‘reconstruction’ Gleason mentions.

Another limitation that I need to keep in mind when using this source relates to the credibility and accuracy of information being provided. Information and events reported in connection with autobiographers are assumed to have been, to be, or to have potential for being the truth.²⁹ The issue relates back to historical truth as the reader is expected to accept the reports as true and is then left to reference the facts to either accept or discredit them as being true. One may also encounter a difficulty if the reader determines what is being presented to be false, based on secondary research since the autobiographer purports to believe in what he asserts.³⁰ By choosing to use an autobiography as a primary document for analysis, I tried to cross-reference the information to ensure its authenticity and accuracy.

²⁷ Mona Gleason, “Disciplining the Student Body: Schooling and the Construction of Canadian Children’s Bodies, 1930-1960”, *History of Education Quarterly* 41 no. 2 (2001): 192.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: the changing situation of a literary genre*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

A further caution when using autobiographies is the threat that I may expect the voice of James Gray to speak too loudly or as being representative of all families in a similar situation.³¹ I need to be aware that using Gray's text in my research can never fully account for all people's experiences. His is one insight into the time period of study and what is presented by Gray is not characteristic of everyone of that time period. If *The Winter Years* provides an in-depth account of what the depression was like for one man and his family, it was necessary for me to consult numerous sources both of autobiographical and secondary nature in order to draw wider conclusions.

The problem of memory and accuracy of information presented within the text becomes a concern, not only when using an autobiography, such as Gray's, but also when discussing the next type of source used for this study. Transcribed oral interviews, such as those presented by Barry Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*, and Denyse Baillargeon's *Making Do: Women, Family, and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, act as a primary source which offers detailed insight about the emotions and experiences of many men, women and children during the depression-era. In both these cases, the use of oral interviews represented the main primary source of their books; however, before one comments on the issues of oral history and memory that accompany the use of such a source, it is necessary to discuss what the books are about.

Broadfoot's *Ten Lost Years* is a compilation of transcribed oral interviews conducted with hundreds of Canadians who experienced hardships and destitution during the 1930s. He travelled Canada for nearly nine months conducting his interviews in survivor's homes, in

³¹ Gleason, 193.

offices, in stores, in bars, in cafes, while travelling and while on the street.³² The author, Barry Broadfoot, was a child of the Depression, born in Winnipeg in 1926, and that particular ten year decade was something that always interested him. As he wrote, “throughout my career as a newspaper reporter I have studied what I could find of it and talked to those who knew of it. By the time the 1970s rolled along I realized that probably 75 percent of Canada’s 20,000,000-plus knew nothing, or very little, about those years- 1929-1939”.³³ The purpose for writing the book came from the lack of attention and ignorance that surrounded the thirties and the tendency of many to “sweep under the rug those ten lost years that were the most debilitating, the most devastating, [and] the most horrendous. Those words are not used lightly. Text books used in Canadian schools tend to dismiss those ten years with half a page, three paragraphs, even one sentence”.³⁴ The book had a purpose of bringing understanding to those who might not be aware of the numerous difficulties faced by many Canadians. Since then, there has been more interest in the depression-era, but I still think that this is a neglected period. It is hoped that this study will bring more attention to the 1930s and the conditions that many faced.

Baillargeon’s study rests on a set of thirty interviews undertaken in 1986 and 1987 with women who were already married at the beginning of the 1930s and who agreed to relate their experiences of the depression.³⁵ The recollection of wives and mothers make it possible to shed light not only on the impact of the economic crisis on their domestic labour, but also on their entire development from childhood to the Second World War, and on the living conditions of the working class, from which most informants came.³⁶ Her study is significant because it proceeds

³² Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1977), ix.

³³ *Ibid.*, vii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Baillargeon, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

from a generation of women that would soon be unable to testify and that had left very little behind in the way of written evidence.³⁷

The appeal of both these histories of the depression is who the story is about. In Broadfoot's words, "the people I talked to are ordinary Canadians. If you want to know how the Depression is recalled by the movers and shakers, the men who shaped events in those dreadful days – premiers, cabinet ministers, judges, millionaires, financiers – then you must look elsewhere...this is a book about ordinary people. The survivors. The soldiers, so to speak, not the Generals".³⁸ To further illustrate how the book reflects the experiences of ordinary Canadians, Broadfoot does not introduce individual speakers: "I believe that the stories, in the fullest sense, speak for themselves. And if the anonymity worries you, leaves you feeling a certain story could have been told by your neighbour three doors down the block, then you are getting the message of this book – that dramatic and wonderful and terrible and foolish and funny and tragic things happened in Canada's Depression to people you pass in the street every day, people as ordinary as the woman three doors down".³⁹ His exclusive focus on the 'soldiers' of the Depression is important because this is the premise of my work: I am examining the experiences of those most unfortunate Canadians who were not the 'movers and shakers' of society. As such, the sources used for this dissertation allow me to closely explore the experiences and emotions of the 'average' Canadian during the thirties.

From Baillargeon's perspective, 15 years later, studies of the depression "continue to pay little attention to everyday life".⁴⁰ This holds especially true when one looks at the 'everyday life' of the domestic housewives and mothers during the 1930s. An investigation of the private

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Broadfoot, x.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Baillargeon, 2.

sphere, she argues, can turn out to be a disappointing exercise if one tackles it solely by means of conventional sources. According to Baillargeon, “these contain very little information about daily life and domestic labour. Admittedly, students of women’s history have developed a certain expertise in the rereading and reinterpretation of archival documents, newspapers, reports of commissions of inquiry, and other governmental publications familiar to historians”.⁴¹ Although these documents have not been ignored, by her, it became quickly apparent that, to gain access to daily life during the depression, it would be necessary to turn to the first-hand accounts of those who lived through it. She found that relying on oral interviews was the best method to gain the necessary insight into the daily lives of those people most affected.

The use of oral history is essential to both Broadfoot and Baillargeon and therefore requires a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of such a method. It “intends to take into account the experience of groups which are absent from the public sphere and from the written record; thus it is highly desirable, if not indispensable, tool to bring women back into history”.⁴² This also holds true for people who are members of the lower classes of society, in the case of this study the working-class, those people who have often been marginalized from the ranks of history. This is also important because it is not only a question of visibility, but also a question of authorship. According to British historian Paul Thompson’s study of oral history and its place within the historical field, “oral evidence, by transforming the ‘object’ of study into ‘subjects’, makes for a history, which is not just richer, more vivid and heart-rendering, but *truer*”.⁴³ By allowing for groups that have often been excluded from the historical narrative to have a place and an active voice, oral histories allow for a more socially conscious and

⁴¹ Ibid., 3.

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 90. Italics original.

democratic history.⁴⁴ However there is a significant issue which needs to be kept in mind when using sources such as these; the problem of memory.

The complex nature of oral sources must not be forgotten as they are in fact constructed both within the framework of an interpersonal relationship and through the workings of memory. Thus the information collected depends on the quality of questions, the contact between the interviewer and interviewee, and on the functioning of the subject's memory.⁴⁵ It is clear that memory works selectively and is conditioned by the present. That is, memories are rekindled only to the degree that they have a particular significance to respondents while being questioned and that their perceptions are modified as much by their subsequent experience as by the changes at work in society.⁴⁶ Memories are constructed and reconstructed constantly by the process of remembering and forgetting. In addition, individuals' relationships to their memories are highly subjective and singular. There can also be collective memories, which are comprised of individual memories. These 'collective' or 'social memories' are shaped by social, economic, and political circumstances; by beliefs and values, and by opposition and resistance. They involve cultural norms and issues of authenticity, identity and power.⁴⁷

This is important when one looks at the families analyzed in this study, as the circumstances reflect that they were working-class families, who had strong values and beliefs associated with the breadwinner ideal. Since the families used for this study are from the working-class, one must keep in mind that their circumstances, often impoverished and destitute, would influence how they responded. Would the nature of their answers be different than

⁴⁴ Ibid., x. This has often been a general problem that has plagued historians. The issue of narrative and who has a voice in the historical debate is something that is not limited to this study, but has troubled historians for decades. See for example, Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Ltd., 2006), Chapter 2, 'Narrative'.

⁴⁵ Baillargeon, 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷ *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed by Jacob Climo and Maria Cattell, (New York: Altamira Press, 2002), 4.

someone who was middle-class or would they interpret the depression differently if a husband or father did not lose their job during the 1930s? One also needs to remember that the testimonies presented are subjective and individual. No one experience is the same. It is also important to highlight the preconceived notions that present themselves in sources such as Baillargeon and Broadfoot.

What I am presented with in both cases is the authors' interpretations and understandings of the interviews. Both Broadfoot and Baillargeon are the ones who transcribed their interviews and placed them into their work. It is also important to keep in mind that none of these authors do reproduce the full transcripts of their interviews. So I have to be aware of the fact that both authors collected and organized the interviews and presented them in such a manner that benefitted their own work. Broadfoot, for one, makes an attempt to comment on his methodological approach to his study. He interviewed hundreds of people, "so many I lost count. Some encounters were casual, the small talk of strangers, but I would shift the talk around the Depression, and often they never knew why I did so. Other interviews were intensive, with the conversation firmly pointed on the subject for an hour or two. I interviewed people in their homes, in offices, in stores, in bars, in cafes, while travelling and while on the street".⁴⁸ He used a tape recorder whenever it was available, made detailed notes and remembered the stories and words as clearly as he could, and wrote them down after the interview was over. Broadfoot did some editing of most interviews and as he writes, "I did compress the story where necessary, although I always tried to keep the individual flavour of the storyteller's style. Stories often were shortened, but facts were never altered and facts vital to the story were never left out. Some of the stories were told to me on the understanding that I would not give away the name of the teller

⁴⁸ Ibid., ix.

or allow others to be identified”.⁴⁹ From this we are able to see that the book is organized and presented from the author’s perspective; however, we are still left with valuable and insightful stories from those ‘ordinary’ Canadians and therefore works such as these are beneficial to the narrative of the Great Depression.

The final collection of sources that were used in this study are letters written to R.B. Bennett during his time as Prime Minister, 1930-1935. These letters can be grouped into two main categories. The first group were taken from *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett 1930-1935*, which is a book comprised of a variety of letters written by men, women, and children who experienced the hardships of the depression during Bennett’s term as Prime Minister.⁵⁰ The purpose for using letters as a source is that they allow readers to gain a first-hand look at those ordinary Canadians most affected by the hardships of the thirties. According to the editors Linda Grayson and Michael Bliss, the heavy dependency of historians on written sources results in “almost no first-hand access to the lives of the bottom groups in societies” and they add that “people who tried to speak for the helpless -union leaders, social workers, radical politicians- too often sketched the poor in their own image”.⁵¹ From these letters, we are able to gain a historical understanding of the experiences of the ordinary Canadian; we are, in a sense, provided with a ‘history from below’ and a first-hand account of what life was like in the depression-era.

The two authors claim that the letters to R.B Bennett are unique as they allow us to “bypass the middle-class spokesmen...and enter directly into their condition and feelings...they

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

⁵¹ Ibid., xxi.

speak more personally, more vividly, more effectively than any source we know".⁵² There are 168 letters reprinted in the source which have been taken from several thousands from the R.B Bennett Papers in the Library and Archives Canada collection.⁵³ Of those 168 in the book, I selected approximately 25 letters. Each letter had to be written by a husband and father, who made explicit reference to having dependents at home. It is important to note that what is presented in these letters represents the most extreme circumstances that were faced by Canadians. According to the editors, those represented in the letters were not

a typical group of Canadians during the 1930s. The whole country was not in rags and starving. These are [however] the forgotten people, the submerged tenth, and no description of Canadian life in the 1930s is balanced without including the other eight or nine million Canadians with whom we are not concerned...they certainly indicate how bad the 1930s were for some people in Canada: worse, perhaps, than most of the history texts and even many of the survivors remember.⁵⁴

A critical reading of the letters written to Bennett provides many interesting ideas surrounding masculinity and gender. I am not aware of anyone else who has taken such a source and analyzed it with a focus on masculinity.⁵⁵ These were not the kinds of questions that Grayson and Bliss were asking at the time; however we can read them for the insight they provide of gender history. These letters bring to the fore-front intriguing elements of masculinity, femininity, and domesticity and provide a great deal of insight into the livelihoods of the most destitute of Canadians.

⁵² Ibid., xxii. It is important to note that the editors have changed the names and often disguised the residence of those mentioned in the text as a way to protect correspondent's privacy.

⁵³ Ibid. xxii. The selection was not made on a rigid statistical basis- percentage quotas for each province, each category of poverty, each year, and so on. The bias in the author's selection does favour the desperately poor those who were often 'normally' underemployed, ill-fed, and ill-housed. The letters are arranged in chronological order and in rough chronological proportion to the master collection in Ottawa.

⁵⁴ Ibid., xxiv.

⁵⁵ A study of similar nature would be Michael Roper's examination of soldier's letters home to their mothers during the First World War. Michael Roper, "Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History", *History Workshop Journal* 59, (2005), 57-72.

Since Grayson and Bliss only use 168 letters, from a possible several thousand, I went to Library and Archives Canada, and with the assistance of the archivist, we looked in the most plausible place that these letters would be located. Upon finding the collection, I was able to add twenty-two new letters from a possible several thousand. The process of selecting these twenty-two new letters involved choosing ones that were either written by married men or wives; there had to be some mention, either directly or in passing, about having dependents to look after at home, and they needed to demonstrate that they were in a situation that called for them to turn to Bennett for some financial assistance.⁵⁶ These new letters were taken from the Bennett Papers, grouped under the title ‘request for assistance’ from Library and Archives Canada.⁵⁷ Due to the poor quality of hand-writing, I only used letters in which I could decipher the contents. It also should be noted that by no means is the review of letters exhaustive, there could be more letters grouped under a different title. The bias in the selection, like in Grayson and Bliss, does favour the desperately poor, those who were often ‘normally’ underemployed, ill-fed, and ill-housed. In both cases, whether I used a letter from the book or a letter I located at the archives, I present the letter in the way that it was presented to me. I copied the letter as it was, spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors included. I also tried to provide as much background information as I could about the letter writer, including their place of residence, age, sex, previous employment history and anything else I felt would provide the reader with a mental image of the circumstances of the person represented in the letter.

⁵⁶ It must be kept in mind that where families were in the life cycle impacted how they experienced the depression-era. Those who were financially stable before the thirties often had it easier than those who had no security in the form of an income. Families often delayed having children during this time, and marriages were often delayed as the responsibility that accompanied the breadwinner ideal caused people to be more cautious. These trends do not present themselves in the letters, but should be made known.

⁵⁷ Library and Archives Canada, R.B. Bennett fond MG26-K Personal Papers, “Request for Assistance” and “Request for Assistance, Financial”, microfilm reels M-1319 to M-1325.

What is most intriguing when one examines all the testimonies of this study, is the language that men and women were using during the 1930s to describe their situations to the prime minister. Using recurrently words such as ‘hurt pride’, ‘stigma’, and ‘work not charity’ was very important because these feelings and emotions showed a recognition of the importance that work and wages played within Canadian society at that time. It is striking to me how these men and women were aware of their situation and that they placed such an importance on their ‘proper position’ within society. In order to achieve all I have set out to examine in this study, it becomes necessary to provide a breakdown of the chapters of my thesis and briefly comment on their perspective and on the logic that unites them.

Chapter Breakdown

Four chapters placed in a specific order build on each other in order to provide a comprehensive examination of masculinity amongst families during the Great Depression in Canada. Chapter one, ‘Masculinity and the Pride of Earning a Wage’ serves the purpose of placing the breadwinner ideal into its long and wide context by exploring how the idea of the male breadwinner became synonymous with waged labour. It is necessary to open with this chapter because one needs to gain an understanding of the values and characteristics that came to define fatherhood. In order to do so, I will discuss changes in the Canadian economy, from a predominately agriculturally based family economy, to a more industrial, family waged economy, which caused the definition and expectations of fatherhood to change. As the switch from agriculture to an industrial economy was never complete, pre-industrial attitudes towards unemployment remained in competition with new ideas surrounding the waged economy. It will become apparent that men identified with the stability and security that waged labour brought to

their families. Wage-labour brought pride and respectability for many working-class men and their families.

The second chapter, 'Masculinity and the Humiliation of Relief' examines the stigma surrounding relief. It explores the attempts the Canadian federal government made to reinforce the breadwinner ideal through the implementation of two major programs: the works relief projects and the administration of direct relief. Through the aid of a variety of letters and oral testimonies, this chapter shows that many of the men saw the reliance on public relief as a personal failure of their ability to be an adequate provider. I build on the first chapter's position that the changing economy was the reason why men could not fulfill their roles to show how several men came to see unemployment as being beyond their control. However, through the aid of letters and memoirs, it will be seen that many men did not fully recognize unemployment as being of no fault of their own.

Chapter three, 'Masculinity and Family Responsibility' investigates the family dynamics of husbands and fathers to see how various family members experienced the unemployment of men and in return, the impact their values and practices had on the male breadwinner. It discusses how wives and children viewed their husbands and fathers and to what extent they recognized the importance that waged labour played in the sense of pride and respectability of the male head of household, which we will have discussed in chapters one and two. The chapter will address how many women during the 1930s conceived their roles primarily as mothers and, similarly to their husbands, prided themselves on their family responsibilities. Through the aid of letters and memoirs, one can see how women accepted their 'role' as mother and economically dependent citizens and adhered to and encouraged the existing norms. These women acknowledged the pride and respect waged-labour brought to their husbands.

It is necessary to note that when one discusses the idea of masculinity they need to keep in mind that masculinity is not something that is defined solely by men. Masculinity is a concept that is socially constructed, meaning that a good story of men involves discussions about how others interpret and define them. As such, for historians John Tosh and Michael Roper, masculinity as a concept is not a narrow or simplistic idea; rather it is diverse and broad in range. Masculinity is not a distinct part of a man's personality, but rather it is more of a matter of social or cultural construction.⁵⁸ Being socially constructed means that outside elements can influence what it means to be masculine. As such, when discussing masculinity, it is necessary to include women into the discussion. That is why, discussions of women and their understanding of the breadwinner ideal takes place in this chapter, as it contributes to an overall comprehension of masculinity. Also of importance is how children viewed their father and his unemployment during the depression-era. Including women and children into the discussion allows for a deeper analysis and fruitful discussion of masculinity. Finally the third chapter studies how fathers interpreted their familial responsibility. Their concern for their wives and children was related to the larger working-class ideals surrounding a strong work ethic. The working-class work ethic is important when one examines the limits and challenges of the breadwinner ideal. It leads to the fourth chapter.

'Masculinity, Public Participation, and Politics' is the final chapter to this study. Here we will examine the relations of men and women of the 1930s with the Canadian government. With the aid of letters and testimonies, this chapter will reflect especially on how letter writers viewed the role of government and understood their place in politics. It is also important to explore the involvement of the Canadian government from the perspective of the government itself and comment on the influence they had over the population. The premise in which masculinity fits

⁵⁸ Roper, 58.

into these ideas of politics is central to this chapter. This inclusion of government into the discussion relates back to the idea above, that masculinity cannot be understood on its own terms. It is a social construct and many ideas contribute to how masculinity is understood. As will be seen, economic independence was deemed to be the single most important criterion for democratic political participation. As such, universal citizenship was predicated on the possibility of free and equal individuals associating together.

The chapter will examine the concerns the Canadian government had with the potential abuse of the relief system by recipients. To do so, it will comment on the administration of relief through the constant surveillance and inspection of recipients, which demonstrated a form of distrust towards the unemployed. This was related to public authorities questioning a man's willingness to adequately provide the necessities for his family. Also in this chapter we will explore the threat of political upheaval that presented itself during this time and show how many of the letters and testimonies do not conform to the claims made by some historians that political revolution was a real threat within Canada. The chapter will conclude by returning to an important notion of chapter three to comment on the role the government played in maintaining a working-class culture of independence and autonomy. Paradoxically, it meant breaking in some ways the breadwinner ideal, in order to uphold the very ideal.

It is hoped that this study will bring to light the experiences of Canadian men and their families and the history of masculinity during the economic hardships of the 1930s. The collection of letters and testimonies illustrate the humiliation, shame, and disgrace that unemployment brought to many men and their families. The depression-era was a time of hardship, challenge, and contradiction for government and society alike, as there was recognition of the importance that the male breadwinner played within Canadian society.

CHAPTER 1

MASCULINITY AND THE PRIDE OF EARNING A WAGE

The most notable effect of the processes which transformed the economy over the nineteenth century was the slow change of families from farm *family economies* to industrial *family wage economies*. In the preindustrial society, the family unit was the economic unit; in the wage economy it was ultimately the *persons* in family households who entered into social and economic relations with others *as individuals*, not as family collectivities.¹

This excerpt from Canadian family historian Emily Nett highlights a significant aspect of this chapter; the change from a farm '*family economy*' to a '*family wage economy*' became the basis on which the male identity was constructed. In Canada, as in many other places, the shift from a predominately agricultural society to a predominately waged-labour society helped change how married men were viewed. Associated with this new 'waged economy', came changes in the definition of fatherhood which, in turn, brought with them many hardships and challenges as society tried to move through the economic instability of the 1930s.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the male identity became associated with waged labour. It will discuss the changing economy within Canada from a predominately agriculturally based family economy, to a more industrial, family waged economy. Through this examination it will become apparent that men became defined less by their earning status than by the stability and security that accompanied it. However, this transformation was never complete, which caused for pre-industrial attitudes towards the unemployed to remain in competition with new ideas surrounding the waged economy. Through a detailed exploration of various letters and oral testimonies it will become apparent that wage-labour brought pride and respectability for many men and their families. The developments within the economy led to the creation of a

¹ Emily Nett, *Canadian Families Past and Present*, (Toronto: Butterworths Canada Ltd., 1988), 47. Italics original.

working-class, characterized by a strong commitment towards a work ethic that encouraged independence and autonomy. In addition the Canadian government recognized these ideas, of independence and autonomy, and through various policies, such as the *Canadian Patriotic Fund*, adhered to the notion of the breadwinner ideal.

The first section to this chapter will discuss how the definitions of fatherhood changed with the shift in the economy from a predominately agrarian based economy, to a more industrialized and urbanized environment. It is through this exploration that it becomes apparent that with a change in the economy, masculine identity became characterized by waged-labour. From here, one will address how with the movement to an industrialized economy came the emergence of the working-class and a working-class culture. This is significant because it is the members of the working-class who embrace the notion that earning a wage meant independence and autonomy for themselves and their families. The third section will examine the pride that men felt through earning a wage and will comment on how these men looked to their fathers and forefathers as examples of what a good father and provider should be. However, these men failed to take into account that the circumstances, for both their fathers and themselves, were different and fail to interpret unemployment as 'no fault of their own'. The first chapter will conclude by considering the role the government played in adhering to the breadwinner ideal by exploring the *Canadian Patriotic Fund* and the role the working-class played in having the fund act as a surrogate breadwinner in their absence.

1.1 Changing Definitions of Fatherhood: How Masculinity Became Synonymous with Wage-Labour

Prior to industrialization, the British North American economy was a predominately family-based agrarian economy in which men, women, and children all played distinct but interdependent productive roles. Husbands and fathers worked alongside their families as the family was understood as an economic unit. At the same time, the social structure of British North American society was “intensely patriarchal, based upon the ‘natural’ rule of men as ‘governors’ of state, economy, and family”.² The ideal notions regarding fatherhood were precise; fathers were expected to be “affectionate and interested parents, but also to be the disciplinarians and ‘governors’ of their domain... [and] often took over training and educational plans for adolescents, especially their sons”.³ Fathers took an active role in the development and maintenance of their families. In Canada, as in the England studied by gender historian John Tosh, the idea of an active and involved father was “fundamental to...masculinity because it contributed so markedly to a man’s immediate social standing”.⁴ Playing a significant role in the rearing of children had represented a “striking shift from the patriarchal homestead of sixteenth and seventeenth century England. The argument...is that the Victorian male never really abandoned the historic role as protector and breadwinner but profoundly modified it by his new commitment to domesticity”.⁵ It was believed that the influence of the father in the home during this time resulted from the notion that the father was to provide moral supervision and training for his children.⁶ The father’s standing within society was “bound up with how his children-

² Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ John Tosh, “Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The case of early and mid-Victorian England”, *Gender and History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 50.

⁵ Albert Schmidt, Review of “A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England” by John Tosh, *Journal or Social History* 34, no.3 (2001), 725.

⁶ Tosh, “Authority and Nurture”, 51.

especially his sons- carried themselves in the world at large”.⁷ Thus, it was important for the father to be active and involved within the household. Domesticity and active fatherhood were seen by many as indicators of his masculinity; being a father testified to “his virility; it lent greater substance to his role as sustainer (sic) and protector of family dependents; and it provided an enlarged and privileged sphere for the exercise of authority”.⁸ However, during the early to mid nineteenth century, this Victorian model itself underwent transformation.

Indeed, for Tosh, the 1830s and 1840s brought about an abrupt change to how masculinity was to be defined in relation to being a father. During this time there was an increase in the status of mothers and, as a result, a question-mark was left over the role of the father in bringing up his children, but also in areas such as discipline.⁹ In addition, since mothers were becoming increasingly responsible for the well-being of their sons, there was more concern amongst many fathers.¹⁰ Child-rearing advice literature in the eighteenth century had commonly been addressed to the father, on the assumption that he exercised the chief responsibility for his children’s upbringing once the nursing stage was over; now it tended to be written for mothers alone. It was believed of mothers that “none can supply her place, none can feel her interest; and as in infancy a mother is the best nurse, so in childhood she is the best guardian and instructress”.¹¹ An example of the increased presence of mothers was that they were now becoming responsible for educating their sons about sex, which was previously the father’s domain. The end result was a generation of men becoming aware of the unprecedented influence

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 50. According to Tosh there is abundant evidence that in the nineteenth century the transmission of masculine attributes to the next generation was taken extremely seriously by the middle class. Education and moral training were central to a father’s concerns.

⁹ Ibid., 52. Motherhood stood on a new pinnacle of esteem, not only because greater value was placed on breast-feeding, but also because the mother was endowed with a unique moral role that stemmed from her reproductive function.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

of women and feminine authority in their sons lives. As families became more mother-centred, fathers were increasingly left out of their children's lives.¹² Having been praised for their domesticity, fathers now became 'outsiders' in their own homes as more emphasis was placed on the role of mothers and motherhood. Thus, the dynamics of parenthood and of the proper place for fathers and mothers were undergoing significant changes at the same time that the economy was shifting from an agrarian to industrial society. With the introduction of industrialization came new expectations for members of society. Husbands and fathers were pushed to the forefront of society through the separation of home and work.

1.2 A Changing Economy: The Emergence of a Working-Class and Working-Class Culture

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the economy shifted into one characterized by mechanized production.¹³ According to Emily Nett's study of the Canadian family, the process of industrialization revolved around the notion that "men with few skills and no land sold their labour to other men who owned the means of production, organized and managed the work processes, and controlled the market. Working-class wives, who were effectively excluded from ownership, also worked at home. Thus arose the association of work with places outside the home and the notion of fathers/husbands as providers".¹⁴ With industrialization came the removal and separation of men from the everyday tasks of domestic work.¹⁵ Pre-industrialization had seen men engage in the various tasks of the household, such as tending to the fields. With industrialization and the introduction of waged labour, men entered

¹² Cynthia Comacchio, "Bringing Up Father: Defining a Modern Canadian Fatherhood, 1900-1940" in *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed by Lori Chambers and Edgar-Andre Montigny, (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 1998), 291.

¹³ Males began to earn a wage and leave the home to enter the work place. By 1900, there were 70,000 factories in Canada; 60 per cent of the labour force was now non-agricultural. Comacchio, *Infinite Bonds of Family*, 15.

¹⁴ Nett, 47.

¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion on industrial developments in Canada see, for example, Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owrain, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, Chapters 13-15.

into the paid workforce, while women were left to the confines of the sphere of unpaid domestic work. Women were engaged in various domestic tasks such as cooking and laundry, the growing of vegetables, and baking.¹⁶ Women's work became increasingly hidden within the household and according to Nett, the myth was born that "wives did not work, and eventually the norm was established that wives...should stay home. To enter the labour force was to be remiss in one's duties to husband, children and society".¹⁷ From the latter parts of the nineteenth century and by the end of the First World War, it was believed that the only individual in the family considered to be a worker was the husband and father.

With the belief that it was the father who was the worker, gender images became crystallized around the 'natural' distinctions between the sexes, as "mothers came to represent nurturance and selfless devotion, while fathers represented public conceptions of law, order and authority...[and] with industrial development, more men left their homes to 'work' while women and children stayed behind".¹⁸ Industrial developments brought with it a reconfiguration of ideas surrounding skill, gender and family. According to Cynthia Comacchio's study of the Canadian family from 1850-1940, "underpinning the [new] 'male breadwinner family' model that was more and more held up as the 'norm', separate spheres ideology became the most powerful factor restricting women's access to paid labour".¹⁹ Wage labour changed the manner in which production within the family operated. Accordingly, family economies became more dependent on externally earned wages for as many members as possible, particularly fathers.²⁰ The male

¹⁶Comacchio, *Infinite Bonds*, 34. This is referred to as the 'hidden economy' of the home, which was headed by women who acted as the resourceful manager who 'stretched' the family wages with careful shopping and housekeeping.

¹⁷ Nett, 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ Comacchio, *Infinite Bonds*, 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32. It is important to note that older children, sons and after daughters, contributed to the externally earned wage for the family.

breadwinner ideal was becoming the most influential factor shaping gender roles and relations in the early twentieth century. Men successfully ‘fathered’ by earning their family’s keep through waged labour.²¹ Providing for a family thus signified more than the obvious material provision that ‘breadwinning’ allowed, and more than the concept of masculine prerogative that it upheld. It also signified real fatherly devotion, paternal protection from neglect, harm and danger, the cruel realities that men had to confront.²² This notion of the father providing and protecting for his family, through the earning of a wage became interconnected within the new rising working-class culture.

An important aspect which needs to be addressed is that with this shift to a predominately industrial, waged economy came the emergence of a distinctly new working-class and a working-class culture. In Canada, the working-class emerged during the 19th century in English Canada as a result of the spread of industrial capitalism in British North America. This idea of ‘working-class’ relates to the notion that individuals sold their labour for wages and developed a work for wages mentality. According to Canadian labour historian Bryan Palmer, what defines the working-class in contrast with farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers of the past, was that they lack decisive “control over their conditions of labour, produce a surplus for others who own the physical environment of production and its tools as well as working-class time on the job”.²³ These people, Palmer adds, “and their familial dependants, who nurture and reproduce on a daily and generational basis the labour and personnel that do all of this, are the human material of the

²¹ Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father”, 292.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), 22.

working-class”.²⁴ The working-class prided themselves on their strong work ethic and the sense of independence and autonomy that accompanied it.

Accompanying the changes and influences brought on by industrialization, masculinity became synonymous with wage labour. The ability to provide for one’s family contributed to a man’s sense of independence and autonomy as for many, “the nature of a man’s public character was even more important than his private life in determining whether he possessed enough masculine virtue for public life”.²⁵ Men had long been exposed to the importance of work and family and often took pride in their ability to provide a respectable life for their families. Men had traditionally been accustomed to providing and protecting their families through their active involvement within the family unit; however, now to properly provide and protect a family was defined by the security and stability that a wage brought to the family. From wage labour, masculinity came to be entrenched with the “values of skill, pride, and respectability [which] were equated with manliness, independence, and freedom”.²⁶ The male breadwinner ideal was a key element in terms of masculine self-definition and of popular notions about family.²⁷

1.3 The Influence of Religion: Creating a Breadwinner Ideal

The influence of religion in the daily lives of many men played an important role in contributing to their identity and defining work as a form of self-expression. According to gender and welfare historian Nancy Christie, throughout the nineteenth century “the Protestant churches had played a prominent role in defining ‘domesticity’ in Canadian culture”. She continues

²⁴Ibid. Palmer defines the working-class in orthodox Marxist terms.

²⁵ Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 78.

²⁶ Lara Campbell, “Respectable Citizens of Canada: Gender, Family and Unemployment in the Great Depression”, PhD diss. Queens University, 2002, 44.

²⁷ Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father”, 293.

“similarly, in the early decades of the twentieth century, evangelicalism continued to view the family as an essential locus of activity if Protestantism was to maintain its vitality and strengthen its cultural authority”.²⁸ Both American and British historians have argued that the ideology of domesticity emerged in Canada only at the turn of the last century.²⁹ The 1880s, according to Lynne Marks and Nancy Christie, “was the decade during which the middle-class embraced the values of evangelical Protestantism. Indeed, evangelical notions of morality, respectability, and family relations had become so ‘normal’ among the middle class that their increasingly aggressive assertion led to an equally self-conscious response from ‘unchurched’ members of society, many of whom belonged to the semiskilled and unskilled working class”.³⁰ One can see that the religious values of the middle-class had come to influence the lives of those ‘unchurched’ working-class members. These attitudes towards families had come to be the ‘norm’ for many families of both classes.³¹ The works of British and American historians have come to influence the manner in which religion has been understood in Canada.³² These religious ideals combined with the working-classes’ own notions of respectability and “habits of steadiness and perseverance”, which helped to develop the breadwinner ideal.³³ One manner in which religion contributed to a man’s self-identity was the belief that work was a form of self-expression.

²⁸ Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 17-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³¹ Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father”, 293.

³² It is important to note that studies of both masculinity and gender, in relation to religion in a Canadian context, have developed mainly around the works of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Mary Ryan, and John Tosh. As such, this study will draw on these same sources to provide a more detailed discussion surrounding male identity and gender in Canada.

³³ Palmer, 57. These ideas were all part of a variety of working-class self-help activities, temperance societies, and fraternal lodges, which helped to cultivate and develop a working-class culture within the class itself as they had an outlet to create their own interests. This can be seen as the working-classes own source for masculine autonomy, from within the social class itself and not placed upon them from the classes above.

One way this was achieved was through connecting the idea of work to God. For example, “work was not to be despised; rather it was to be seen as doing God’s duty in the world”.³⁴ Previously in the middle-class, a man’s masculine nature was defined by “sport and codes of honor derived from military prowess, finding expression in hunting, riding, drinking and ‘wenching’”.³⁵ With this new found idea of work, as a form of expression, manliness and work were to be defined by honour, competence, and respectability.³⁶ Manliness was connected to work and despite the commercial world not having “the glory associated with the battlefield in the past, or the political arena in the present...it was a world that mattered”.³⁷ Men were summoned to a new calling and were characterized by their sense of responsibility and respectability that providing brought to their family. The active involvement within the church also played a significant role in defining a man’s masculinity.

Attending church contributed to the definition of masculinity for many married men. The family was often interpreted to be the foundation of social and moral stability. Thus, by attending church, the husband demonstrated his commitment to this idea. The notion of respectability as a provider for his family was “strengthened by church involvement... [as] what he heard there was intended to strengthen his commitment to the role of family breadwinner”.³⁸ According to Lynn Marks’s study of religion and identity in the late nineteenth century, on a weekly basis it was not uncommon for married men to be exposed to the teachings of a minister who would often emphasize to his congregation that “providing for one’s family was a divine command and that

³⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 112. Work was to be dignified, serious and a properly masculine pursuit. Such a concept was necessary to the growing middle class, whose livelihood so often derived from the despised activities of commerce.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. This concept was the result of combined ideals of both Evangelicals and Quakers.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* 32.

‘he who failed to do so was worse than Voltaire, or Hume or Ingersoll’”.³⁹ The power of the church did more than reaffirm a man’s respectability; it also reflected a particular Christian notion of masculinity that incorporated a commitment to the domestic sphere. As John Tosh has discussed, traditionally the Victorian notion of the family was focused on the private spaces of the home, which were to be warm and welcoming; the very nature that women were to emulate.⁴⁰ Therefore, by attending church, men could “enjoy the domestic life and at the same time be influenced by women’s higher moral and spiritual values”.⁴¹ The facets of masculinity were defined through two interconnected notions: the respectability of breadwinning and the idea of a deeply committed, faith-inspired family man.

This notion of a ‘deeply committed, faith-inspired man’ is intriguing when one looks at Patricia Dirks and her study of masculinity and fatherhood in Canada during the early twentieth century. By 1900, there was a concern mounting amongst leaders of Canada’s major Protestant denominations that the church was losing ground both individually and collectively.⁴² There was a fear over the lack of religious education and presence in many children’s lives. As such, there was an attempt to redefine Christian masculinity for the modern age.⁴³ Mothers, even those who were heavily involved in church work, were warned against taking too much time from their primary duties as homemakers. Fears about the feminization of the church, however, focused more and more attention on fathers, who were admonished to put family responsibilities ahead of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion on the role of religion in the daily lives of wives and mothers, see chapter 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴² Patricia Dirks, “Reinventing Christian Masculinity and Fatherhood: The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1900-1920”, 290. In *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969*, ed by Nancy Christie, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002).

⁴³ Ibid., 291.

all other interests, business included.⁴⁴ Religious educators sought to redefine a new masculine ideal based on “personality and social involvement. Their efforts included the definition of an ideal of Christian fatherhood suitable for the modern, urban industrial world”.⁴⁵ Thus, good fathers were to be well-rounded individuals, ones who devoted time and energy to fulfilling their essential and unique duties. This meant that fathers were to balance home life with wage-earning. In essence, devoting time and effort to parenting and home life now established one’s masculinity. This balance between earning a wage and being active within the lives of their children complements the idea that breadwinning was more than material possessions, it signified real fatherly devotion.⁴⁶ However, there still was an emphasis placed on providing for one’s family through the earning of a wage. The influence of Protestant faith non-denominational voluntary associations, such as the YMCA, played a pivotal role in connecting masculinity and waged labour.

The efforts of the YMCA during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries played a pivotal role in further associating the ideal of masculinity with waged labour. According to Thomas Winter’s study of the YMCA in the United States, officials within the organization drew on concepts of character, personality, and self-expression, to redefine the ideals of manhood, while simultaneously constructing class boundaries.⁴⁷ For those of the YMCA, character was often used interchangeably with manhood and that “distinguished the man who had successfully

⁴⁴ This is interesting as in the Victorian era, there was a shift to mother-centred homes, now, there seemed to be a shift back to the influence of the father in the household, as well as in the public sphere.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴⁶ This balance between earning a wage and protecting one’s family is something that presents itself in numerous letters and memoirs in this study. One will be able to see how fathers were extremely concerned with finding employment to provide for their family, while simultaneously placing the welfare of their family before their own.

⁴⁷ Thomas Winter, “Personality, Character, and Self-Expression: The YMCA and the construction of Manhood and Class, 1877-1920”, *Men and Masculinities* 2, no. 3 (January 2000), 277.

moulded good habits into a unified self endowed with a strong work ethic”.⁴⁸ The idea of a good work ethic was essential when it came to defining what constituted a man. The notion of work also played into how manhood was to be defined. In addition, work played a crucial role in character development: “work satisfies one of the highest needs of the soul because it gives opportunity for self-expression”.⁴⁹ Moreover, one of the highest forms of self-expression was production; it is through production and the making of something that ideals are reproduced – both spiritual and material.⁵⁰ It was through production that society, specifically men, found self-expression, whereas women were to express themselves through the maintenance and caring of the family. Work, therefore, as an outlet for self-expression, represented a true path towards character, which in turn symbolized a true path to manhood.

For the working-class, “workingmen would demonstrate their manhood through serving their employers as faithful and good-willed workers”.⁵¹ These masculine ideals were established within society and were strived after by many working-class males. However, as Canadian society was undergoing a transformation from a predominately agricultural economy to a new industrial economy, the problem of unemployment illustrates the unique situation that the Canadian economy was experiencing. The transition from one economy to another created a slow reaction in the attitudes towards unemployment as there was a lack of acceptance amongst the unemployed to realize that being without work was no fault of their own.

A phenomenon accompanied Canada’s new industrial economy as there was a shift from a predominantly agriculturally-based society to one that was becoming highly industrialized and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The concept of self-expression originated in the private sphere of the Victorian middle-class home. Whereas nineteenth century Victorians preferred self-restraint in public, in the privacy of their homes, they emphasized emotional self-expression between spouses and family members.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

urbanized. Convincing evidence pictured ‘unemployment’ as a new problem, of alarming dimensions, and beyond the control of the worker. However, the attitudes surrounding public assistance did not change with the changing economy.⁵² During the depression-era, this failure to recognize unemployment as being out of the control of the worker was problematic for many working-class males. Despite attitudes and evidence that would suggest unemployment was out of the control of the worker, many unemployed men themselves did not seem to adhere to this perception. Numerous men, as highlighted through various letters and memoirs of this thesis, saw unemployment as a failure on their behalf and as a challenge to their proud natures. Often this stance was based on the fact that it was something their fathers had not experienced.

1.4 Looking to Our Fathers: Pride and Respectability Through Work

Pride was a characteristic that was closely connected to the breadwinner status, if it did not define it. According to one woman interviewed by Broadfoot, who worked in the relief offices in the thirties, unemployed men had their pride: “my God, how they had their pride. Relief was a disgrace. Men would say that never in the history of their family- and they’d usually mention something about the British Empire Loyalists, or coming West with the first C.P.R. trains- never had they had to go on relief”.⁵³ There is an interesting aspect to this reflection, which relates to the settlement of the nation by the Loyalists and offers a reason as to why the fathers and forefathers mentioned rarely had to turn to relief. The movement of the Loyalists to Canada was largely an economic migration and had a dual impact on the local economies. On a short terms basis, the settlement provided new markets for the produce of the population that was

⁵² James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 8. For a detailed discussion on the attitudes towards relief see Chapter 2.

⁵³ Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1977), 78.

already there.⁵⁴ Secondly, the settlement of the Loyalists added to the existing labour force, which increased the potential output of the economy. These men were the farmers, fishermen, loggers, shippers, and sailors of the Maritimes' new economic status in the British mercantile system.⁵⁵ Based on this it is evident to see that many the fathers and forefathers would have the economic capabilities to support their families and thus, not have to rely on assistance.

Thanks to the economic opportunities of recent past times, men's fathers and grandfathers had rarely set their pride aside to ask for assistance, even when providing might have been difficult as they moved westward for the first time. The reference to a family's forefathers not turning to hand-outs was the basis of another depression survivor interviewed by Broadfoot: "let's not even admit that we walked around with holes in our sole and souls and let's never admit the fact we had to work for a dollar a day or we had to take relief and do things which our pride and our upbringing and our heritage would never allow us to do before".⁵⁶ Indeed, many men of the thirties commented on how their fathers and grandfathers 'never had to go on relief'. For men who often compared themselves and looked to their own fathers as examples of what a successful father should be, having to admit failure to adequately provide and protect their family was seen as humiliating. One's 'heritage' and upbringing' had these men look to the past to see how their fathers dealt with hardships.

In a letter dated June 24th 1932, Mr F. Deane of Toronto, Ontario referred to his own father's experiences when he first settled in Canada,

I am 41 years of age, married, with 3 children, aged 8, 5 and 3 years respectively...I settled down in Toronto in 1923, as an Accountant for a large American Corporation,

⁵⁴ Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owram, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1991), 114.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Broadfoot, 18. The specific circumstances of this father are unknown, as for most of Broadfoot's interviewees.

and was married... We haven't a cent, are (sic) dependent on the City for our food, (*which does not provide proper nourishment for a young family*), are 4 months behind without rent and are apparently up against a blank wall... I do not infer, Sir, that my difficulties are in any sense your problem. Were I alone I should take my medicine without a whimper, but what of my kiddies? My father, in the undisturbed pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, was able to create, provide for and fairly well educate a family of 6... Frankly after nearly two years of nerve wracking struggle and privation, only to land in absolute destitution is it any wonder that one is desperate. Is it what we fought for [referring to his time as a soldier] that the man who will gladly sink education, experience, pride and everything else he values to work in any menial capacity at any return which will provide the necessities of life for his family, food, shelter and clothing, cannot, despite superhuman efforts, find even that consolation... Am I to continue in charitable slavery until the vestige of morale is gone, and my family and their chance for happiness destroyed?⁵⁷

Joy Parr's study of two Canadian industrial towns from 1880-1950, also found men who would have "no doubt... measured their personal worth as men by their ability to meet their household's needs for cash. They were particularly likely to compare themselves in this regard to their fathers... this was a long-standing part of masculine gender identity".⁵⁸ The comparison of some men to their fathers and forefathers was an old characteristic of masculinity, one that did not change with industrialization; however, the manner in which these men provided for their families was different. With the hardships of the depression, this comparison to their fathers created special adversity as these men were no longer able to adequately provide in the same manner as their fathers and forefathers. This is of interest because in the letter by F. Deane, he makes reference to his father as 'in the undisturbed pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, was able to create, provide for and fairly well educate a family of 6', thus offering a point of comparison to himself. He suggests that even though his father had a larger family, he was still able to successfully provide for his family; therefore, he should be able to provide for his smaller

⁵⁷ F. Deane, Toronto, Ontario, June 24th 1932, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 27. There is another significant theme in this letter, which will be returned to in chapter four; the notion of soldiering and welfare rights.

⁵⁸ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 198-199.

family of three. Many of these men of the depression-era wanted nothing more than to provide the same benefits that their own fathers provided for them and to ensure that their own family had the same opportunities as they had. These men were looking to the past as a way to measure their abilities, in a time when the expectations of what it meant to be a father and husband were changing.

The pride that accompanied earning a wage was something that was instilled into many from a very young age based on the very hard circumstances that they were exposed to. According to James Gray's autobiographical account of the depression-era, his family "knew nothing but poverty in Winnipeg during the First World War" and as a result, "money has an overweening importance to anybody who grows up in poverty".⁵⁹ Being exposed to the dire conditions that a lack of money brought to his family, Gray began to earn a living at a very young age. In his words,

at fifteen, I had started out to make my fortune. In our family, the idea of any of us pursuing a higher-education was never considered because it was *naturally* assumed that, as the oldest of four brothers, I would leave school to help support the family as soon as it was legally possible...I made it to Grade 10 and then got my first job in 1921 delivering groceries for \$5 a week. From there I moved up to delivering engravings for \$7 a week. When I landed a job as an office boy in the Grain Exchange at \$10 in the early fall, I was convinced I was on the sure road to success.⁶⁰

From his personal reflection, one is able to see how James Gray was subjected to conditions that encouraged him to become the 'natural' breadwinner for his family. According to Gray 'it was naturally assumed' that he would 'help support the family'. This undoubtedly was something he carried with him as he grew older and began a family of his own. Canadian society had encouraged men to mark their own steadiness and dependability as traits of personal, manly

⁵⁹ James Gray, *The Winter Years: the Depression on the Prairies*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Italics added.

character which were normalized by the regularity of waged employment.⁶¹ The notion of a man as steady and dependable was a mark of his masculine character, which suggests that men were only able to achieve this through the regularity of waged employment. Like James Gray mentioned before, his strong attachment to work and success was also influenced by many men before him, who had “come out west with nothing and made their fortunes in Winnipeg. If they could do it, I would someday do it”.⁶² What should be noted from Gray’s example is that he was not living in a pre-industrial Canada; rather he was living in a booming industrial Canada, which did not yet challenge one’s notion of self-sufficiency. Gray was inspired and influenced by those before him who began with nothing and ended up achieving great success in their lives. From an early age, Gray was determined to get ahead in life and to be a great provider for his own wife and daughter.

The idea of earning a wage in order to provide for one’s family might have been a new concept; however, the idea of caring and providing for a family was not, which is seen in these frequent comparison’s to one’s father and forefathers. As we have seen, the unique situation that the Canadian economy was experiencing, being at a cross between the pre-industrial, agrarian and the industrial wage oriented society, had caused for a recognition that these men had to provide for their families through the earning of a wage. But the scarcity of waged jobs during the 1930s made it increasingly difficult for these working men to live up to the expectations. Unemployment might have been beyond the control of the worker as a result of such shift in the economy, but many men failed to interpret it that way as they failed to see the issue of unemployment as ‘no fault of their own’. Attitudes towards unemployment clash with older notions coming from a rural, pre-industrial Canada, that unemployment was evidence of nothing

⁶¹ Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, 203.

⁶² Gray, 9.

more than an unwillingness to work. The nation had informed these policies based on the influences of the Poor Laws from the previous century.⁶³ At that time, this ‘unwillingness’ could be rectified, according to the Canadian government, by using the land and its resources in an appropriate manner which ‘easily’ rectified the unemployment problem. Notions of ‘turning back to the land’ as a means to counter unemployment had been prevalent up to then and were indeed at the core of the Canadian National Policy. The Policy became predominately focused on industrial developments and advancements within the country, which created unpleasant side-effects such as economic disparities between regions and also grievances between capital and labour.⁶⁴ The focus on an industrial economy would also become troublesome during the 1930s when the economic conditions slowed down and the ability to rely on the industrial economy to provide a suitable standard of living was reduced.

The urban and industrial developments that occurred within Canadian society had an effect on the urban wage earner which the prosperity of the twentieth century had kept hidden. A city worker may enjoy the amenities of regular hours, regular income, and the variety of a larger community; however, the urban family bore little resemblance to the rural family. On a family farm or in a prosperous city, as seen by the account of James Gray, children could make a direct economic contribution to the family by doing chores and helping with the farm activities.⁶⁵ In the city on the other hand, the wage-earner brought in the money, which was most often the male head of household, but in some cases included older children. The presence of children and the elderly would increasingly become a financial burden that would often have little to contribute to

⁶³ For a detailed discussion see chapter two.

⁶⁴ H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 41. The National Policy was first conceived of by John A. MacDonald in 1876 and was put into place in 1879. In addition to massive investments in railways and the opening of the West for a grain based economy, it called for high tariffs to be placed on imported manufactured goods in order to protect the manufacturing industry. In the 1930s the industrial machine slowed down and thousands of wage-earners lost their jobs.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

the family income.⁶⁶ Despite changes within the Canadian economy to a more industrial nation, there was still reluctance on the part of society and the federal government to take responsibility for the nation's poor and unemployed. The issue of unemployment, from a societal standpoint, would only slowly be recognized as out of the control of the labourer;⁶⁷ however, there was still a clash between the older, agrarian notions that going 'back to the land' provided ample employment for those willing to work. The fathers of these letter writing men were products of the agrarian society for which the land was able to provide a living for men and their families under a farm family economy. However, with a shift towards a family wage economy, the men represented in the above-mentioned letters were placed into a situation where they were expected to provide for their families through the earning of a wage. They became unable to do so effectively because of the shortage of work during the depression. In essence many men of the thirties were unable to grasp fully how times were different for their fathers, and faced the new circumstances with their fathers in mind.

Welfare historian James Struthers argues that the indifference to the plight of the unemployed despite changes in the economy was largely informed by Canada's preoccupation with the land.⁶⁸ Canada was in a unique situation among other modern industrial nations at the time – it was still developing its agricultural frontier, while industrialization was occurring. Other countries that were thoroughly urbanized, had developed a strong class-conscious labour and socialist movement, and were beginning to devise new methods of dealing with the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 45-46. The notion of dependency will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

⁶⁷ Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), 70.

⁶⁸ Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 7. Even in the 1930s, as will be seen when discussing the efforts to curb unemployment under Bennett's government, there was a preoccupation with placing the unemployed back on to the farms to work off their relief. There was still a belief that going 'back to the land' would adequately address Canada's unemployment problems during the depression-era. See following chapter for a more detailed discussion.

unemployed.⁶⁹ Canada's concentration on an agrarian economy affected the unemployed in a variety of ways. The first idea that affected the unemployed in a negative way was the federal government's attitude towards immigration. It was believed that as long as hundreds of thousands of immigrants came to Canada every year to occupy vacant land in the West and North, then "there seemed little excuse for any Canadian to complain that he could not find work. Periodically, it was true, jobs might become scarce in this or that trade but there was always a need for more manpower on the land. If a man's luck gave out in carpentry, [he could try his luck at] farming or at least work for his room and board on a homestead during the winter".⁷⁰ It was argued that there would always be a variety of jobs available on farmlands to those who were willing to work. Therefore, if one chose not to engage in the land as a means of employment, they would be seen as idle and unwilling to contribute to Canada's economic developments.

Secondly, this 'back to the land' belief was further supported by growing fears surrounding rural depopulation. It was argued that these same economic forces that produced the emergence of unemployment as a serious urban problem were also held responsible for the drift from the countryside and a growth in metropolitan values and institutions over rural life.⁷¹ The new prospect of 'easy' work lured too many Canadians to the urban centres and they began questioning their 'true' vocation which was to be found on the land. There was a view that accompanied the unemployed which increased the antipathy towards them. The unemployed were often considered to be "morally weak and unwilling to do the work that had to be done if

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 8. The idea of immigration is intriguing and as chapter 4 will demonstrate, it created problems between loyal British subjects and those who were not proper British subjects.

⁷¹ Ibid. It was easy for many Canadians who viewed the rapid growth of cities with unease to make a simple cause and effect equation between the problems of urban 'congestion' on the one hand and 'abnormal' unemployment on the other. The proper balance between city and country had gone out of line.

the country was to grow and develop”.⁷² As a result, the unemployed were seen as individuals that did not want to change their situation and that unwillingness to work when work was available made it seem as though they were challenging the Canadian myth that Canada was the ‘land of opportunity for all who were willing to work’.

The attitudes regarding the unemployed as ‘morally weak’ and ‘unwilling to do the work to be done’ can offer an insight as to why, many of the letter writers to Bennett want work of any nature, in order for them to be able provide for their families and fulfill the role of the male breadwinner. Being given a job opportunity relates back to the underlying notion that many men took pride in their abilities to ensure their families well-being and that employment brought them respectability within society. In the next selection of men’s letters to the prime minister and testimonies, there is a vivid account of their work history and a mention that they are willing to work at any job in order to obtain a liveable wage. They also constantly mention their families, specifically their wives and children, and how they, the men, need assistance in order to provide for their dependents. This reflects the breadwinner ideal and affirms that these men recognized that their identities were characterized by their ability to provide. These men who were without work and wage seem to have lost self-respect and often felt humiliation. Their letters suggest that only through work and a return to the provider role can their respectability and their pride be restored. Those writing, specifically husbands and fathers, seem to be reluctant to turn to government assistance, as they insist that it is only through the direst of situations that they appeal for assistance.

⁷² Ibid. The fact that so many jobless were immigrants who had been brought to Canada specifically for agricultural settlement was an added reason for this general lack of sympathy for the unemployed.

1.5 Work and Stability: How the Worker Provided for his Family

Husbands and fathers related their new notion for regular work to the stability that it offers them and their families. From the letters examined, it is possible to see that men were relied upon heavily by their families for their survival, thus placing a great onus of responsibility on them. For example, here are three letters:

I am taking this time to write to you: I am a painter and paper hanger and Decorator by trade...I have a wife and three girls aged 13 yrs 11 yrs and 9 yrs...I ask you Sir 'who was this money given and what for?' is it for a man to crawl on his hands and knees to get a loaf for his family?...I dont want help: I want work I'll do anything to keep my family...I beg to remain. A disheartened Man.⁷³

I have worked out my direct relief & have been glad to do so, however what I need is a regular job I am a good mechanic & have usually serviced for machine companies in the five years I have been here [b]ut have always been willing to do any kind of work at all. Your humble servant.⁷⁴

I am 41 years of age, married, with 3 children, aged 8, 5 and 3 years respectively...I settled down in Toronto in 1923, as an Accountant for a large American Corporation, and was married...We haven't a cent, are dependent on the City for our food, (*which does not provide proper nourishment for a young family*), are 4 months behind without rent and are apparently up against a blank wall...I do not infer, Sir, that my difficulties are in any sense your problem. Were I alone I should take my medicine without a whimper, but what of my kiddies? My father, in the undisturbed pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, was able to create, provide for and fairly well educate a family of 6...Frankly after nearly two years of nerve wracking struggle and privation, only to land in absolute destitution is it any wonder that one is desperate. Is it what we fought for [referring to his time as a soldier] that the man who will gladly sink education, experience, pride and everything else he values to work in any menial capacity at any return which will provide the necessities of life for his family, food, shelter and clothing, cannot, despite superhuman efforts, find even that consolation...Am I to continue in charitable slavery until the vestige of morale is gone, and my family and their chance for happiness destroyed?⁷⁵

From these three letters one is able to see that these men draw attention to their previous employment history and training. One man was a 'painter and paper hanger and Decorator by

⁷³ P.W.L Norton, Sherbrooke, Quebec, January 5th 1931, Grayson and Bliss, 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 6-7. Ralph Mackenzie, Calgary, Alberta, April 7th 1931. In some places throughout the country it was presumed that one of the major tests to determine ones eligibility for relief was the recipient's willingness to work. This was referred to as 'working out relief'. See chapter two for a detailed discussion.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 27 F. Deane, Toronto, Ontario, June 24th 1932. Italics original.

trade', another 'a good mechanic', and also an 'Accountant'. They are reflecting on how they were once capable and willing workers who were able to provide for their families. There is also reference to their wives and children, which illustrates that these men were accustomed to providing and maintaining their families welfare. A man's identity of self was shaped through a variety of conditions and experiences with wage labour. According to Mark Rosenfeld's study of a Canadian working-class railway town between 1920 and 1950, men's view of "themselves as breadwinners was conditioned by their class situation, the prevailing gender divisions of wage labour, and the ideology of patriarchy. As economic providers they persisted in wage labour for the greatest part of their lives and attempted to ensure economic security for their kin".⁷⁶ What is of interest is that many of the letter writers reflect on their work history, which illustrates that they had once been able to work and wish to continue working. The writers of the letters above, in their pleas for work, illustrate the notions that many of these men 'persisted in wage labour for the greatest part of their lives' and that they knew nothing other than the 'economic security for their kin' that accompanied it. As a result, these men believed in the intrinsic value in wage labour.

An interesting point taken from the aforementioned letters is the idea of not wanting 'help' but 'work'. As P.W.L Norton of Sherbrooke, Quebec states: 'I want work I'll do anything to keep my family' and 'have been willing to do any kind of work at all'. This is interesting as these men seem to be suggesting that the type of work they do is not as important to them as providing for their families, which was done through the wage they obtained. Men 'fathered' their families by successfully earning their family's keep through productive labour. As we have

⁷⁶ Mark Rosenfeld, "It was a hard life: Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950" *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed by Bettina Bradbury, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1992), 256.

seen earlier, providing for their families signified more than the obvious material provisions that breadwinning allowed, and more than “the concept of masculine prerogative that it upheld. It also signified real fatherly devotion, paternal protection from neglect, harm and danger, the cruel realities that men had to confront”.⁷⁷ This idea of being a provider is further demonstrated in the third letter where F. Deane of Toronto comments on how, if he were alone, he would ‘take his medicine without a whimper, but what of my kiddies?’ This indicates that he recognizes how he must fulfill the role of provider for his family and that if he were alone he would accept the situation. He uses his children as the basis for an emotional plea to Bennett in order to get the assistance he requires. According to Andrew Tolson’s study of British masculinity’s, male identity was forged through the ability to work, as

definitions of masculinity enter into the way work is personally experienced, as a life-long commitment and responsibility. In some respects work is made palatable only through the kinds of compensations masculinity can provide- the physical effort, the comradeship, [and] the rewards of promotion. When work is unpalatable, it is often only his masculinity (his identification with the wage: ‘providing for the wife and kids’) that keeps a man at work.⁷⁸

The importance of work and the benefits that it brought was highlighted by one woman, Ruth Collins of Toronto, as she reflected on the depression-era, in an interview she gave forty years later: “men and women would do anything for work. It not only kept families alive, it was a measure of one’s worth. When work was lost, self-esteem went with it. A lot of emphasis was placed upon the dignity of work. My worst memory is of seeing men- no scarves, no hats, in the bitter cold of winter- lining up as far as you could see in front of a store advertising one job”.⁷⁹ From this image, one is able to see that many men were lonely and physically humiliated, which

⁷⁷ Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father”, 295.

⁷⁸ Andrew Tolson, *The Limits of Masculinity*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 48.

⁷⁹ Robert Collins, *You Had to Be There: An Intimate Portrait of the Generation that Survived the Depression, Won the War, and Re-Invented Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1997), 21.

challenges the ideas put forth by Tolson that work is palatable through the comradeship that work provides.

Men were relied upon heavily by their families, which in turn placed a great onus of responsibility upon them. There is recognition in the following three letters that these men are making a sacrifice for their families and that they struggle with the responsibility associated with the breadwinner role.

Dear Sir, I am writing you to see if there is anything you would be kind enough to do towards finding me employment of a nature I could do. I am a young man with wife and children having lost a leg above the knee some fourteen years ago. I have been on direct relief for the past four years receiving the sum of ten dollars per month. I have written on numerous occasions to the supervisor of relief and the Deputy Minister of public works Edmonton begging to be given employment of a nature that I could do in preference to charity... Without the aid of charity this certainly would be a very cruel world, on the other hand the bread of charity is very bitter indeed... there are numerous jobs I could do and would willing do in order to get away from direct relief and the stigma attached to it. Anything you would be kind enough to do towards finding me work of any kind in order to be self-supporting and be able to look into the future with confidence I certainly would appreciate it.⁸⁰

Dear Sir, I am writing this letter to you in hopes that you could possibly do something to help me out. I am a married man aged 26 with one child and have been working for the last three months for little more than my board and have had to break my home up. My parents have also broken up and I have to help my mother and sister as she is unable to work. I am willing to do any kind of work and any length of time. I sincerely hope that you might have some kind of a job that you could offer me so that I may get back with my wife and child. I am sleeping and eating just wherever I can and sure hope you will have something for me to do as I have nearly froze in the last week looking for a job with the few clothes I have. I have no underwear and I don't care to ask for relief as I think something might turn up and there is poorer people than I who need it. Hoping for a reply from you soon.⁸¹

Dear Sir, I am writing to ask you if you could or would help me. As I have a big family and all are going to school at present but I will soon have to keep them home as they have no clothes and very little to eat. I have been working nearly all summer but my pay was so small that I barely got enough [to] eat for them. There are six children ages from 15 to 7. Four of which are boys... I try every way to get work. There is no work and wages so small. All I can do is to get something to eat for my

⁸⁰ John Jennings, Passburg, Alberta, August 6th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1325, 400466.

⁸¹ John J. Durant, St. John, New Brunswick, November 20th, 1933, Bennett Papers M-1319, 393324.

wife and children...no work nor money think it is terrible thing for a man that is able and willing to work has to see his little children go to school hungry and half enough cloth on them to keep them warm...I dont (sic) mind myself so bad that children I am thinking most of now. I dont (sic) know how I am going to get cloth for them. If you help me I would be very thankful to you.⁸²

These three letters indicate the importance that these men had in providing for their families well-being. John Jennings of Passburg, Alberta comments on how he wants ‘to be given employment of a nature that I could do in preference to charity’ and how he is willing to ‘do any kind of work and any length of time’. Lester Sturgeon reflects on how it is a ‘terrible thing for a man that is able and willing to work has to see his little children go to school hungry’. This recognition of providing for their families is interesting because these men all identify with the importance and security that a wage brought to their family and that ‘work of any kind’ allows them ‘to be self-supporting’ and have a ‘future with confidence’. This reference to ‘work of any kind’ also reflects the idea expressed by Tolson that the type of work they engaged in was not as important as providing for their families, which was done through the wage they obtained.

Being a provider and paternal protector can be further illustrated by Lester Sturgeon’s letter when he states ‘I dont mind myself so bad that children I am thinking most of now’. Mr. Sturgeon is aware of how the needs and well-being of his family surpasses his own and indicates that he recognizes how he must fulfill the role of provider for his family. He is willing to sacrifice his own well-being in order to ensure the well-being of his own family. These men seem to be aware of the sacrifices needed in order to ensure their families are provided for and these men are consciously making that sacrifice. The notion of sacrificing in order to provide can also be highlighted in John Durant’s letter when he comments on how he ‘had to break my home up’ in order to be able to care for his family. He also is responsible for providing for his mother

⁸² Lester Sturgeon, Carvel Alberta, March 30th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398499.

and sister, who are unable to work. Breaking up his family can be seen as the ultimate sacrifice and the only way to bring the family back together is through work, 'any kind of work and any length of time'. From the above letters and testimonies one is able to see that men seemed to identify more with the earning of a wage and the security that it brought their families, more so than the nature of the work they were engaged in. For some of the letter writers, they pleaded with the prime minister for any work in order to provide for their dependent families.

Two letters from Mr. Charles Grierson of Winnipeg, Manitoba also address the theme that men were willing to take the first available job in order to provide for their families. He also stresses the connection between earning a wage and the respectability that came with it. In Mr. Grierson's words,

It is now forty months since I had the pleasure of a pay check...possibly you have never felt the Pang of a Wolf. Well become a Father have children then have them come to you asking for a slice of bread between meals and have to tell them to wait. Wait until five of humanitys (sic) human sleep in one room no larger than nine square feet with one window in it...I want work of a nature that will provide an honest living now not ten years from now. I am not a radical, Red or unloyal (sic) but I would appreciate an honest chance in this world for my family...For God's sake please make a personal endeavour to assist me toward a brighter outlook immediately.⁸³

In a second letter dated January 26th 1934, Mr. Grierson reflects on his provider role:

I am married and have three children and it is because of them that I am striving to secure employment...above all I have to hands and a willing head to do some work and I am not particular what the nature is...with your assistance I can once more become a *respectable* law abiding citizen and if I am not successful in securing your help then what do you think I would do. Remember I am desperate.⁸⁴

From these two letters one again can see how there is an appeal to the role of father as a provider for his family. Mr. Grierson pleads with Bennett to understand his situation by adopting the perspective of a father. He seems to suggest only a father can understand the dire circumstances

⁸³ Charles Grierson, Winnipeg, Manitoba. June 8th, 1933, *The Wretched of Canada*, 46.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-70. Charles Grierson, Winnipeg, Manitoba. January 26th, 1934. Italics original.

that he is faced with, which is interesting because Bennett was not a father. He also mentions that he wants ‘work of a nature that will provide an honest living now not ten years from now’. He feels that only through waged work can he achieve an ‘honest living’. In the second letter he favours work ‘because of them [wife and children] I am striving to secure employment’. And it is through this work that he would become a ‘respectable citizen’. This explicit reference to the link between respectability and work confirms the analysis of Cynthia Comacchio, that the male breadwinner and work were “integral to working-class notions of respectability...[and] was a key element of masculine self-definition”.⁸⁵ Numerous male heads of household, such as Charles Grierson, during the latter nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth century, viewed themselves as the main breadwinners for their families. It is only through his ‘desperate’ situation that he turns to Bennett in an attempt to have him help his family.

The identification with the wage as the means to ‘providing for the wife and kids’ was a powerful ideal for many men during the 1930s, so much so that their wage earning abilities and the security it ensured was more important than the type of job they were engaged in during and after the 1930s. According to one man’s account, mentioned by Broadfoot, who, as a barber, was private to men’s intimate thoughts:

the Depression changed most men’s lives much more than they realized...here’s my point. I have met few men sitting in this chair [referring to his job as a barber] who are really happy in their work, men of 50 or 55 and over. He may be successful, have lots of money, may be a president of his own company but that man may have wished to be a sea captain. Or a guy I know is a super-salesman, he might want to be a maker of documentary films...the Depression screwed everyone. You lost your job, got laid off, the plant shut down, and there you were, on the street with 5,000 other guys...you took the first job you could get. You jumped at it. In the stockyards across the river, shovelling shit. If it was a job, you took it. And you stuck with it...you looked for a job, for months. It should be a good job and I mean a respectable one,

⁸⁵ Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father”, 292-293.

but it had to be a job. Man was made to work. That was drummed into you since childhood.⁸⁶

This comment is powerful as it highlights and provides evidence to the notion that many men, before and at the time, identified with the wage and security that accompanied it. The unnamed speaker mentions how some men may have become successful, but in retrospect these men may have wanted to pursue another profession. The necessity of a liveable wage forced many to take the first available job in order to fulfill the provider role and all that accompanied it. The need to take ‘the first job you could get’ seems to suggest that these men took the provider role seriously, and that the breadwinner model was an influential ideal within Canadian society. The comment makes clear that when characteristics of physical strength or mechanical expertise or ambition and competitiveness fall, the idea of work remains. This idea of identity being shaped through work and wage is furthered by the comment that ‘man was made to work. That was drummed into you since childhood’ which emphasizes that men self-identified with the notion of the family wage economy and were constantly made aware that without work and wages there was an element of personal failure and an inability to fulfill their male identity. This comment also speaks to the point above, made by James Gray about how it was ‘naturally assumed’ he would quit school at a young age in order to provide for his brothers and then apply those ideals to his own wife and daughter. The working-class ideals of independence and autonomy that accompanied waged labour were taken to heart.

These men were relied upon heavily to ensure the well-being of their families and work was interpreted by many, society included, as a life-long commitment and responsibility – one that was not taken lightly. The strong need to provide for a family resulted in many seeking a ‘good job’ and a ‘respectable one, but it had to be a job’ no matter how unpleasant. Despite not

⁸⁶ Broadfoot, 425.

necessarily desiring the job that they ended up at, men saw the need to find employment that was ‘respectable’ and therefore ‘took the first job you could get’ and ‘stuck with it’ no matter how unpalatable it was. These men were aware of the security that a wage brought and that it allowed for the husband and father to ‘provide for the wife and kids’, which kept them there, in many cases, for years. It is this very attitude that had brought these men awareness of the security and stability an income brought their families. The Canadian government, through its implementation of various policies, such as the *Canadian Patriotic Fund*, had long been aware of the importance that the working-class placed on a strong work ethic and the importance that the breadwinner played within society.

1.6 The Canadian Patriotic Fund: Enforcing the Male Breadwinner Ideal

It is necessary to address this specific policy undertaken by the government because this policy shows how shared the breadwinner ideal was between the working-class and public authorities. The policy also solidified the ideal and made it harder to abandon during the 1930s. The *Canadian Patriotic Fund* began during the Boer War as a private organization to help the wives and children of the volunteer recruits. It was not until the First World War, on August 18th, 1914 that it was expanded into a large-scale national relief organization with semi-official status in order to play a larger role within Canadian society.⁸⁷ It provided aid to soldiers’ wives and sometimes to their mothers, arranged domestic jobs and housing for wives, and medical services for their children.⁸⁸ The CPF had the objective to provide for the needs of the wives, families and dependent relatives of those who went to the front. The CPF could “do no more than ensure for

⁸⁷ Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 50. It is of interest to note that R.B. Bennett served as a member on the CPF board.

⁸⁸ Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History*, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 95.

soldiers' dependants a reasonable standard of comfort during the absence of the breadwinner".⁸⁹

It is from that understanding that those dependants of the breadwinner were to be looked after one can begin to see how the CPF began to shape its policies by adhering to the 'traditional' gender roles, with focus on the male breadwinner, within Canadian society. This focus on the male breadwinner also sought to address the enlistment problems among the working-class.

A lack of interest amongst numerous working-class males to enlist their services to the war effort placed the federal government in a situation where they needed to provide the necessary protection for these men's families or run the risk of having these men refuse military service. This reluctance of these men to enlist "unless they had assurances from the Canadian military that their families would be provided for in their absence, was the main impetus for government intervention in the private domestic sphere".⁹⁰ Therefore, according to Nancy Christie, "the agitation for military policies that would maintain soldiers' families- either through a system of compulsory assignment of pay to the soldiers' wives or through the creation of supplementary assistance through semiprivate organizations such as the CPF- came from the working class".⁹¹ The CPF program, along with maintaining the gender roles of the male breadwinner and the domestic housewife, was also consciously designed to not infringe on the sanctity of prewar wage contracts, and as such was meant to maintain only the male breadwinner and one dependent – usually the wife.⁹² Thus, the standard living wage, from the perspective of the Canadian government, was not intended to fully address families' needs.⁹³

⁸⁹ *The Canadian Patriotic Fund: A Record of its Activities from 1914 to 1919*, ed by Philip Morris, 9.

⁹⁰ Christie, 47. What is interesting that in the face of a national emergency the government was quicker than in the 1930s to acknowledge the elements of men's pride.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹³ *Ibid.* The way the government shored up the ability of breadwinners to maintain their families had the effect of restraining wages and thus complemented the wartime policy of the dilution of labour.

The hope for such a program had been to encourage national war service amongst both the skilled and the unskilled working-class. This appeal was supposed to distinguish it from various prewar systems of relief, which were viewed as mere charity to the idle and improvident.⁹⁴ Those members of the CPF's non-partisan board constantly downplayed the relief aspects of its program, out of concern "not to offend working-class ideals of independence and respectability, but they also frequently cautioned that the assistance the fund provided must not be perceived as a pension or as a universal right given by the State".⁹⁵ To reduce the belief that what was being offered to families was a form of relief, the CPF's board insisted that once these men returned home their status as skilled workers and heads of households would be the same as before they left. Therefore in order to keep the enlistment levels high, the CPF's board decided to declare publicly that their organization would meet the demands being made by the working-class families that their status and role as head of household would be maintained. The fund, many insisted, "would act as a surrogate for the absent soldiers, fathers, and sons by attending to the financial, psychological, and legal needs of their dependents",⁹⁶ and once they returned home they would resume their rightful places as providers. Thus, in the eyes of working-class men, the breadwinner ideal and its characteristics of providing stability and security, independence and autonomy within the family came before the idea of defending the nation. As a result, the government had to create a program in which the working-class ideals would be protected.

Conclusion

The above mentioned discussion on the changing definition of fatherhood and how a man's identity became synonymous with wage labour was the focal point of this chapter. It

⁹⁴ Ibid. 50.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 54.

becomes apparent that the social policies and ideals within Canadian society were already targeted at maintaining the influence of the breadwinner and that the relief policies' favouring the breadwinner during the 1930s was not a new idea – rather, it was a continuation of the status quo. It was with the shift to a more industrial society and the increase of unemployment that made the male breadwinner ideal more prevalent and visible within society. Based on the literature regarding fatherhood, the father had always been an active and involved agent when it came to his duties within the family. As the economy changed, and more emphasis was placed on the earning of a wage, the expectations of the father were altered to favour the stability and security the wage brought one's family. To be active and involved, now meant to enter into the realm of the labour market, to sell one's productive ability to earn a wage. The presence and importance of the male breadwinner prior to the 1930s can be highlighted through various government policies, such as the Canadian Patriotic Fund. The CPF can be seen to have accepted the role of the father through the declaration of its creators that cultural conventions indicated that 'family security and self-sufficiency was still first and foremost the responsibility of the male breadwinner'. Once the breadwinner returned from the fronts, he would resume his role as provider and the fund would cease to support the family. During the depression, the government continued to adhere to the idea of a family wage economy as there was an increase in unemployment which made the breadwinner's problems more visible. Therefore, to argue that the 1930s was a drastic change in how the government approached the breadwinner ideal is not entirely correct; rather the tensions within the changing economy and the subsequent increase in the scarcity of jobs made the ideal more evident within Canadian society.

The following chapter will examine the stigma surrounding relief and the attempts that the Canadian government made to reinforce the breadwinner ideal through the implementation of

two major programs: the works relief projects and the administration of direct relief. Through the aid of various letters and testimonies, one will be able to see how the notion of providing for one's family was of utmost importance and that many of the men and women mentioned in the sources came to see the reliance on public relief as a failure of the breadwinner's ability to be an adequate provider for his family. It will become evident that both men and women believed in the notion that it was a man's responsibility to protect and provide for his family through the earning of a wage. Also, one will examine how the relief policies of the 1930s reinforced the idea of a changing economy to a wage labour, oriented society and how ideas around relief work reflected the change in the definitions of masculinity. This association of the male identity with waged labour will also be discussed along with the larger notion of the strong work-ethic of the working-class, which was characterized by a strong sense of independence and autonomy that accompanied wage labour.

CHAPTER 2

MASCULINITY AND THE HUMILIATION OF RELIEF

From our home on Ruby Street in Winnipeg to the relief office at the corner of Xante Street and Elgin Avenue was less than three miles. It could be walked easily in an hour, but I didn't complete the journey the first time I set out, or the second. If I had not been driven by the direst of necessity, the third trip would have ended as the first two had done. I would have veered sharply to the right, somewhere en route, to head downtown in one last attempt to find a job. But on the third trip the truth could no longer be dodged by any such pointless manoeuvre.

We were almost out of food, we were almost out of fuel, and our rent was two months in arrears. At home were my wife and daughter, and my mother and father, and two younger brothers. Applying for relief might prove the most humiliating experience of my life (it did); but it had to be done, and I had to do it. The deep-down realization that I had nobody to blame but myself made the journey doubly difficult.¹

This excerpt taken from James Gray's *The Winter Years* serves as the basis for this chapter. His attitude towards relief was characteristic of many married men as will be highlighted through the various letters and testimonies during the 1930s when it came to their reflection on their family's reliance upon government relief. From the above taken selection one is able to distinguish Gray's thoughts towards relying on relief. His vivid and detailed recollection of where the relief office was located demonstrates the significant role relief played in his and other men's lives. Also, his description of how it took him three attempts to finally accept the fact that he was in need of relief shows the reduced pride and the shame which accompanied relief. That reluctance demonstrates that James Gray took pride in his ability to work and provide for his family that only when the 'direst of necessity' faced him, was he willing to accept the fact that there was limited to no employment available. According to Gray, 'the truth could no longer be dodged', which suggests that retrospectively, he saw that a sense of denial had plagued him, and that the slimmer of hope that his situation, like many others', could be rectified with the first available opportunity of employment had long become an illusion before he abandoned it. Gray's shame in

¹ James Gray, *The Winter Years: the Depression on the Prairies*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), 8.

his inability to provide fits into the notion studied in chapter one regarding the male breadwinner ideal being the “most powerful factor shaping the roles and relations of gender and family during the early twentieth century”.² Men ‘fathered’ their families by successfully earning their family’s keep through productive labour. However, with the slow realization amongst the men themselves, that they were unable to fulfill their role the Canadian government stepped in and tried to resolve the issue.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore, in more detail, the stigma surrounding relief. Furthermore, it studies, in this light, the attempts the Canadian government made to reinforce the breadwinner ideal through the implementation of two major programs: the works relief projects and the administration of direct relief. Through the aid of a variety of letters and testimonies, one will be able to discuss how many of the men saw the reliance on public relief as a personal failure of their ability to be an adequate provider. It will build on the first chapter’s position, that the changing economy was the reason why men could not fulfill their roles, to show how several men came to see unemployment as being beyond their control. However, through the aid of the sources, it will be seen that many others failed to fully recognize unemployment as being of ‘no fault of their own’. This chapter will highlight in parallel how the government similarly viewed the depression as a short-term, temporary occurrence. To fully grasp the negative attitudes surrounding the dependency of public assistance from men and government, one must briefly turn to their origins and first discuss relief with the developments that occurred with the British Poor Laws.

² Cynthia Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father: Defining a Modern Canadian Fatherhood, 1900-1940”, *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed by Lori Chambers and Edgar-Andre Montigny, (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 1998), 295.

2.1 The British Poor Laws and the Origin of 1930s Attitudes towards Unemployment

The administration of the poor in Britain can be divided into two time periods, pre-1834 in which the destitute were governed under the policy of the Old Poor Laws and post-1834 when the nation was influenced by the New Poor Laws. Variety rather than uniformity characterized the administration of poor relief in England under the old Elizabethan Poor Law of 1597-1601. The unprecedented economic and social changes produced severe problems for those responsible for relief, and different localities found distinctive solutions to them under the broad legal framework established by the Elizabethan Poor Law.³ This was a social policy that was designed for an essentially rural population and needed some adaptation to meet the needs of a more urbanized population which was dramatically increasing.⁴

The issues posed for the nation's relief administrators were not as significant in the fast-growing towns of northern England where the development and expansion of the iron and textile industries provided work for the cities' inhabitants. The issue resided in the country's southern, rural populations where economic changes exacerbated demographic pressures.⁵ The problems were intensified with the increase in land enclosures that took place as a result of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. These events caused higher food prices, which in turn encouraged farmers to raise production by enclosing land.⁶ While enclosure increased the amount of employment available, it did not do so sufficiently to absorb all those in the expanded

³ Anne Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales*, (London: The Chameleon Press Ltd., 1982), 5. It is important to note that most Canadian welfare historians trace the origin of Canadian attitudes towards the poor to the developments and attitudes in Britain.

⁴ *Ibid.* The rural population was estimated to be approximately four million and increased in size from six to nine million during the second half of the eighteenth century, and from nine to fourteen million by 1834.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

rural population.⁷ There was also a decrease in the average price of wheat that occurred after the wars, which led to an agrarian depression, a subsequent reduction in farm employment, and a rise in the number of ‘able-bodied’ applications for relief.

The Old Poor Law divided the poverty-stricken into three categories: the ‘able-bodied poor’ who could not find employment and were willing to work and who needed to have work provided for them; the ‘rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars’ who were to be whipped or otherwise punished for their disinclination to work; and finally the ‘impotent poor’, the old, the sick, the handicapped, who were to be relieved in almshouses.⁸ The local parishes were charged with the task of administering the poor and they were also responsible for appointing overseers as the administrators and levied a poor rate to finance the relief. The administration of England’s destitute underwent numerous reforms during the seventeenth and eighteenth century in order to restrict the number of poor people for whom the local ratepayers were responsible. For example, the 1662 *Act for the Better Relief of the Poor* gave overseers the power to remove anybody who was likely to become chargeable and who did not possess a settlement guaranteeing the right to relief in the parish.⁹ In 1723, the *Knatchbull’s General Workhouse Act* was passed, enabling single parishes to erect workhouses, if they so wished, so that they could enforce labour on the able-bodied poor in return for relief.¹⁰ At the same time, the social pressures and high costs of ‘indoor relief’ were encouraging a more sympathetic approach to the management of the poor.¹¹ The *Gilbert’s Act of 1782* allowed for the parishes to amalgamate into unions where the unemployed able-bodied poor were provided first with outdoor relief and then with

⁷ Ibid. The accompanying loss of common rights, such as the right to graze a cow or collect wood for fuel caused many hardships for the poor. These difficulties were increased by the decline of cottage industries, particularly hand-spinning and weaving, which could not compete with the new factory-based production.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. By 1776 there were almost 2000 workhouses established in England; typically they held 20 to 50 inmates.

¹¹ Ibid. Indoor relief was poor relief that took place within a workhouse or almshouse.

employment.¹² There was a tendency for many local administrators to direct their efforts primarily towards the administration of the outdoor poor.¹³

As outdoor relief was often given to able-bodied men, a new series of problems occurred, in concurrence with new attitudes towards the poor; the poor were often viewed as idle. It was believed that employers would begin to deliberately pay lower wages knowing that the parish would supplement them. A healthy unemployed man was presumed to be idle deliberately and to provide such a man with relief would not only deter him from seeking work, but would encourage others already working to join him in idleness.¹⁴ Expenditure on outdoor relief was too high and, in 1832, a Royal Commission was established to investigate the operation of the existing poor laws. The Report published by the Commission in February 1834 “condemned a system which relieved mere poverty (rather than absolute destitution) as both economically and morally disastrous, and concluded that the great source of abuse is outdoor relief afforded to the able-bodied”.¹⁵ Changes were then made under the directive of the government, which led to the New Poor Law.

The 1834 Poor Law Report has been interpreted as a “major divide in social values, symbolizing a change from paternalism to the pursuit of class interests in the administration of relief. A contemporary view has been that the [Poor Law Amendment] Act represented a triumph for classical economics, liberating the labour market from distortions by the Old Poor Law and

¹² Ibid. “Outdoor relief” was assistance in the form of money, food, clothing or anything given to alleviate poverty without the requirement that the recipient enter into the workhouse. Recipients were allowed to stay within their homes. Those who received this relief were “able-bodied”. The administration of indoor relief was reserved for the old, sick, infirm and their dependent children.

¹³ Ibid., 7-8. This had to do with how the amount of relief given to a recipient was dictated on a sliding scale, which was related to the price and grain, known as the Speenhamland scale. This meant that payments to the poor varied between and within counties and during a period of agricultural depression the amount of relief given to a recipient would decrease.

¹⁴ James Struthers, *No fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 6.

¹⁵ Digby, 11.

thereby benefiting capitalism”.¹⁶ Under the new system it was not sufficient enough to merely be poor to qualify for relief, rather “the able-bodied actually had to be destitute, and the mechanism for distinguishing between these two states was to be the workhouse. Its conditions were to be deterrent ones, in that they were to be ‘less eligible’, or less attractive, than those enjoyed by the independent labourer”.¹⁷ The Report argued

first and most essential characteristic of all relief to the able-bodied was to ensure that their ‘situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class’. Otherwise these workers would be ‘under the strongest inducements to quit the less eligible class of labourers and enter the more eligible class of paupers’. The ‘condition of those maintained by the public’ had therefore to be kept below ‘the condition of those who are maintained by their own exertions’.¹⁸

According to Canadian welfare historian James Struthers’ reflection on the 1834 law, “the first goal of unemployment policy was not to relieve the need of the indigent but to preserve the motivation of those who worked, particularly of those in the worst jobs a society had to offer”.¹⁹ Society had to distinguish between the ‘deserving poor’ and the ‘undeserving poor’ and the manner in which to achieve this was through the ‘workhouse test’.²⁰

The implementation of the workhouse in Britain was to operate under the directive of local parishes who would organize together into local poor law unions in order to have sufficient financial support to build and maintain the workhouses. Each union was to be administered by professional, salaried officers who were to work under boards of elected guardians of the poor.²¹ The purpose of the workhouse was to deter as many of the poor as possible from turning to

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ S.G and E.O.A Checkland, eds. *The Poor Law Report of 1834*, (Harmondsworth, 1973), 335-36.

¹⁹ Struthers, *No fault of Their Own*, 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid., 7. The report did concede that some poverty, such as that arising from sickness, injury, or old age, was legitimate.

²¹ Digby, 14. In the interest of uniformity local boards were to be supervised under a newly created body, the Poor Law Commission and its inspectorate.

relief. The workhouse was thus a “self-operating test, for only the truly indigent would wish to enter such an institution”.²² According to James Struthers, if conditions surrounding relief were

made sufficiently degrading only those genuinely bereft of all resources would be tempted to seek it. The Poor Law Report recommended that ‘outdoor’ relief, paid to the indigent in his home, should be abolished and replaced by relief dispensed only inside central workhouses, modeled along the lines of penitentiaries, where work could be compelled in exchange for subsistence. By so stigmatizing the unemployed through forced labour, confinement, and separation of families, relief could be made ‘less eligible’ than the worst-paid unskilled work.²³

The cruelty of the workhouse was not in its material deprivation but in its psychological harshness. The main element of psychological deterrence was in the classifying of inmates who were divided into groups based on age, able-bodied men or women over 16 years of age, boys and girls aged 7 to 15 years, and children under 7 years of age.²⁴ Each of these categories was assigned their own day room, sleeping room, and exercise yards within the workhouse. The end result was families were often separated from one another and not permitted to see one another on a regular basis. Families were only permitted to meet together at infrequent intervals and under the discretion of the guardians within the workhouse. The underlining premise for the establishment of the workhouse was to deter and motivate other workers to seek labour at any cost or be subjected to the horrific fate of those who did not try to find employment. The idea of ‘less eligibility’ was the main approach towards managing the impoverished and unemployed in Canada until the First World War.

Before one can move forward with the discussion about welfare and the idea of ‘less eligibility’, one needs to explore how welfare was administered in Canada prior to the government’s efforts during the depression-era. It is important to note that generally in Canada

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ Struthers, *No fault of Their Own*, 7.

²⁴ Digby, 17. The workhouse tried to depersonalize the individual. This was often achieved was issuing pauper uniforms and instituting a monotonous and regimented existence.

there was no application of the Poor Laws.²⁵ Therefore, one must comment on the role that charities and private organizations played in the administration of the nation's poor. Prior to the depression, two types of private social organizations were in existence. First there were the strong, well-organized agencies, which were staffed with paid workers and which were concerned not only with the issuance of material relief, but also with the rendering of 'service' to their clients.²⁶ These agencies accepted the perspective, which looks upon the mere giving of material relief, without concurrent service to re-establish clients on a self-supporting basis, with suspicion or open hostility.²⁷ Organizations such as these gave out some relief, although they tried, so far as possible, to leave this to the public authorities while they focused more extensively on the character-building services.²⁸ The second type of organization was the charitable bodies of a less-developed type, whose primary concern was with material relief and was staffed with volunteer workers.²⁹ According to Harry Cassidy's study conducted in the early part of the depression, "organizations of this type were operating in a number of the municipalities...notably, Windsor, St. Catherines, and York Township".³⁰ Cassidy notes that the resources for these agencies were limited, and during the depression it seemed impossible that they could assume full responsibility for the maintenance of all the deserving applications.³¹

The administration of direct relief or charity was usually the responsibility of a Relief Officer who often served as either a city's Chief of Police, Sanitary Inspector, Clerk, Councillor,

²⁵ Struthers, 7. Some provinces, such as New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, had enacted poor laws in the late eighteenth century which acknowledged the principle of local public responsibility for the indigent. In most Canadian cities, however, this function was discharged by private charities usually organized on a religious basis.

²⁶ H.M. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929-1932*, (Toronto: JM Dent & Sons Ltd., 1932), 216. Examples of these agencies included, but were not limited to the following: the Neighbourhood Workers' Association of Toronto, the Welfare Bureau of Ottawa, and the Central Bureau of Family Welfare of Hamilton.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 216-17. Private agencies such as these were responsible for areas such as paying rent, issuing clothing, and providing aid for those not deemed residents.

³¹ *Ibid.*

or even Mayor or Reeve.³² With the increased number of those turning to assistance, full time relief officers were hired. As such, a citizens committee or a welfare board composed of municipal council members and representatives from the major private charitable organizations in the area worked alongside with the relief officer. According to Riendeau's study of dependency and municipalities during the depression, "these semi-municipal bodies were actively involved in the collection of private funds, the distribution of relief benefits, the co-ordination of private and public effort, as well as advising council on matters of relief".³³ With the development of these various welfare boards, there was an increase in the involvement of local authorities who now "took on a definite supervisory and co-ordinating role to avoid wasteful duplication of services. No longer would local relief administration remain a mere adjunct of private charity".³⁴ From this, one can see that the administration and implementation of welfare began to transform from a private practice to a more public process. However, with this change to a more public process, the ideals and attitudes that accompanied those on relief still had a negative connotation, which were rooted in the tradition of the British Poor Laws. It now becomes necessary to explore the rule of 'less eligibility' amongst relief administrators in more detail and, correspondingly, the destitute's failure to interpret unemployment as 'no fault of their own'.

2.2 Less Eligibility and Canadian Unemployment in the 1930s: the Shame of the Unemployed

'Less eligibility' was a method to deal with Canada's unemployed, until the First World War, even though it was widely recognized that thousands of Canadians were put out of work each winter by seasonal factors. It was believed that the labourer should save over the summer

³² Roger Riendeau, "A Clash Interests: Dependency and the Municipal Problem in the Great Depression", *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1979), 53.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

months so that he and his family might remain independent during the winter. Up until World War One, this ‘habit of the economy’ was the chief response of the middle-class to the possibility of poverty and unemployment.³⁵ Savings banks, temperance societies, public education, and Christian evangelicalism were essential in promoting the notion that it was the individuals’ responsibility to look after their families in times of destitution. Turning to relief was to be nothing more than a last resort for many Canadian families. Accordingly, relief was discretionary, minimal, and degrading.³⁶ These thoughts about how to cope with unemployment would have come to influence the attitudes and opinions of the working-class. In general, attitudes towards public assistance can be seen through a newspaper article from the *Globe* during the late nineteenth century. The public’s sentiment was that society should not

advocate a system which could leave them to starve, but we do say that if they are ever to be taught economical and saving habits, they must understand that the public have no idea of making them entirely comfortable in the midst of their improvidence and dissipation. If they wish to secure that they must work for it and save and plan. Such comfort is not to be had by loafing around the tavern door, or fleeing to charity at every pinch.³⁷

Based on the influence of the British Poor Laws, one can see that attitudes in Canada towards public assistance had a negative connotation. Turning to relief was to be nothing more than a last resort and relying on assistance was to be a degrading experience in order to further deter others from the process. This humiliation and shame towards relying on relief became evident during the 1930s, as highlighted by various letters and memoirs.

The idea that relief was to be used as a last resort was encountered in the first chapter and warrants discussion here because the letters and memoirs below reflect the ideas that men were defined by the wage-earning status and that relying on relief came as a challenge to their identity.

³⁵ Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*s

³⁷ Toronto *Globe*, 26 January 1877, cited in Michael Cross, ed. *The Workingman in Nineteenth Century Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), 196.

These men were able-bodied men, who were willing to work and wanted work to be provided for them. Mr. Noah Norris's letter of August 1933 discusses the humiliation and shame he felt when he had to come to the realization that public assistance was the only way to survive. In Mr. Norris's words,

Last week I enquired about relief. It takes courage, and courage of the bravest kind to ask for relief. I have been humiliated and sent from pillar to post, just as if I were a criminal or something...A fellow Shriner told me to put my pride in my pocket and go to the Mounted Police Barracks here, which I did, they informed me I should be here a year at least before they could do anything, so I was sent back to the farm. For my wife's sake I am asking you to help me obtain relief so that I can get it here. Only the most dire of necessity would have induced me to apply for it. There is also the children, two whom are of school age, 12 and 14 years of age.³⁸

An interesting aspect to this letter is the reflection on the justice of relief. In his own words, Mr. Norris views the process of applying for relief as taking 'courage, and courage of the bravest kind' and through applying for relief he has been 'humiliated'. It is interesting how he uses the word 'courage', which could be interpreted as a masculine virtue. Applying for relief would have been seen as a failure on the part of the male breadwinner who was accustomed to the role of provider. The reliance on relief in order to survive for many men was interpreted as a form of failure to protect their families. The stigma surrounding the 'dole', as it came to be known, was one of mortification – something to be avoided at all costs. Mr. Norris was encouraged to 'put my pride in my pocket' and apply for relief. From his letter one is again interested to see how 'for my wife's sake I am asking you to help me obtain relief'.³⁹ Mr. Norris is pleading with the prime minister to assist him in obtaining relief for his wife's sake. This would seem to suggest that Mr. Norris takes pride in his ability to provide for his wife and children and through asking for relief he is still trying to fulfill that role. His recognition that only through the 'most dire

³⁸ Noah Norris, Calgary, Alberta. August 24th, 1933, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 48.

³⁹ This idea of turning to relief for the sake of the 'wife and kids' is something that came up in numerous letters and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

necessity' is he applying for relief, relates back to James Gray's testimony at the beginning of the chapter, that only when the most destitute of situations arise do these men turn to the use of relief to provide for their families.

The insistence on men's pride acting as a hindrance to turning to relief can further be echoed by Mr. W.M Currie of Maruel, Alberta when he says "I do not want to go on relief because I am ashamed".⁴⁰ It is no doubt that these men did everything they could to avoid turning to relief. Pride was something that many men had associated with work, and it often got in the way when it came to applying for relief as Mr. Stevens of North Bay, Ontario reflects, "you see I am one of the men who should have gone on relief three years ago but did not, my pride kept me of relief".⁴¹ According to a letter by R.E Rogers of Alberta, "I am asking you for some help one way or another. I am farming west of Edmonton and I have been frozen out for 2 years straight. I have a large family and this spring my wife gave birth to twin boys wich means a lot more expense before they are raised. It sure hurts my *pride* to do this but it is necessary".⁴² From this letter, there is a recognition that Mr. Rogers did not want to rely on government assistance to support his family. He is only turning to Bennett because it is 'necessary' to do so. The notion that 'it is necessary' could also suggest that Mr. Rogers is at a point where he can no longer adequately provide for his family. More importantly is his comment on how 'it sure hurts my pride to do this', which indicates that Mr. Rogers was a man who took great pride in providing for his family and that only through the necessity of the situation is he appealing for assistance. As chapter one has indicated, there was a sense of pride and respectability that waged work brought for many of these men during the depression-era. Turning to government aid was often personally interpreted as humiliating and shameful and the fault of no one but themselves.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 136. W.M Currie, Maruel, Alberta. March 30th, 1935.

⁴¹ Ibid., 148. T.H. Stevens, North Bay, Ontario. May 27th, 1935.

⁴² R.E. Rogers, Alberta March 2nd 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398603. Italics my emphasis.

For many Canadians to go on relief was a humiliating experience, “there was a deep-rooted feeling that to accept charity- especially charity from the state- was a confession of failure. It was a question of self-respect, of personal pride...a relic of a simple society when men could support themselves if they had the will and the strength”.⁴³ Applying for relief would have been seen as a failure on the part of the male breadwinner who was accustomed to the role of provider.

This attitude of personal failure can be seen through James Gray’s own recount of his relief experience, which further highlights the point that these men of the 1930s were proud and respectable men, ones who adhered to the traditional breadwinner ideal. According to Gray, “applying for relief might prove the most humiliating experience of my life (it did); but it had to be done, and I had to do it. The deep-down realization that I had nobody to blame but myself made the journey doubly difficult”.⁴⁴ Gray openly admits that applying for relief was the most ‘humiliating experience’ of his life because he was not used to receiving hand-outs. According to historian Cynthia Comacchio, turning to relief would have been humiliating because “relief was depicted as charity, and charity was limited to those evidently deserving the pity of strangers”.⁴⁵ Gray, like many in similar circumstances placed the full and exclusive burden of failure on their shoulders, which indicates that Gray and others like him were proud men and the acceptance of charity was a personal interpretation of failure. These men were not able to come to the realization that the changes occurring within Canadian society, from a predominately agriculturally based economy to an industrial, waged economy, hindered their abilities to fulfill their provider roles.

An example which highlights the shame and humiliation that accompanied turning to relief can be seen through the issuing of food hampers or through the use of food vouchers rather

⁴³ H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 25.

⁴⁴ James Gray, *The Winter Years*, 7.

⁴⁵ Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family*, 117.

than cash. It was done this way in order to ensure that the recipient did not squander his voucher on luxuries. With regards to food orders, grocery orders were authorized to obtain foodstuffs from retail stores for specific items only. Some of these specific items included: flour, lard, and salt, sugar, rolled oats, butter, stewing meat, potatoes, turnips, and soap.⁴⁶ This method of administering relief “reflected the deep distrust of dependent people which had pervaded both public and private charity administration up to this time”.⁴⁷ This reliance on vouchers proved to be troublesome for some recipients as it often was a public display of their misfortune. As one relief worker stated to Broadfoot during an interview,

The system worked against people with pride because some of the hand-outs...coal, wood, some food, some things like that, boots, shoes, clothing...were in the form of vouchers. You went to a coal yard or a grocery store or a clothing store and the clerk would know you were on relief, and the owner would find out, and soon it would be all over the neighbourhood. This kind of thing, I'm sure, stopped some people from coming in. Pride, just stupid pride, pride all the way to the grave.⁴⁸

As relief took the form of vouchers and as these men and women would present these vouchers to the local grocery stores or clothing store in order to obtain the necessary items ‘the clerk would know you were on relief’ and then ‘the owner would find out, and soon it would be all over the neighbourhood’. There was a lack of privacy associated with the use of vouchers as it would become public knowledge that a family was on the dole. It would then be seen that the recipients were nothing more than lazy or unwilling to work.

The above mentioned men were not part of the events described by historian Blair Neatby’s study of the depression, as we have seen earlier. Neatby writes: “in the 1930s the industrial machine slowed down and thousands of wage-earners lost their jobs. Without wages, families were destitute...it was only then that the precarious nature of industrial society became

⁴⁶Cassidy, 190.

⁴⁷Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), 84.

⁴⁸Broadfoot., 79.

glaringly apparent that able-bodied men, willing and eager to work, realized that, through no fault of their own, they could not support their families”.⁴⁹ To decisively say that Neatby is correct in his analysis or to suggest that Neatby is incorrect is not easily achieved. Based on the evidence thus far, one can see that these men were having difficulty in beginning to realize that unemployment and an inability to support their families was ‘no fault of their own’, and these men were ‘willing and eager to work’. To suggest, with certainty, that it was one way or another is an ongoing process with no definite answer and will be returned to again in the conclusion of this dissertation. The use of relief works schemes throughout Canada was an attempt to reduce the stigma of relief and remove part of the burden of responsibility that men placed onto themselves. In many ways relief works projects attempted to re-enforce the ideals surrounding the breadwinner’s status within Canadian society. The inherent dignity that came with earning an honest wage, which will be seen below, indicates that many felt their situations could be rectified by the availability of work.

2.3 Relief: ‘Not a Gift, but a Loan’: Unemployment Relief Act and the Temporary Nature of Relief

On September 22nd, 1930 the *Unemployment Relief Act* was passed under the directive of Conservative Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett as a means to address the growing problem of unemployment. Once elected, in August of 1930, Bennett called an emergency session of Parliament, in which the funding for relief works projects was one of two measures taken that day. The Act was brief and general in nature, “providing for the appropriation of a sum not to exceed \$20,000,000 ‘for the relief of unemployment’, which was to be expended in the construction of public works; ‘in defraying the cost of distribution of products of the field, farm, forest, sea, lake, river, and mine’; in granting aid to provinces and municipalities for the

⁴⁹ Neatby, 46.

prosecution of relief works”.⁵⁰ According to Blair Neatby, the \$20 million for relief work was a radical measure at the time because the federal budget was less than \$500 million and because up to that time “no federal government had accepted responsibility for supporting the unemployed. The traditional view was that being out of a job was a temporary problem. If a family had no income, the local authorities- the municipalities- were expected to provide relief out of local taxes”.⁵¹ There are two intriguing aspects which can be taken from the comments made by Neatby and warrant a detailed exploration. First, when it came to dealing with the unemployed, was it the responsibility of the federal government or the municipalities? The second interesting comment centres on the idea that being unemployed was a temporary problem.

There was much debate over who should oversee and administer relief. It was the responsibility of the municipal governments to oversee and administer relief to the public, however there was much confusion. The confusion was associated with where the responsibility lay when it came to dealing with the unemployed. There was a tension between the cities and provinces, and provinces and the federal government as to who should take onus of responsibility when it came to administering relief. Administering relief was seen as a municipal problem based on the tradition of the Poor Laws and the influence of the local parishes in the governing of the poor. The relief work projects, which will be discussed in greater detail below, were handled by the cities which suggest that it was a local responsibility. However, the federal involvement in terms of providing the funding for the projects, as outlined above by Neatby,

⁵⁰Cassidy, 57. It was reported to the House on September 10th that there were approximately 117,000 workers unemployed and that the number would only increase to about 177,000 during the following winter. Of the \$20 million, \$4 million was set aside by the Bennett administration in order to provide direct relief to some of the unemployed.

⁵¹ Neatby, 56. The other significant measure taken was an amendment to the *Customs Act* and which placed an increase on the tariff duties on a wide range of commodities in order to protect Canadian industry from foreign competition. The increase in tariff protection was the sharpest tariff increase in Canadian history since John A. Macdonald's tariff changes in 1879. The aim was to strengthen Canadian manufactures' monopoly on the Canadian market and so enable them to keep their factories open.

shows that the federal government had a role to play in relief activities after many municipalities and provinces exhausted their resources, and after, as we will see shortly, the federal government understood the economic problem to be of national proportions. Amongst the unemployed, the resulting confusion of who to turn to in order to receive the necessary assistance can be seen through a letter by Mr. Ormond Beard of Montreal, Quebec, which highlights the confusion. In Mr. Beard's words,

Dear Sir, As you say it is for the municipal authorities to distribute relief, although lots of people hold the Dominion people should control it. Well to show you how futile it has been so far, I was at a council meeting when my relief was cut off, & the Mayor said he had nothing to do with my relief & that I must communicate with Ottawa. So you see they refuse to deal with me...I have been without food or drink here for two and a half days at a stretch. I owe it to my wife & family to get some relief. If I was a single fellow I would not bother so much. You see how useless it is so far for me to get any kind of redress, one says write here & you write & then you are told to write somewhere else etc.⁵²

Mr. Beard was told that the mayor had no responsibility in cutting off his relief and that he should 'communicate with Ottawa'. However, he was aware that it was the 'municipal authorities' who 'distribute relief'. It was 'useless for me to get any kind of redress' as 'one says write here & you write & then you are told to write somewhere else'. This demonstrates a lack of coordination when it came to who was responsible for the governing of the destitute, which added to their hardship.

A second interesting aspect can be taken from Neatby's discussion which relates to the manner in which the federal government approached the *Unemployment Relief Act*; the notion that 'being out of a job was a temporary problem'. Bennett's attempt to deal with the depression was palliative in nature and reflects the belief that the economic hardships of the 1930s were to be short-lived in nature. It was customary for the family and the private market to act as the traditional channels for help for those with a loss of income or had an inadequate income. The

⁵² Ormond Beard, Montreal, Quebec, March 14th, 1933. Bennett Papers M-1319, 393562.

sudden loss in income would result in trying to find another job, borrowing, and seeking credit, if these avenues failed then asking a relative for assistance was common.⁵³ According to Dennis Guest's study of social security in Canada, "a head of household who found himself unemployed and unable to secure another job would be expected to meet his living expenses by drawing on his savings...or having resources to some agency within the private market- a bank, a finance company, a pawnshop- or by prevailing upon his creditors to carry him until he was able to meet his commitments".⁵⁴ Only if he was unable to do this would he apply for aid from the municipality for assistance. This reliance was also understood to be a temporary and emergency fact, until the individual's capacity for self-support was regained.⁵⁵

The idea that assistance was to be 'temporary' in nature and provided only on an 'emergency' basis is found in several letters to the prime minister. Many of those requiring assistance insisted that any form of aid they received from Bennett would be paid back by the recipient once they recovered their means. Several letter writers present their situation as being temporary, and in circumstances to be direst: only through a loan from Bennett could they keep their families self-sufficient. Here are four letters:

Dear Mr. Bennett, This is a letter not asking for charity, but a loan, I am asking indirectly for money so I will stand a better chance of obtaining a job. A job nowadays cannot be got unless your clothes are fairly good. That is one of the first things as you will know...I would pay you back in instalments...P.S I would at least like a job.⁵⁶

Dear Sir, Before consigning this to the waste paper basket, would you please read this carefully and give it your very earnest (sic) consideration. I am a carpenter by trade, am 49 years of age, with a wife and small family. During the past ten years I have been living in a CN Railway station, paying rent for same. This is now being taken up and the station and land adjoining 'some 4 acres is to be sold. The price for same will be \$500. My wife 'who by the way is a very delicate woman' and family

⁵³ Guest, 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Edgar Handford, Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, August 19th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1325, 400404.

have become very much attached to this place, and we would like to secure it for a home. If I had about \$200 more than what I now have we could secure this and be settled for life. Would it be possible Sir, that you could advance me this amount from your own personal funds...Sir, I am not asking for a gift, but rather as a loan. I am not in the habit of borrowing money but would expect in time to repay you. This amount Mr. Bennett would put me on my feet where I could fend for myself and family and not be depending on charity...and I ask it as man to man, or let us say as friend to friend...I have no desire for great wealth, but would like to make enough so that I can stand on my own two feet, and my family will be independent.⁵⁷

Dear Sir, I am writing you a few lines we have allows (sic) been supporters of the Conservative party on my side of the house. And also my husband. Well Mr. Bennett we are in _____ there are 7 of us...and you know Mr. Bennett no family of 7 can love on 20 a month let along (sic) get clothes. My husband hasnt (sic) had a days work since the winter and we are getting no relief...could or would you please lend us 40 or \$50 till Joe can get work and we will pay you back every sent (sic) oh please let me have some any way.⁵⁸

Dear Sir, Mr. Bennett, I am writing to see if you would do me a favour. I am doing all I can...I need a little money I have not being (sic) any relief. I had a little start and was doing good till the depression came and I managed to carry on until now. I would like to get two Hundred dollars for two years and pay one Hundred this year and the other the next year. Please give me a try and see if I am not Honest. I am sure you would not mind helping a man that is trying to get along. I have a wife and 2 kiddies. I have been sick and a heavy doctor bill to pay so please do your best for me. Please answer this letter.⁵⁹

What these letter writers were doing was asking for assistance in the form of a loan. Edgar Handford was 'not asking for charity, but a loan' and would work out a system in which he would pay the prime minister back in 'instalments'. From the letter of Mr. Jas E. Diamond one sees that if he 'had about \$200 more than what I now have' he could secure his property and continue to provide for his wife and family. He makes his plea to Bennett in the language of not desiring a 'gift but rather a loan'. This loan would 'put me on my feet where I could fend for

⁵⁷ Jas. E. Diamond, Wadoc, Ontario, October 4th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1324, 400056.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Josiah Payne, Smiths Falls, Ontario, July 17th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398705.

⁵⁹ Arthur MacFarland, Napanee, Ontario, February 20th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398989.

myself and family and not be depending on charity'.⁶⁰ These 'loans' were to be temporary in nature and claims were made that the recipients, such as Mrs. Josiah Payne, 'will pay you back every [c]ent'. The appeal to obtain a loan, rather than relief reflected the sentiment towards relief as it was believed that to rely on relief was to be something less than human in Canada during the 1930s.⁶¹ To avoid the stigma of charity, most head of household recipients "signed a form promising to pay for the relief they received when good times returned. But this nod to self-respect was no more than a futile gesture. The stigma of accepting charity had outlived its relevance but it was still alive and very real, both for men on relief and for officials who administered relief".⁶² There was a pressing desire for many fathers, like Mr. Diamond, to keep their families' 'independent'. The writing of letters to the prime minister can be seen as a last resort for many. It is through the letters to Bennett that it becomes apparent that people were at the end of their personal resources and were therefore turning to the prime minister for assistance after their personal resources were exhausted.

The non-temporary nature of available and appropriate resources can be seen to have caused the following letter writers to turn to Bennett as a means to obtain the necessary resources, such as clothing and food, due to the increased scarcity of those resources. These people are not opposing the idea of temporary strategies, rather they are pointing to the fact that their resources are not of any use after a while. According to Geo Kutzy of Moosehorn, Manitoba,

Dear Sir, I hate doing such a thing as this, but I really have to. I would like you to help me. I havent got any place of my own...I am 67 years old. Do you know this is hard. I have children going to school and in mud and water up to their knees. They have no rubbers, nor shoes. They have no winter clothes. We had no grains, nor

⁶⁰ What is also of interest from Mr. Diamond's letter is that he is pleading with Bennett to 'as man to man, or let us say as friend to friend', which suggests that he sees himself as being equal to the prime minister.

⁶¹ Neatby, 26.

⁶² Ibid., 25-26.

garden. Everything was drown out. I dont know how Ill live the winter. Please help me. If you do help me then Ill help you. Please help with clothing and other things.⁶³

The theme of exhausting resources such as clothing can be seen in another letter to the prime minister. Mr. Florian Meyers of Lestock, Saskatchewan states: “as the crops were very bad this year and I could not earn anything I would like to get relief for clothes and also food. Have a large family of seven children and cannot send any to school if we do not get any clothing for them. I would like it as soon as possible. I thank you”.⁶⁴ These two letters suggest that both men were at the end of their savings and were turning to the assistance of the government as a last resort. Clothing items such as ‘rubbers’ and ‘shoes’ and ‘winter clothing’ would only last a certain amount of time before they were worn out and needed to be replaced. As the depression continued, more and more families began to exhaust their private resources more were compelled to seek out public assistance, even though they may have weathered previous months of unemployment without assistance. The longer a family was on relief, the greater their needs “clothing needs are greater, and consequently the costs of clothing are mounting. As a family [continued] on relief it comes to rely a greater extent for their intimate needs...the net result is that costs per individual are increasing, and even though in some cases the number of individuals shows a slight decrease, the cost is greater”.⁶⁵ It was when families such as the Geo Kutzy and Florian Meyers were unable to provide these necessities for their families that they turned to Bennett for assistance.

The sentiment of only through exhausting the resources available that one must turn to the government for assistance can also be seen in James Gray’s reflection. For Gray, it was only when “we were almost out of food, we were almost out of fuel, and our rent was two months in

⁶³ Geo Kutzy, Moosehorn, Alberta, September 27th 1935. Bennett Papers M-1325, 400531.

⁶⁴ Florian Meyers, Lestock, Saskatchewan, October 3rd, 1935. Bennett Papers M-1323, 398919.

⁶⁵ Cassidy, 161.

arrears. [And] at home were my wife and daughter, and my mother, father, and two younger siblings”.⁶⁶ Relying on government relief came as a last resort for many, only after they exhausted all other avenues of self-sufficiency, when they were ‘almost out of food and fuel’ and could not sustain their family’s standard of living. Even when these men asked Bennett to loan them some money, there was still an inherent sense of shame and guilt that accompanied the process. One manner in which the government tried to diminish the sense of shame and guilt was through the establishment of relief works projects throughout the country which, at the same time, would ensure that public authorities did not reward inaction.

2.4 Relief Work Projects: The Inherent Dignity of a Wage

When it came to providing relief to the countries’ unemployed, Bennett promised the jobless that the ‘right to work’ was the right of every man in Canada. According to John Thompson’s study of Canada in the 1920s and 30s, Bennett had come to view unemployment as being a national problem since the election against Mackenzie King in the summer of 1930, and since it assumed national proportions, “it was the duty of [his] party to see that employment is provided for those people who are able to work”.⁶⁷ Since June 1930, Bennett made it clear to Canadians that his promise was jobs, not relief, “an opportunity [for the unemployed] to toil with their muscles that their families may live...I will not permit this country...to ever become committed to the dole system”.⁶⁸ In a time of election campaign there was also convergence between Bennett’s declaration and the working-class cultural imperative of the individual’s male’s right to work and the notion of a traditional family wage. His support of the family wage model was already evident during the time when he served as the Director of National Service

⁶⁶ Gray, 8.

⁶⁷ John Herd Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1985), 202.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

for the administration of the Canadian Patriotic Fund.⁶⁹ Relief works programs were targeted towards the male breadwinner and the eradication of male idleness, as it was believed that idle men “should be compelled by law to work and a man who will remain at home and allow his wife to work and support his family should not be allowed to live”.⁷⁰ The relief projects were a means for the Canadian government to provide work, rather than handouts to those most affected by unemployment.

The term ‘relief works’ generally refers to “undertakings set in motion with the express purpose of creating employment...the common characteristic of the undertakings designated by...municipal officials as relief works is that the available employment on them is spread around among applicants in need of work, the men rotating in turns on the job. Thus the need for employment rather than suitability for the job in hand are the determining factor in engaging men, while just the opposite is the case normally”.⁷¹ In most municipalities the administration of relief works was generally carried on under the direction of the engineer’s department, while in many instances these projects would have been completed by contractors.⁷² The nature of the relief works undertaken by the various municipalities to provide employment was very much alike in most places. Common relief work projects included the development and maintenance of sewers, water mains and trench-digging jobs, while there was also the tendency to favour street and highway grading and in some instances some park improvement and flood prevention

⁶⁹ Christie, 85. He criticized those feminists who ‘saw the intrinsic value in the work of women’, when he stated that only ‘deserving and dependent women’ with ‘dependents’, should obtain work and that he preferred to defend the ‘redistribution of wealth to the poor and needy ‘undertaken by the CPF’. Bennett had formulated a two-tiered, gendered conception of social policy; employment for men and welfare support for ‘dependent women’.

⁷⁰ NAC, Kelso Papers, Vol. 4, ‘Charity and Charity Organization’, untitled extract, n.d taken from Christie, *Engendering the State*, 119.

⁷¹ Cassidy., 129.

⁷² Ibid. Various municipalities had their city councils instruct the engineers to prepare lists of possible relief jobs and then had them whittle down the lists to what they considered to be reasonable proportions. This process was often done very hastily.

measures were undertaken.⁷³ The leading prerequisite for these work schemes was that the projects undertaken should maximize the involvement of labour. In essence, the relief works projects involved the ‘moving of dirt’ in large quantities, work that could be done by men without special skill or training for it, and this was the task upon which the battalions of the unemployed, armed with picks and shovels were concentrated.⁷⁴ One can see that the relief works projects were a means to deal with those able-bodied men who could not find employment, but were willing and eager to work. For many men working various relief projects, there was little to do, and they saw the work they did engage in as unproductive and certainly not very stimulating; however the inherent dignity that came from earning an honest wage cannot be underestimated.

James Gray reflects on his experiences with relief works projects and just what the work he engaged in meant to him. In Gray’s words, “the closest any of us on relief got to socially useful labour was sawing wood, but we were drafted periodically for all the make-work projects, like raking leaves, picking rock, digging dandelions, and tidying up back lanes”.⁷⁵ These relief work projects were devised to “enable us to work off the assistance we received, and our services were demanded for a couple of days once a month. It was all justified on the grounds that the exercise would be good for us, that working would improve our morale, and that, by providing us with a token opportunity to work for our relief, we would be freed of the stigma of accepting charity”.⁷⁶ The work project scheme served the purpose of trying to restore any level of morale and pride to those men who were on relief. The government recognized the inherent stigma and humiliation associated with ‘hand-outs’ and recognized that they were willing to work.

⁷³ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gray., 38.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

The typical recipient was expected to be a married, employable male and these men were often provided jobs for three days or a week at a time and were then laid off until their turn came again. Using Toronto as an example, married men got approximately one week's work in eight during the winter 1930-31.⁷⁷ The preference of married men when it came to the administration of various relief works projects served a very significant purpose; the maintenance of morale for those men who had become accustomed to earning and providing for their family. It also could be seen as an acknowledgement that their work was more important because they had a family and single men did not have the same responsibility to a family. And it worked according to Harry Cassidy's study of relief work in Ontario during the early parts of the 1930s, "relief works have done something at least to maintain the morale of the unemployed. There is universal testimony that prolonged idleness and subsistence on charity exert deteriorating effects of the most serious nature upon the workers...the opportunity of relief employment has sustained the spirits and self-respect of the better class of workmen among the unemployed".⁷⁸ The ability to turn to relief work offered an avenue of escape for many from the cruel and degrading experience of handouts.

Despite the belief that relief work was 'unproductive' and 'not very stimulating', the ability of many married men to participate in relief projects offered many a chance to escape the stigma of charity associated with direct relief. To turn to relief for most Canadians was a humiliating experience. The administration of relief might have been necessary legislation, but according to one informant interviewed by Broadfoot, "the shame and bitterness can never be legislated out of the recipient's mind. If he had been a proud and hard-working wage earner only a year or two before, the most shameful moment of his life was walking into the relief office for

⁷⁷ Cassidy, 144.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

the first time. I know that to this day men still remember this moment”.⁷⁹ According to one worker’s perspective, relief was “not what people want. [The] Dole breeds laziness. Nor charity. Charity kills pride. What is a man without his pride, or one who is lazy for that matter? *What is really needed is work*”.⁸⁰ The work relief projects provided men the opportunity to diminish the notion that one who could not manage his family’s affairs was incompetent or lazy.⁸¹ The preference of relief works reflected a longstanding antipathy towards “indiscriminate charity or almsgiving. Wages earned from relief works projects, however minimal, helped to remove some of the stigma of outright destitution of incompetence or laziness”.⁸² The importance that relief work played for many can be summarized by Eric Strikwerda’s study of the relief works projects of Saskatoon from 1929-1932. Based on various municipal government documents, Strikwerda concludes:

Less easily identifiable was the dignity inherent in earning an honest wage doing meaningful and useful work. The humiliation of sudden unemployment was difficult to bear for many of the city’s residents, particularly for those who prided themselves on their self-sufficiency and thrift. Such humiliation, of course, was not limited to Saskatoon: for unemployed men in urban centres across the county, standing before the relief officer, hat in hand, and declaring complete and utter destitution remained a sign of personal failure- this despite climatic and economic conditions and systems certainly beyond their control⁸³

From both Strikwerda and his contemporary reflection towards relief works projects, and from Cassidy’s comments towards the benefits of relief during the thirties, one can see that the pride and self-respect that earning a wage brought many married men and their families was a value that cut across all classes of Canadian society. As a result, the various relief projects undertaken by the local municipalities under the directive of the federal government’s funding, relief work

⁷⁹Broadfoot, 74.

⁸⁰John Verhooven, in Christie, 214. Italics original.

⁸¹Neatby, 25.

⁸²Riendeau, 51.

⁸³Eric Strikwerda, “From Short-Term Emergency to Long-Term Crisis: Public Works Projects in Saskatoon, 192-1932” *Prairie Forum* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001), 178.

offered some men salvation from their feelings of inadequacy, and some through their contributions, saw themselves as not being shiftless or lazy or paupers.⁸⁴

The 'inherent dignity in earning an honest wage' can be seen in a variety of letters and testimonies from this and the previous chapter through the self-reflection towards work, which highlights the significance placed on earning a wage. John Jennings comments 'there are numerous jobs I could do and would willing do in order to get away from direct relief and the stigma attached to it'. This highlights that he sees the inherent dignity that came from earning a wage. In John Durant's words 'I am willing to do any kind of work and any length of time', which demonstrates the pride he took from providing for his family.⁸⁵ One can also see the benefits that work brought these men of the depression by focusing on their discussions surrounding the humiliation they felt when they had to finally apply for relief and how it challenged their proud natures to do so. Thus, some relief work projects, such as bridge building or road and sewer developments, offered these men the chance to engage in 'meaningful' and 'useful work' within their communities.

One can see that Bennett's insistence on relief works projects partly represented an encouragement of the values of fathers as breadwinners, and that such values were shared by all classes of society. Able-bodied, who were willing to work had work provided. Eventually however, the financial instability that these projects brought to many cities led Bennett to re-evaluate, and eventually change the manner in which he dealt with the problem of unemployment. In this switch from relief works to direct relief, motivated by budgetary concerns, Bennett abandoned the promotion of the male breadwinner.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ For a detailed examination of the letters see Chapter 1.

2.5 Direct Relief: Abandoning Breadwinning Ideals

The Bennett government had emphasized the use of public works as a means to address the issue of unemployment rather than direct relief because it feared the moral character of the unemployed would be undermined if they were given money through the dole. However, by the spring of 1932, at the time when increased government spending would have done the most good, Bennett decided to formally end his tentative assault on unemployment by means of public works.⁸⁶ The justification for abandoning the relief works projects was one of economic rationalization more than anything else. Bennett had favoured work relief projects as a means to maintain the moral character of the unemployed, but the switch to direct relief showed that his fear of killing the initiative or enterprise of working Canadians was lesser a fear than unbalanced budgets.⁸⁷ According to Roger Riendeau's work on social assistance during the thirties, local administrators tended to view the issue of unemployment and relief as a fiscal problem, rather than a social one, even if the inadequacy of public relief disrupted the normal family and human relationships of the unemployed: "the abandonment of relief works in favour of direct relief, while justifiable from a budgetary standpoint, did not take into account the psychological impact of unemployment on the worker...relief works could be socially beneficial to the unemployed in preventing them from being totally reduced to pauper status".⁸⁸

In April 1932 Bennett passed what is commonly referred to as, the third *Relief Act*, in which "no further public works would be supported; the federal government would pay one third of all direct relief and would lend the provinces enough money to cover the municipalities' third

⁸⁶ Thompson, 217-18.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 218.

⁸⁸ Riendeau, 55. The Toronto City Council recognized this to a certain extent in 1933 when it proposed a 'work test' for its recipients of direct relief in order to 'release the men from the monotony and demoralizing effects of idleness'. Nevertheless, despite their complete lack of control over their destiny, the unemployed continued to face public hostility and degradation. This idea of 'willingness to work' will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4, in relation to how the government still provided for the families of those who were unable to find work in order to ensure that their families did not suffer.

when necessary”.⁸⁹ Bennett’s abandonment of relief work was an abrupt change from his campaign promises several years earlier where he had assured every Canadian the right to a job; however, by September 1932 one in four of them was not working; he had sworn that there would be no dole, but a quarter of a million families celebrated Christmas on ‘direct relief’.⁹⁰ Bennett had abandoned his campaign promises and the unemployed saw him as being personally responsible for their misfortunes.⁹¹

According to Harry Cassidy, direct relief is “public charity granted to those who are incapable of independent self-support and who face starvation, eviction from their homes, or suffering from cold unless given assistance” and the direct relief has been given those living in their own homes “in the forms of grants of food, fuel and sometimes clothing, as well as payment of rents and other bills in some instances, on a scale designed to do no more than provide the minimum necessities of life”.⁹² To economize, all levels of government would come to rely on the administration of direct relief, which was cheaper to administrate as will be discussed shortly, to deal with the increasing unemployment problem. So now relief was no longer seen as an emergency method. It becomes necessary to now explore the administration of relief works and the problems that accompanied them, which encouraged the switch to direct relief.

In addition the *Relief Act* of 1930 has been understood by historians as having done very little to ease the plight of those unemployed. The \$16 million previously used for public works

⁸⁹ Thompson, 218. The second relief act occurred in 1931 titles the *Unemployment and Farm Relief Act*, which was prepared in a near panic. The government made an unspecified amount of money available to aid the municipalities and the provinces with public works relief projects. The terms were more generous than those of the 1930 act. The dominion government was to pay fifty cents of each dollar spent, the remainder to be divided equally between the municipality and province.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 221. People spoke of ‘Bennett boroughs’, the shack-towns of cardboard and corrugated iron crowded with homeless men and they spoke of ‘Bennett blankets’, the newspapers under which transients slept on park benches.

⁹² Cassidy, 164.

had been divided among the provinces on the basis of population rather than need and the provinces divided their funding among their municipalities not according to the number of unemployed, but in relation to what each municipality was prepared to spend on public works.⁹³ The administration of work projects at the municipal level was “haphazard, so that it was impossible to direct the jobs to the neediest families in a community. Married men were given preference over the single, British subjects over immigrants, and there was a residence qualification that was enforced”.⁹⁴ To further illustrate the problems associated with relief works projects, “anyone who was unemployed was provided with the same amount of relief work regardless of the number of his children or the length of time he had been out of a job”.⁹⁵ There were some further drawbacks when it came to the administration of relief works projects as discussed by Cassidy.

One significant drawback to the public relief projects, as outlined by Cassidy, was the work being provided was much more expensive than if it had been done in the ordinary way, with regular, full-time employers.⁹⁶ For example, the cost of flood prevention as a relief project was approximately \$200,000, while the normal cost was around \$100,000. Sewer development cost around \$250,000 under the relief program, while the normal cost was \$180,000, an increased cost of 38.9 per cent.⁹⁷ The reasons for this greater expense were several: in the first place, hand labour was generally employed, even where machinery could have been used to much greater advantage; secondly, the relief jobs were done mainly during the winter months, when climatic conditions were unfavourable for efficient work, and finally relief workers were

⁹³ Ibid., 210.

⁹⁴ Ibid. This theme of favouring ‘British subjects’ over ‘immigrants’ presents itself in a variety of letters, see chapter 4 for a detailed discussion.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Cassidy, 150.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

not nearly as good as regular men for the jobs they were required to do, most of the relief men were inexperienced in the rough labouring work of civic construction.⁹⁸ Relief work projects had proven to be distinctly expensive, as “it has been necessary to spend about two dollars in most Ontario municipalities to provide a man with a dollar in wages”.⁹⁹ There were numerous other problems associated with relief work that were separate from the problem of increased costs.

There was the issue of some municipalities not being able to provide enough work for many men. According to Cassidy, the cities have been “insufficient to provide nearly enough jobs for all the unemployed, even for the married men who have been recognized as particularly entitled to assistance”.¹⁰⁰ There was also an issue regarding the type of work made available to these men, that the work was only ‘one class’ in nature, pick and shovel labour.¹⁰¹ According to Cassidy, the work being done was of “dubious value to the community. It is difficult to say what proportion of municipal projects fall into this category...a substantial number may be classified as civic luxuries or non-essentials”.¹⁰² The most pressing issue, associated with the relief programs, not relating to cost was the “fact that municipal initiative and administration have been dominant has given rise to a variety of problems. Eligibility rules, wage rates and amount of employment offered have varied from place to place, so that there has been no uniformity of treatment for the unemployed”.¹⁰³ As a result of the growing costs and the inadequacy of relief

⁹⁸ Ibid., 151.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 160-61. Interesting to note how Cassidy mentions how married men have been given preference to relief work over all others in society.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 161.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 162.

works programs, the Bennett administration decided to abandon these programs in favour of direct relief in 1932.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The discussion above examined the stigma surrounding relief and the attempts that the Canadian government made to reinforce the breadwinner ideal through the implementation of work relief projects and the administration of direct relief. The deep-rooted feeling of shame and humiliation when it came to accepting relief was an important part of the tradition of the British Poor Laws, and was echoed through the various letters and interviewees of those men who had to finally succumb to the realization that there was a scarcity of work available. The work relief projects, despite their 'pick and shovel' nature, attempted to provide an inherent dignity to those involved through the wage they received. The projects were not only a way to assure that the government did not encourage idleness, but also a way to acknowledge the breadwinner ideal of independence and autonomy that accompanied waged labour amongst the unemployed. Bennett believed in the value of work and tried to encourage those values through the establishment of work relief projects. The able-bodied were demonstrating a willingness to work and the policies reflected that ideal. However, the turn to direct relief as a less expensive measure was intrusive and demeaning for recipients, as the method had always been associated with means to ensure that only the most 'deserving poor' were provided for. With a switch to direct relief, the ideal of the male breadwinner was abandoned as everyone, including the able-bodied, were placed onto direct relief. The analysis of primary sources documenting the attitudes of recipients indicates that relief was nothing more than a futile gesture on behalf of the Canadian government. Men felt

¹⁰⁴ The idea about eligibility fits into the notion of politics and surveillance and can be seen to highlight the distrust that the Canadian government had for those on relief. For a detailed discussion about the politics of administering relief see chapter 4.

an inherent sense of shame and humiliation when they faced administrators who acted as if they had ‘nobody to blame’ but themselves.

The third chapter will explore how men’s families, specifically their wives and children, viewed the issue of unemployment. It will examine the breadwinner ideal from the perspective of wives and children and how these family members recognized the importance of this ideal and how, as dependents, they were affected by a loss of stability and security that employment brought their families. It will comment on how women were actively involved in fulfilling their role as caregivers and maternal protectors of the family. It will also address how children viewed their fathers and the concern amongst the Canadian government that a lack of work would reduce working-class ideals of independence and autonomy for future generation.

CHAPTER 3

MASCULINITY AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

Marriage represented a critical stage in the life of women...marriage marked a new stage in the life cycle which was emphasized by the religious ceremony and the celebrations which accompanied it. In marriage, the young woman took her partner's name, swore to honour and obey him...and expected to engage in sexual activity, which was now sanctioned to the degree that it would allow her to become a mother, the only condition which conferred on women genuine adult status.¹

This excerpt taken from Denyse Baillargeon's *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression* acts as the foundation to this chapter. The role women played in defining, sustaining, complementing, and reproducing men's roles during the 1930s warrants a chapter of its own. The main idea of this third chapter is that associated with the ideal of the male breadwinner was the notion that women were natural mothers and that a woman's place in the wage earning economy was to depend on the income of her husband. It is also important to this chapter that we explore how women understood their own position in regards to the breadwinner ideal. As the introduction has made clear, masculinity is not something that is defined solely by men. It is a concept that is socially constructed, meaning that a good history of masculinity involves discussions about how others interpret and define men. Indeed, for historians John Tosh and Michael Roper, masculinity as a concept is not a narrow or simplistic idea; rather it is diverse and broad in range. Masculinity is not a distinct part of a man's personality, but rather it is more a matter of social or cultural construction.²

This chapter investigates the family dynamics of husbands and fathers to see how various family members experienced the unemployment of men and, in return, the impact their values and practices had on the ideal of the male breadwinner. It will discuss how wives and children

¹ Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, Trans by Yvonne Klein, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 47.

² Michael Roper, "Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History", *History Workshop Journal* 59, (2005), 58.

viewed their husbands and fathers and to what extent they believed in the importance that waged labour played in promoting a sense of pride and respectability of the male head of household, which we have discussed in chapters one and two. This chapter will begin by examining the influences that religion had in defining women as dependents within Canadian society.³ After, it will be necessary to comment on how ideals of women as dependents and mothers were translated into various policies of the Canadian government, such as the *Canadian Patriotic Fund*. Once this basis is established, the chapter will progress to address how women during the 1930s saw their roles as mothers and, similar to their husbands, prided themselves on their family responsibilities. Through the aid of the same group of letters and testimonies, one will be able to demonstrate how women accepted their role as mother and dependent and encouraged the existing norms.⁴ As such, these women acknowledged the pride and respect waged-labour brought to their husbands. The third section of this chapter will explore the role that women played during the 1930s with special attention given to their ability to manage the household finances. The fourth section will explore how children viewed their fathers and unemployment during the depression-era, which will lead to a final section about how fathers interpreted their familial responsibility and how their concern for their wives and children was part of the larger working-class ideals surrounding a strong work ethic. As this chapter progresses I will also pay attention to the limits of this system and to the circumstances where these values of the male breadwinner are challenged.

³ The reason why the influence of religion was not discussed earlier is because, as will be seen below, religion was a reflection of the home and as has been previously been discussed in the first chapter, the home came to represent a woman's domain.

⁴ It is important to note that I chose sources to be by and about men; however in the selection of sources, there is much to be said about women. I am using the same sources as outlined in my introduction, but will explore them from a different perspective.

3.1 Defining and Rewarding Women as Mothers: Women as Dependents both Spiritually and Politically

As the first chapter has discussed, the process of industrialization contributed significantly to the establishment of the breadwinner ideal. While chapter one discussed extensively the male head of household, which is the focus of the thesis, and the expectations that came with a changing fatherhood, it is important to discuss the expectations that came to define women as mothers, as the former cannot be understood without the latter. As for the ideal of the male breadwinner, an important contributing factor which led to the notion that women were to be rewarded for their mothering capabilities was the influence of religious practice. The religious doctrine of evangelicalism, a stream of Protestant Christian theology, had played a significant role in defining women as mothers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the whole British world. It is important to begin this examination during this period to understand how these ideals have progressed through the centuries, and how the influence of religious teachings in the lives of women has insisted on values of dependency. According to historians Davidoff and Hall's study of men and women in middle-class England from 1780-1850, religion "may have been the 'one thing needful' for men and women...but it was not experienced by them in the same manner. Indeed, discussions on the proper place of men and women in the public and private sphere were a central part of religious practice at this time".⁵ There was a belief in spiritual equality between the sexes; however, through belief and practice of evangelical authorities, the separate spheres of men and women became more pronounced during the nineteenth century. Within the household it was 'natural' that the husband should

⁵ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 107.

command and the wife, children and servants should obey.⁶ Women, it was argued by preachers and teachers, had been created for man, indeed for one man, and there was a necessary assumption from this that home was the ‘proper scene of woman’s action and influence’.⁷ The idea of a privatized home, separated from the world, had a powerful moral force and if women, with their special aptitude for faith, could be contained within that home, then a space would be created for true family religion. Preachers and teachers alike, argued with conviction, that women were more open to religious influence than men because “of their greater separation from the temptations of the world and their ‘natural’ characteristics of gentleness and passivity. Home must therefore be the first and chief scene of their mission”.⁸ As such, women were ‘best suited’ to influence the realm of the home through their gentle and passive natures. The influence of religion in contributing to a woman’s proper place within society, was not only occurring amongst the British middle-class, but can also be seen within the United States.

According to Mary Ryan’s study of families in Oneida County New York, 1790-1865, a distinct set of characteristics were given to this idealized view of womanhood: “the great giver of all good as a helpmate of man, formed in a superior though more fragile and delicate mold...to play a distinct character in the great drama of the world”.⁹ Women had purer feelings and were able to express their affection towards their families. As the first chapter has made clear, a man’s ability to support his family and household lay at the core of his masculinity; while a woman’s femininity was best expressed through her dependence. The idea of being dependent was “at the core of the evangelical Christian view of womanhood, and the new female subject, constructed in

⁶ Ibid. 108. There was an emphasis on using verses of scripture such as St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, where God told wives and children to submit themselves to their husbands and fathers. As a result, families were encouraged to use these verses to engage in family prayer, where these ideas would continue to be embedded into daily life.

⁷ Ibid. 115.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mary Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: the family of Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 190.

real religious terms, were the godly wife and mother”.¹⁰ For evangelical preachers the need to place women into their own sphere went back to religious scripture and the Fall of Eve. Eve had introduced transgression to the world and must suffer for it. Indeed, childbirth was seen by some religious thinkers as a ‘woman’s hour of sorrow’ when, in conditions of ‘peculiar agony’, each mother would reflect upon that fall and experience her pain as ‘a lasting memorial’ of Eve’s fate and ‘an impressive comment on the evil nature of sin’.¹¹ But childbirth could also represent a woman’s access to salvation since Mary, the mother of Jesus, had through her maternity raised women from despair. Notions of womanhood “thus assumed a link between the godly woman and her family duties”.¹²

Through the teachings of the church, a woman would only obtain salvation through “her responsibilities as mother, wife, daughter or sister; through her services to the family she could suppress the dangerous parts of herself, associated with her sexuality, which linked her back to Eve”.¹³ To be a good wife was a high attainment in female excellence. Women needed to be contained within families, whether their family of origin, their family of marriage, or the family of the church.¹⁴ The emphasis was placed on women operating in a “different department and sphere of action. Men and women were in separate spheres and those spheres were not hierarchical, the contribution of women in the home and family were quite as vital as that of men in the world outside”.¹⁵ Religious doctrine became central to the development and maintenance of the notion that women were to be dependents and mothers within society. The ‘proper’ profession for women was as a good wife and responsible mother.

¹⁰ Davidoff and Hall, 114.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. Lack of attachment to a family would mean that women were exposed to being ‘surplus’, with no meaning to their lives, and with the additional dangers of unconditional sexuality.

¹⁵ Ibid., 115.

These ideas about women as dependents and mothers were circulated through sermons, public addresses, the press, and novels. The ‘cult of domesticity’, as it became known, tried to confine women to the private sphere. In Canada according to Nancy Christie, one of the first suggestions that men and women belonged in separate spheres appeared in March 1881, in a sermon delivered by Reverend Robert Wallace, a Presbyterian minister. In it he systematically developed the notion that the wife’s ‘proper department’ was “with her ‘household duties’ and that the home was ‘her throne of influence and power’, while the husband was to acquire ‘manly character’ by making his family ‘independent’ in the marketplace, thus preserving them from becoming ‘dependent on the cold charities of the world’”.¹⁶ The end result was that in all matters of business “in merchandise belong, for the most part, exclusively to the husbands of English wives: nor are they expected to be able in any way, to make, independently, a fortune for themselves”.¹⁷ For many evangelical women “the religious submission to the Lord... was congruent with the dominant ideals of feminine qualities of tenderness, love, and forgiveness”.¹⁸ These qualities characterized the ideal Canadian home and ensured the wife’s role was taking care of the affairs at home, while her husband went to work and provided for his family. Women were to maintain the home, as it was seen as the foundation of society. They had to remain in the private sphere, tending to their ‘natural functions’. In many letters written to Bennett during the depression, women showed a deep-rooted faith in God and the church, which informed their ideal of being a good mother.

¹⁶ Reverend Robert Wallace Papers, Vol. 1, file 8, Lecture ‘Homes and How to Make them Happy’, March 1881, delivered at West Church, Toronto. In Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 19-20.

¹⁷ Davidoff and Hall, 116.

¹⁸ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 29.

Women often referred to their faith in the course of their letters. For example, in a letter to Bennett Mrs. Joan Brock, a wife and mother, of Red Deer, Alberta states: “May God Bless you in your work”; again at the end of the letter, she comments “so God Bless you”.¹⁹ Another woman, Mrs. Louise Eollicott of Bronte, Ontario comments on the difficulties she faces, but insists to Bennett “I am very thankful that through it all I can truthfully say I can still maintain my faith and trust in God above”.²⁰ These two female letter writers draw attention to their faith in God, which suggests that religion played an active role in their daily lives. As Mrs. Eollicott mentions she still maintains a ‘faith and trust in God above’. This letter, from a wife and mother, is interesting because as the beginning of chapter three has indicated, the depression was a challenging time for many, and it caused for the faith of many to be tested. In Mrs. Eollicott’s letter, one gains a sense that she could lose her faith; that the limits of her faith are being pushed. The most intriguing of letters which suggests the active involvement of religion in the daily lives of these women comes from Mrs. Dorothy Franklin, of Brechin Ontario: “We are taught to believe God put us women here for the noble cause of Motherhood”.²¹ This comment is significant as one can see that this woman draws a distinct connection between the ideas that God put women ‘here for the noble cause of Motherhood’. There seems to be a belief that her ‘role’ within society was decreed by God, and therefore is innate. She recognizes that her natural role as a mother was ordained by God. The importance and meaning of her role as a dependent wife and mother is founded on spiritual truths. Mainly through the landscape of religion, Canadian society viewed women as dependents and mothers. And these ideals about women being dependents of a

¹⁹ Mrs. Joan Brock, Red Deer, Alberta, March 11th, 1935. *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 1276-127.

²⁰ Louise Eollicott, Bronte, Ontario, February 28th, 1935, Bennett Papers M-1324, 400091.

²¹ Mrs. Dorothy Franklin, Brechin, Ontario, March 18th, 1935. Grayson and Bliss, 118.

breadwinning husband and a good mother to his children were two characteristics which influenced government and societal attitudes before and during the 1930s.

At this point in the chapter, it becomes necessary to examine how the ideas of motherhood, which were influenced by religion, manifested themselves into policy. One needs to make it clear that the *Canadian Patriotic Fund* was not influenced directly by religious ideals; however, drawing on the notions of motherhood and dependency, two significant ideals that came to define the CPF, one can see that religiously inspired ideals came to inform people's interactions with public authorities. One way in which they came to fruition was through the practices of the social work profession who carried out these religious values of the breadwinner. Prior to the 1930s, the profession, a predominately female profession, had been focused on the religious and loosely cultural aspects of family life, in which the mother occupied a central role.²² By the 1930s, the family was viewed, even by social workers, in entirely economic terms and seen as a singularly male preserve.²³ As such, through the implementation of the CPF, one can see how religious ideals of motherhood and dependency came to manifest themselves into public policy.

3.2 The Canadian Patriotic Fund and the Manifestation of Breadwinner Ideals

One of the main programs that shows the state's understanding of women mainly as mothers and therefore as dependents had been the *Canadian Patriotic Fund*, a fund that encouraged and rewarded women for their mothering capabilities. It is important to examine this fund because of how it brings the ideas of religion and industry together. The premise for the CPF lay in the understanding that mothers were to be the primary beneficiaries of any government welfare policy. According to welfare and gender historian Nancy Christie, "by

²² Christie, 198.

²³ *Ibid.*

paying women for their mothering skills, and for their national service in keeping the family inviolate during a time of national crisis, the CPF established the principle of family allowances, which provided assistance on the basis of the number of children”.²⁴ During the First World War it was motherhood rather than male citizenry rights that were held to be the pre-eminent qualification for the main type of welfare entitlement. This was illustrated by the fact “that married women without children were discriminated against, and paid a benefit substantially less than that of their mothering sisters, and that a woman who married after her husband had enlisted was summarily disqualified from any public aid unless she had children”.²⁵

One important assumption surrounding the implementation of the CPF during the war was that it was a temporary measure.²⁶ This idea of a ‘temporary nature’ parallels itself with Bennett’s early programs to deal with unemployment, as he viewed the problem as being temporary in nature. This idea of the removal of the breadwinner from the family as being temporary, either through war or lack of employment, as is seen in the 1930s, indicates that the breadwinner ideal was prevalent within society. Officials believed that once the war ended and the soldiers returned home, “government assistance [would end] abruptly, as did private philanthropic endeavours because of the deeply held cultural convention that family security and self-sufficiency was still first and foremost the responsibility of the male breadwinner”.²⁷ The government, through its implementation of the CPF, was adhering to two distinct notions: first, as we have seen in chapter one, the male breadwinner was the basis on which the family and society should function. Secondly, the Canadian government, through its insistence that married women have children in order to qualify for the fund, adhered to the idea that women were to be

²⁴Christie, 48.

²⁵Ibid., 48-49.

²⁶Ibid., 50.

²⁷Ibid., 49. The ideal of the male breadwinner cut across class lines and was rigorously upheld by working-class husbands, wives, and mothers, and by middle-class social reformers.

acknowledged and supported for their mothering skills. The CPF attempted to preserve traditional gender roles within society. It worked closely with various local businesses to ensure that women who worked outside the home were denied assistance from the fund, which effectively drove wives of soldiers back into the home.²⁸ To further ensure that women remained in the home, the CPF created a policy whereby the regular earnings of women were deducted from the fund, and if women were married, the CPF only allowed casual earnings from two or three days' work per week.²⁹ It also needs to be noted that this fund was not solely an imposition from above, placed onto the shoulders of soldiers wives. As was seen in chapter one, soldiers themselves asked for this as they were reluctant to enlist their services for the war unless their families were taken care of and provided for in their absence. It then becomes interesting to see how these wives of soldiers viewed the fund and tried not to challenge the cultural norms of motherhood.

For many mothers, the program helped them to realize and reinforce their preference to avoid the workplace by choice, "during the war, large numbers of women- even in the absence of a male breadwinner- eschewed paid labour".³⁰ It has been pointed out by historians such as James Naylor that women presented no real challenge to male workplace strong holds, as women were working in only a small handful of munitions factories. According to Nancy Christie, the CPF heavily influenced the structure of female employment, but not working-class women's values; "working-class women who were eligible for a regular and directly provided state wage almost always preferred to stay home to raise their children. And when wages rose appreciably in 1916, women generally responded by choosing to work shorter hours; clearly, they did not want

²⁸ Ibid., 82.

²⁹ Ibid. At the same time, the fund, by offering childless wives \$5.00 per week, encouraged their participation in the workforce; and as a national public body it was instrumental in reinforcing distinctions between the work of single and married women.

³⁰ Ibid.

their paid work to interfere with their maternal duties”.³¹ Women who entered the paid workforce and ‘neglected’ their maternal duties were seen to be challenging the cultural norms of Canadian society and this amongst all classes.

Attempting to recruit mothers into the labour force was often viewed as an offence to the “cherished cultural norms of family life and to gendered relations in the workplace...[and] the idea of wage labour for women was perceived as transgressing the well-entrenched belief in the sanctity of motherhood. This is because as never before, population growth was considered the very wellspring of national regeneration”.³² The upheaval within families as many male breadwinners left the home and headed to the front, both business communities and organized labour held firm to the belief that women who were hired would directly undermine the ideal of a family wage. Accordingly, there was a tendency to view a woman’s welfare rights in terms of her function as a wife of a deserving male husband. This mentality about womanhood being defined by dependency and mothering skills carried forward after the First World War into the depression-era and beyond. Women did not engage in paid labour once they became married as it was believed that the husband was to provide for his family through the earning of a wage.

James Struthers’ examination of social welfare in Canada during the early decades of the twentieth century and into the 1930s supports Christie’s account: the emphasis was placed on shoring up “a family-wage model that viewed women and children principally as dependents of male wage-earners”.³³ By encouraging women as dependents of the male breadwinner welfare policies in Canada, such as the CPF and later Mothers’ Allowances, served a dual purpose; first to exclude women from the ranks of paid labour, and secondly the social policies emphasized women’s roles as mothers and caretakers of the nation’s children. Mothers were targeted under

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 80.

³³ Ibid.

the premise that women were not to be wage-earners or active citizens, but were ‘naturally’ mothers. The significance of welfare programs for women was that these policies were administered not as citizenship rights, as they were for men, but as charity, which allowed the “scope for bureaucratic discretion and ongoing moral regulation of women’s private lives in order to determine their eligibility for benefits. Within this two-tiered welfare state, men claimed entitlements by virtue of their public participation in the capitalist labour market, while women received discretionary assistance, contingent on proof of need, by virtue of their private roles within the family or deserving mothers”.³⁴ Based on this understanding, women were addressed as creatures of need, while men were addressed as workers. As will be seen later in this chapter, this could provide reasons as to why women, during the depression-era, wrote letters on their husband’s behalf. Women were somehow more used to the idea of public charity. Men were less accustomed to the notion of receiving charity and were likely to plead with Bennett to provide work for them or a loan, but not charity. These ideas were reinforced as Canada entered the depression: as we will now see, the work of Leonard Marsh continued these distinctions.

Moving forward into the 1930s it is indeed important to discuss the role that Leonard Marsh, a professor and social scientist, at McGill University played in the administration and implementation of Canadian social policy and the influence his approach to social problems from a macro-economic perspective. His work ensured that women continued to be treated as dependents.³⁵ His research and approach to unemployment during the depression-era had significant gender implications and contributed to how the government implemented its various

³⁴ Ibid. ‘Malestream’ welfare entitlements, developed for a mostly male, wage-earning labour force, tended to take the form of automatic, actuarially determined payments, delivered without stigma or moral supervision, to replace the lost component of the breadwinner’s wage. Women and children within such programs also received economic protection, but only as dependents of men.

³⁵ Allan Irving, “Canadian Fabians: the Work and Thought of Harry Cassidy and Leonard Marsh, 1930-1945”, in *Social Welfare Policy in Canada: Historical Readings*, Raymond Blake and Jeff Keshen, pp. 201-220, (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995), 201-03.

programs.³⁶ Leonard Marsh was a ‘new economist’ who tended to focus primarily on the ‘normal’ family, and viewed normal families as being comprised of a male breadwinner.³⁷ The ‘normal’ family was comprised of a man, wife, and two or three children, with the father fully being able to provide for them out of his own income. This standard presupposed no supplementary earnings from either the wife or young children and the wife would be a homemaker, rather than a wage earner.³⁸ If the social work profession, as we have seen earlier, had long focused on the religious and loosely cultural aspects of family life, in which the mother occupied the central role, the family was now viewed, by social scientists and by social workers, in entirely economic terms and thus was interpreted as a singularly male preserve.³⁹ The ‘abnormal’ family, headed by females, was not given much attention by Marsh as he failed to recognize women’s indirect contributions to the family economy through their purchasing power and their unpaid work, which often facilitated the ‘productive’ work of husbands. According to Nancy Christie, as “work became increasingly conceived as an exclusively male domain, women’s unpaid labour- and hence their entitlement to state assistance- vanished as a topic of public debate”.⁴⁰ Marsh’s scientific welfarism: “eviscerated women’s unpaid work from his categorization of a ‘recognized employment function’, and in doing so made the concept of the male breadwinner ideal the only concept on the table when the government formulated social policies”.⁴¹

³⁶ For a detailed discussion of welfare programs see chapter 2.

³⁷ Christie, 198. Marsh practiced an ‘objective’ social science which abjured the traditional casework studies most closely associated with the social work profession.

³⁸ Alice Kessler-Harris, “In the Nation’s Image: The Gendered Limits of Social Citizenship in the Depression Era”, *The Journal of American History* 86, No 3 (1999), 1271. The ‘abnormal’ family was viewed to be headed by a female.

³⁹ Christie, 198.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

Marsh had come to view the family as an extension of the workplace and an extension of the male personality.⁴² As a result, he held a distinct gendered perspective when it came to the implementation of social policies beyond our period, such as unemployment insurance and family allowances. Marsh considered married women outside the labour market to have social insurance coverage through their husbands: “for women who continued as wage-earners after marriage, he proposed certain modifications in social insurance coverage that would be different from men’s”.⁴³ Thus, he contributed to the notion that the husband was the primary breadwinner for the family and was responsible for its maintenance. He argued that different standards in unemployment insurance were justified for women because “she has other definite sources of support...her registration [for benefits] must be attested by strict interpretation of [her] genuine availability for employment”.⁴⁴ Marsh insisted that the government policies of the 1930s reinforce the social constructs within society, thus Marsh argued ‘it was only natural for women to be dependents within the family’ as work was the source of the male’s perception of self, and constituted the very core of family solidarity.⁴⁵ From the discussion that follows, it becomes evident that many women, before and during the thirties, believed in this idea that it was a man’s duty to provide for the family and it was ‘natural’ that they were to be ‘dependents within the family’.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Brigitte Kitchen, “The Marsh Report Revisited”, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21, no. 2 (1986), 41.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵ Christie, 198. For Marsh, he emphasized the economic welfare of the family, but failed to recognize women’s indirect contribution to the economy through their purchasing power and through their unpaid work, which facilitated the ‘productive’ work of husbands.

3.3 'We didn't work in those days' it was a matter of his pride: Women and how they viewed their husbands Pride and Work Ethic

The idea that a woman was to remain at home and have her husband provide for the family can be seen through several comments made by women interviewed by Denyse Baillargeon who reflected on their experiences as mothers and wives during the 1930s in Montreal. According to one respondent, "I worked for six years in my life because there was no question of going to work after you got married. Your husband would really tear his hair out! Oh no! It wasn't allowed in those days"⁴⁶ A second respondent echoed similar sentiments of the first; "when you got married in those days, there was no question of going on working. And for the married man it would have been a disgrace if his wife kept on working"⁴⁷ Both these informants highlight the notion that women were expected to remain at home while their husband provided for their family through the stability and security of a wage. If they held a job previously they would be expected to quit as 'there was no question of going to work after you got married'. For their husbands, women who continued to work after marriage would signify 'disgrace if his wife kept on working'. There was a genuine acknowledgement amongst married women that entering into the labour market and taking away jobs from husbands and fathers was not done at the time, as it challenged the cultural norms of Canadian society.

As we have seen in the first chapter, for men, supporting the family was a matter of pride. It was a reflection of their social status, "if they were supporting a woman at home it meant that they were adequately fulfilling their role as provider; additionally, it was proof that they did not

⁴⁶ Baillargeon, 56. It is interesting to reflect on how memory works and influences the ideas of the respondents. She recognizes how during the 1930s it 'wasn't allowed' to work, but is reflecting on her past with the influence of her environment at the present. During the time of her interview she realized women did work, that it was during the thirties that many did not work. It is interesting to think about would she have said it this way at the time?

⁴⁷ Ibid.

belong to the poorest of social classes".⁴⁸ This is intriguing because if a woman worked, then the family was seen to belong to the 'poorest social classes within society'. A woman working was a sign of disrespect for the male breadwinner and that the family would fall in social standing. However, as Joy Parr's *Gender of Breadwinners* indicates, there were 'woman's towns' when it came to waged labour.⁴⁹ There were female-headed families before and during the thirties, however, largely due to the method of our selection, none of our writers and interviewees do not highlight the female-headed families. Rather, women are presenting themselves as adhering to the gendered notion that they are mothers and wives and not workers. Maybe some of these women did work, at the time, but they do not present that in public because it would challenge the norms and affect their family's position within society. One is able to see how providing was a matter of respectability and pride for the working-class, which came to define their status through the characteristics of independence and autonomy. Two women informants of Baillargeon addressed the notion of pride that accompanied the male breadwinner status:

Married women weren't allowed to work in those days. My husband did not marry me for me to support him. And it was the same for my brothers-in-law. Nobody went to work- it just didn't happen in those days...No married woman worked...It wasn't done. Men had their pride. They didn't want their wives working.⁵⁰

I talked about it with my husband, but there was no question...One of us had to give in- I gave in instead. I would have liked to go on working, but I saw that his pride would have taken such a huge blow that I had to make a choice. People took a dim view to women working. It meant that the husband was not able to support his wife, that he wasn't able to earn enough money.⁵¹

From the above comments one can see that wives saw the value that accompanied waged labour for their husbands. These women acknowledged how 'men had their pride' and if women

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁵⁰ Baillargeon, 56.

⁵¹ Ibid.

worked their 'pride would have taken such a huge blow'. From these excerpts it is evident that many working-class women accepted that their economic dependence, the elevation of motherhood, and their social rights were founded on the fact that they were dependents of a responsible, earning husband.⁵² According to Nancy Christie, "working-class wives held...to the belief that the pre-eminent and natural function of women was the rearing of children and the management of the home. Working-class wives, especially those of skilled workers, likewise perceived that their respectability and economic independence flowed from their role as dependents of responsible, wage-earning husbands".⁵³ Many believed that women should support their husbands by returning to their natural sphere, the home, while their husbands were left with the opportunity to fill employment vacancies. As such, it can be seen that "very few women wished to contradict traditional gender roles by taking jobs when their husbands were unemployed".⁵⁴ These ideas of respect and independence can be a further reason as to why some women wrote letters to Bennett urging him to find work for their husbands. They did not desire going to work and risk losing the elements of respectability and independence that accompanied their role as caregiver to the children.

In two letters to Bennett, women comment on the need for employment for the male population. In a letter dated January 15th, 1934 Coleen Trehern of Toronto, Ontario stated "I do wish you would put into operation some form of work as I do not think that the present form of Direct Relief is beneficial. Men are becoming discouraged and lazy! Why not help keep their morale up? What is relief, anyhow, but charity?"⁵⁵ In another letter, Mrs. Louise Eollicott of Bronte, Ontario, also reflects on the need for work for the male population. In Mrs. Eollicott's

⁵² Christie, 158.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 208.

⁵⁵ Coleen Trehern, Toronto, Ontario, January 15th, 1934, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 67.

words: "I wonder why men who are self-respecting have to be subjected to such humiliation and embarrassment [when they have to sign up for relief] when they are only too willing to work if possible. It isn't only the men who suffer but the families of these men".⁵⁶

From these two letters and the above interviews, one is able to gain a sense that earning a wage and providing for one's family was not limited to male expectations. Rather women, during the thirties, also believed in the importance of work for married men. Mrs. Trehern suggests that male morale is strongly connected to work by emphasizing that direct relief is not 'beneficial' and that as a result, men are becoming 'discouraged and lazy'. As men could no longer perform their traditional function as primary breadwinners, there was a concern that these men would become idle. It was not an inner wish of these men to do nothing that leads to laziness, but the demoralization of being unemployed that created a sense of laziness and worthlessness. Mrs. Eollicott acknowledges that men are 'willing to work if possible' and that, by working, these men will retain a sense of 'self-respect'. Her comments 'it isn't only the men who suffer but the families of these men' are intriguing because here one can see that the breadwinner ideal is taken seriously. The idea of a family economy, as chapter one has indicated, comes to fruition here, as the job belongs to the entire family. It seems that when the husbands lose their jobs, the entire family loses the job. In essence, when we think unemployment, we often picture men, it might be better to think the entire family. And when women write to Bennett they are at some level suggesting to him 'we have lost our jobs' as well. As such, women are writing to Bennett and reminding him of the ideal. By being forced to turn to relief as a last alternative these men, according to these women, faced great 'humiliation and embarrassment'. Taking hand-outs, in the form of relief, was not something men were accustomed to. As the first chapter has indicated,

⁵⁶ Louise Eollicott, Bronte, Ontario, February 28th, 1935. Bennett Papers, M-1324. 400091.

before and during the 1930s men had marked their own steadiness and dependability, which were traits of personal, manly character, by the regularity of their waged employment.⁵⁷

Another interesting aspect in regards to women recognizing the pride that men had in providing for their families, is that some women wrote to Bennett for assistance, but did not want their letters to be known to their husbands. In a letter dated June 1935, Mrs. John Nilson makes her intentions known to the prime minister; in her words, “No doubt you will be surprised to receive this letter. I have been advised by a friend of your’s to write you. In doing so I am asking you to Please not let this be known Public as my husband doesn’t like me to ask for help from any one”.⁵⁸ From this excerpt one is able to see how she has a sense of shame in writing to Bennett and asking for help. This can be seen through her plea ‘not let this be known Public’. Also of significance are her comments about her husband when she indicates that he ‘doesn’t like me to ask for help from any one’. One can gain a sense that Mrs. Nilson is attempting to protect her husband’s respectability by asking Bennett to keep her letter private. Not letting the public know the circumstances many families faced was important for many Canadians, as admitting you needed assistance was often interpreted as a sign of personal failure and as the first chapter has discussed, this personal failure was interpreted to reside with the male breadwinner.

In another letter to the Prime Minister, Mrs. Frank McGibney, of Welwyn, Saskatchewan states:“this is the first time in my life I have asked anyone for help...I have heard of so many kind acts you have done. I thought I would ask you if you would send me what money you could spare. I am not letting anyone know I am asking for your help”⁵⁹ Mrs. McGibney, like Mrs. Nilson, does not want it to become public knowledge that she needs some assistance in order for her family to survive. Wanting to keep one’s situation private would seem to suggest that having

⁵⁷ Parr, 203.

⁵⁸ Mrs. John Nilson, Grafton, Ontario, June 15th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398776.

⁵⁹ Mrs. Frank McGibney, Welwyn, Saskatchewan, July 9th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 399009.

it known publicly would be a ‘confession of failure’ for many families. One can see that these two women had an element of pride in their plea to Bennett for assistance. For these women there seems to be recognition that one’s pride was not strictly related to pleading for assistance: since it was the husband’s responsibility to provide, having the dire circumstances made public knowledge would fall back onto the husband and thus be an interpretation of failure on the husband’s behalf. One is able to see that women were actively involved in both ensuring their families were looked after during the depression-era, and that their husbands pride and respectability were maintained by keeping letters private.

By ensuring the respectability of their husbands through keeping their letters private, women were active agents in the Canadian household during the 1930s. It is now necessary to closely examine the role that women played within the household by interrogating further the actions women took in maintaining the breadwinner ideal. Do the letters and memoirs indicate that these women were conforming to what the secondary literature says about a woman’s ‘role’ being within the household, and to what extent did the depression changed their actions and values?

3.4 Turning a Dime into a Dollar: Women and Household Management in the 1930s

Women as wives and mothers played a significant role in the management of the household during the depression-era as they had done previously. The economic hardships of the thirties provided many women with an opportunity to “flex their true physical and mental strengths, and many proved that when faced with seemingly impossible situations, women are more than equal to the challenge”.⁶⁰ Women played a vital role in the management and sustainability of the household, from managing the finances to creating their own source of

⁶⁰ Elizabeth St. Jacques, *Survivors: The Great Depression 1929-1939*, (Sault Ste. Marie, ON: Maplebud Press, 1991), 43.

income to compensate for their husband's unemployment; women did what they could to ensure their families had the basic necessities of life. According to one informant interviewed by Broadfoot,

I knew where every last cent of my money went, feeding a husband and three boys. My grocery bill for the month, if it was over \$10 I was just sick. I can tell you what my grocery bill was, every month, since we've been married. I've got it down, and I know that in the Thirties if my grocery bill was over \$10 I was sick...Ten dollars, that was the top, and my husband, my kids, they never starved.⁶¹

This management of the household finances was common for many women, and according to Denyse Baillargeon, "it was most often the wife who had the responsibility of administering the family budget".⁶² There seems to be a tone of pride taken from this woman in her ability to manage the grocery bill in her family, as she 'can tell you what my grocery bill was, every month, since we've been married'. Food was an extremely important item in the household budget and in order to avoid heavy burdens on the budget, women often had to be clever when it came to buying and preparing food. Nourishing the family, especially the children, was never an issue and food was never lacking, as this woman draws one's attention to the fact that 'my husband, my kids, they never starved'. This indicates that nourishing the family was a constant worry for many women.⁶³ She also 'knew where every last cent of my money went'; indicating that she was in control of the little income the family did receive. Women did not earn a wage during the thirties, but by stretching the little income the family did have allowed them to upkeep the breadwinner ideal. If they did work, then the ideal would not have been able to continue and would have broken down.

This ability to stretch the family's income in order to keep food on the table was an important aspect in the lives of many women. But, this capacity to ensure the proper nourishment

⁶¹ Broadfoot, 305.

⁶² Baillargeon, 102.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 108.

for a family becomes of more importance when one looks at how relief was administered in relation to the food allowances granted to families. The allowances for food followed a standard scale depending on the number in the family; thus a family of five, comprised of one parent and four young children normally received exactly the same allowance for food as the family of two parents and three adult dependent children.⁶⁴ That created an issue with families who had more members than what the standard scale dictated the food allowance to be. Thus, a family with more members was not compensated for as the needs of larger families were treated as being equal to a family of five or less. It then becomes important that whoever controls the family budget be able to take what little income they do possess and make certain that they can get the most food and fuel for the fewest dollars.

The primary concern for a majority of relief offices had to do with supplying the most destitute families with food and fuel. The importance placed on food and fuel in the municipal programs can be indicated by the following statistics taken from Cassidy's report during the early stages of the depression. In Ottawa relief expenditures for seven months in 1931 totalled \$137, 404, of that total \$108, 407 was spent on food and \$22, 786 was spent on fuel.⁶⁵ In Hamilton, Ontario \$396, 845 was spent on relief, and of that \$321, 829 was designated for food costs and \$47, 784 was used for fuel.⁶⁶ The food and fuel allowances were designed to provide for the bare necessities of life and no more. The scale of food relief varied a great deal from place to place. In a majority of cities orders for foodstuffs were issued weekly; food orders for a family of five varied from \$3.50 to \$8.50 weekly.⁶⁷ However, in most municipalities it appears that no attempt was made to determine scientifically the least amount of food and the smallest

⁶⁴ Mary Mackinnon, "Relief not Insurance: Canadian Unemployment Relief in the 1930s", *Explorations in Economic History* 27 (1990), 54.

⁶⁵ Cassidy, 181.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

possible order necessary to maintain a family's health. The food order sizes were determined by the municipal relief councils on an arbitrary basis, a basis which they considered reasonable.⁶⁸ It therefore became paramount that these women who were in control of their family's resources do whatever they could to nourish their families.

Denyse Baillargeon argues that "in fact, making ends meet without complaining about having too little money seemed to be a mark of a good homemaker and good wife".⁶⁹ By having the wife maintain the financial responsibilities of the household, she could be seen to have been fulfilling her role as a 'responsible mother, wife, daughter or sister; through her services to the family', as the beginning of the chapter has indicated as being what defined a good wife and mother. The ability to successfully manage their families' resources also served a dual purpose: "on the one hand, it was a way of showing that their housekeeping and managerial skills were advanced enough to compensate for a lack of income; on the other, by being undemanding the women also avoided placing their husbands' breadwinning capabilities into question, thus preserving their dignity".⁷⁰ From this we are able to see that women's financial management skills allowed for their families to survive a lot longer, on a lot less, while ensuring that her husband's dignity was maintained by not constantly bombarding him with questions about his income.

The women mentioned in the above two sections seem to adhere to the idea that their primary responsibility was to care for the family. They prided themselves on their ability to manage the home of their husbands and children and that "domestic work...in the sense...is as essential to the maintenance and reproduction of the economic and social organization as is the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 184. Food orders in numerous cities were not large enough to maintain the recipient's health, even assuming that all of them spent and used their allowances in the most economical manner. Public relief was nowhere large enough to provide the full costs of maintenance for dependent families.

⁶⁹ Baillargeon, 105.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

production of goods and services".⁷¹ Whether it was writing to Bennett and stressing the importance of paid labour for their husbands, or wanting their letters to remain private, to protect their husbands dignity and pride, or managing the family resources, a great number of working-class women accepted the notion of separate spheres and believed that their economic independence, the elevation of motherhood, and their social rights were founded on the fact that they were dependents of a responsible, earning husband most married working-class. Women did not earn a wage during this time, and through their abilities to stretch the little income the family did receive, they were maintaining the breadwinner ideal.

The recognition of the breadwinner ideal and the pride that it brought to many men was something that was not just realized by women during the 1930s. Many children within these families also identified with the pride that waged-labour brought to their fathers. Thus it becomes important to explore how sons and daughters reacted to the problems of unemployment and the impact that it had on their fathers.

3.5 Children and their Fathers: How children experienced the circumstances of the 1930s

Children who experienced the hardships offer another point of insight into the effects that unemployment had on many fathers during the 1930s. Many later testimonies of people who were young during the depression speak of the difficult times their fathers faced. The language they use to recount their childhood is interesting because they seem to recognize how their father's identity was defined by their earning status. When unemployment became a reality for their fathers, these children highlight the shame and humiliation they felt. One informant interviewed by Broadfoot, years after the depression, reflects on a time when he was asked to go to the grocery store, vouchers in hand, and get the necessary groceries:

⁷¹ Nett, 9.

The winter I was 14, that was my year, the time it was my turn to get the supplies. We were on relief, the dole you see, and they gave out tickets, the vouchers, and you took them to the grocery store, the one they told you to go to and you gave them the vouchers and they gave you what you were supposed to get. And so once a week I would get up about six in the morning and get the empty kerosene can for the molasses and it was my job to go to the store in the village. You must remember, for proud people- and my mother was proud but my father was the proudest man I know, I will *ever* know-the relief was the most terrible thing. It was truly the end of everything. It was, truly. This was instilled in me. I would take the cans, both of them, and the vouchers and I would go out, and this would be in the winter at that time and it was pitch black, but I would still take the back alleys and pray to God that nobody would see me because if they saw me taking the two cans to the store people would know. It was shameful. Yes, the store opened about 6.30 (sic) in those days and stayed open late....Once I made it safely to the store I was all right because they knew we were on relief so it didn't matter, and they delivered to the houses so nobody would know. It was a shameful thing.⁷²

From this reflection one can see how this child was made aware of how 'proud' his own family was. For him, 'my father was the proudest man I know, I will ever know- the relief was the most terrible thing', which illustrates that there was a shared feeling of shame between child and father. This informant was accustomed to having his father provide for the family and to turn to the humiliation of relief was 'the most terrible thing'. This child also viewed government aid in a similar light as it was 'instilled into me' as being 'truly the end of everything. It was, truly'. This illustrates that children shared early the belief in the breadwinner ideal and that earning a wage for a family "signified more than the obvious material provision that 'breadwinning' allowed, and more than the concept of masculine prerogative that it upheld. It also signified real fatherly devotion, paternal protection from neglect, harm and danger, the cruel realities that men had to confront".⁷³ The following highlights the pride that his father took in providing for his family and on his way to the relief office 'I would take the back alleys and pray to God that nobody would see me because if they saw me taking the two cans to the store people would know. It was shameful'. The relief process was 'shameful' and many did whatever they could to not have the

⁷² Broadfoot, 159. Emphasis original

⁷³ Comacchio, "Bringing Up Father", 295.

neighbourhood know that they were on relief. Being on relief ‘was a shameful thing’ for many men and this was a sentiment shared by their children. The humiliation, in this case, was shared by the son.

Another example of children’s views of the pride that men felt in their earning abilities can be seen from the following excerpt in which the speaker recounts when his uncle came to visit and his father was out of work. In his words,

My Dad’s brother, my uncle, and his wife visited us in Calgary one summer for four weeks, driving from Kitchener. Dad was out of work and accountants were a dime a dozen. When my uncle and wife were at our house my Dad would get up every morning, have breakfast, leave the house and come home at 5:30 at night. He’d spend the day in the public library or walk in the park or do something, but there was no way he was going to let that brother of his know he was out of work. I don’t blame him one little bit.⁷⁴

This child’s father would go so far as to present the illusion of having a job by going through the daily routine of leaving for work and returning in the evening. He would ‘get up every morning, have breakfast, leave the house and come home at 5:30 at night’. The sense of shame that his father felt can be seen through the child’s statement ‘there was no way he was going to let that brother know he was out of work’, which indicates that children of the thirties were conscious of the importance of the breadwinner ideal within society and of the associated fact that this period was a trying time for many fathers. It was the duty of the father to shape and influence the character of their children through teaching and example.⁷⁵ In this case, the father was setting the example of a strong work ethic through his insistence that he continue the routine of work on a daily basis, despite being unemployed. There was immense pressure placed on these men to provide and men whose self-identity hinged on their provider status experienced unemployment

⁷⁴ Broadfoot, 169.

⁷⁵ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 23.

and public assistance as personal failure and dishonour, something their children were often made aware of.⁷⁶

The negativity surrounding relief was something that Arthur Witt and his two other siblings felt when they learned their family was on relief. In fact, they actually insisted that their parents get off the dole. In Witt's words, "our parents then got it [relief] for two months. When we three children found out, we begged that they cut it off because of the stigma it gave us at school".⁷⁷ This illustrates that the shame of being on the dole was something that the entire family experienced. In this particular case, Arthur Witt and his siblings did not want to experience the 'stigma' it gave them 'at school'. Doug Harvey reflects on his father who was once a manufacturer of wicker furniture until the depression hit and how he did not realize, for many years, that his father was part of the program that paid out-of-work men two dollars a day to sweep the streets. In Mr. Harvey's words, "I remember so vividly seeing my father one day with his push broom in the gutter. I ran up yelling to him. He wouldn't answer, wouldn't even look at me. It took me years to understand".⁷⁸ One can see that Mr. Harvey's father was ashamed of the fact that he was partaking in the program as he 'wouldn't answer, wouldn't even look' at his son. As these testimonies demonstrate, these men took great pride in their earning ability and their children also came to realize that their fathers identified with the stability and security that a wage brought to the family.

As the first chapter has established, breadwinning was more than providing the material provisions for a family, it also signified 'real fatherly devotion, paternal protection from neglect, and harm and danger'. The below reflection highlights the dedication that one particular father

⁷⁶ Comacchio, "Bringing Up Father", 294.

⁷⁷ Robert Collins, *You Had to Be There: An Intimate Portrait of the Generation that Survived the Depression, Won the War, and Re-Invented Canada*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1997), 28.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

had, which transcended the parameters of earning a wage. There is an element of ‘real fatherly devotion’ towards their children, which was an extension of the breadwinner ideal. One is able to see a more caring and nurturing fatherhood, while simultaneously, still adhering to the breadwinner ideal of protecting and providing for one’s family. In a daughters words,

I was getting married at 19, and my father said I’d be married in white. It meant a lot to him, a great deal, and I can remember one Saturday that man packing up his Encyclopedia Britannica, the whole set, which cost him a lot of money several years before, he was proud of that set, and he said he was going to take it down to a second hand store on Notre Dame. Then at the last minute he went back in the house and he came out with his golf bag and clubs over his shoulder, and he looked at my mother and said ‘just in case’. For the set of books and the golf clubs- and he loved to play golf before hard times hit- he got \$4. Just \$4, and maybe that was good. I don’t know. It was just enough to get the material for my dress, and my mom and I made it, and it was lovely, but there was a lot of heartbreak in that dress. He never did get the books back because there never was enough money to redeem the books. Or the golf clubs either.⁷⁹

This account from a daughter highlights the idea that fathers during the thirties often went beyond their earner status and had a more nurturing and caring side when it came to their children’s well-being and happiness. In this case the father sold his encyclopedia collection and golf clubs so that his daughter could get married in a white dress. According to the informant, both the encyclopedia’s and clubs ‘meant a lot to him a great deal’ so he sacrificed items in which he ‘was very proud and cost him a lot of money’. One can gain a sense that the father still felt the need to provide for his family, in this case his daughter, by selling his own possessions in order to have enough money to purchase the material needed to create the dress. The daughter, years later, recognizes her father’s devotion and comments on how ‘there was a lot of heartbreak in that dress’. This father, in particular, demonstrates that men’s credibility within society was not solely grounded in their ability to provide, but “rested as well in their demonstrated

⁷⁹ Broadfoot, 170.

responsibility as family men”.⁸⁰ This tenderness and outward display of affection towards his daughter was something that was common for many men, dating back to the mid-Victorian era.⁸¹ This father made a sacrifice when it came to something he enjoyed doing, reading and playing golf, as the informant recalls, ‘for the set of books and the golf clubs- and he loved to play gold before hard times hit- he got \$4. Just \$4 and maybe that was good. I don’t know’. And from the above-mentioned account, one is able to see that some fathers, even during times of destitution which brought about a challenge to their identities, tried to ensure the happiness and well-being of their families.

This devotion to one’s family is significant and will comprise the last section to this chapter. Thus far the discussion has centred on exploring how wives and children viewed their fathers and husbands during the time of despair, now it become necessary to comment, through the aid of letters and testimonies, on how these men viewed their families. It is important to examine the manner in which these men interpreted their familial responsibility and highlight how they placed a great onus of responsibility onto their shoulders.

3.6 Fathers and their family: The importance that both men and society placed on the well-being of children

As the previous two chapters have highlighted, men were relied upon heavily by their families, which in turn placed a great onus of responsibility upon them. What is of interest is the manner in which these men speak about their families and how there is a constant mention of wives and children. According to Richard O’Hearn of Southwark, Alberta writing in May 1931,

⁸⁰ Parr, 188.

⁸¹ John Tosh, “Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The Case of Early to Mid-Victorian England”, *Gender and History* 8, No. 1 (1996), 57-58. Tosh suggests that because most girls were intended for a lifetime of dependence in the domestic sphere, there was less reason for the father to impose constraint or distance on a daughter.

“I am a married man, with three children aged 8, 5 and 5 respectively, dependent upon me”.⁸² In a letter dated March 3rd 1934, Mr. P.R. Mulligan of Debden Saskatchewan draws attention to his children at home. In Mr. Mulligan’s words, “I have 8 children ranging from 4 years to 14 years”.⁸³ Lester Sturgeon of Carvel Alberta is a father of “six children ages from 15 to 7. Four of which are boys...all I can do is to get something to eat for my wife and children. I don’t mind myself so bad that children I am thinking most of now. I dont know how I am going to get cloth for them”.⁸⁴ These examples demonstrate how men recognized the importance that finding work and providing had on their families. The letter writers do not mind themselves suffering, but it is the ‘children I am thinking most of now’. There is an awareness of how the needs and well-being of their own families surpassed any needs and wants of their own. These men seem to be aware of the sacrifices needed in order to ensure their families are provided for and they are consciously making that sacrifice. These men constantly make a point to comment about wife and children they have at home.

One possible interpretation as to why men constantly made reference to their families in these letters may relate back to the manner in which these men and the values of the breadwinner were understood within Canadian society. The intrinsic value of the male breadwinner was an ideal that was echoed by all, and in this case in the various Canadian state policies. As chapter two has demonstrated Bennett, before and during his term in office, favoured relief policies that encouraged employment for males and welfare support for ‘dependent women’. This tendency to encourage employment can be seen to have taken shape around the various relief works projects that were created in the early parts of the depression. Relief works programs were targeted towards the male breadwinner and the eradication of male idleness, as it was believed that idle

⁸² Richard O’Hearn of Southwark, Alberta, May 1931, Grayson and Bliss, 11.

⁸³ Ibid., 77. Mr. P.R. Mulligan, Debden Saskatchewan, March 3rd, 1934.

⁸⁴ Lester Sturgeon, Carvel Alberta, March 30th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1323, 398499.

men “should be compelled by law to work and a man who will remain at home and allow his wife to work and support his family should not be allowed to live”.⁸⁵ Thus, policies were targeted towards married men. Bennett defined men by their families and the dependents they had at home.⁸⁶ It is not surprising, then, that these men refer to their families. The common concern with family, children in particular, amongst writers and the recipient is another intriguing aspect that can be taken from these letters. Fathers were not the only ones who demonstrated a great concern for their children and wives, the state had a considerable interest in maintaining the well-being of children and wives of the Canadian poor.

The concern for the welfare of children can finally be seen through the government’s unwillingness to allow family members, wives and children in particular, to suffer from what they perceived as a husband’s unwillingness to work. In some places throughout the country it was presumed that one of the major tests to determine one’s eligibility for direct relief was the recipient’s willingness to work. This was referred to as ‘working out relief’. All able-bodied men on direct relief were put to work cleaning school grounds and parks or doing other jobs for the city and were credited with 40 cents per hour towards their relief allowances.⁸⁷ This ‘working out relief’ did not differ a very great deal from ‘relief work’ in most of the municipalities where it was tried. However, the chief distinction lay in this, those who were working out relief got orders for goods in advance on the basis of their needs and worked afterwards; while those on relief

⁸⁵ NAC, Kelso Papers, Vol. 4, ‘Charity and Charity Organization’, untitled extract, n.d taken from Christie, *Engendering the State*, 119.

⁸⁶ This favouring of married men and their dependents can not only be seen in the various policies, but in the treatment of single men and how there was a lack of assistance for these men. Single men were not given the same opportunities to survive as married men were. For a detailed discussion on the treatment of single men, see for example, Laurel MacDowell, “Canada’s ‘Gulag’: Project 51 Lac Seul (A Tale from the Great Depression), *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, (1994): 130-153, Laurel MacDowell, “Relief Camp Workers in Ontario during the Great Depression of the 1930s” *The Canadian Historical Review* 26, no 2 (1995): 205-228, John Manley, “Starve, Be Damned! Communists and Canada’s Urban Unemployed, 1929-39”, *The Canadian Historical Review* 79, no 3 (September 1998): 466-491.

⁸⁷ Cassidy, 176.

works were employed for a few days first and then were paid a ‘wage’.⁸⁸ In a majority of cities it was believed that no one should receive relief if they were not willing to work. However, it was often difficult to enforce this principle because “relief cannot be very well refused [to] a man who avoids work because this may lead to severe distress for his wife and children; and there are very few relief officers who in practice are willing to permit the sins of the father to be visited upon the innocent members of his family”.⁸⁹ Administrators viewed the wives and children of these men as being totally dependent upon the support of the male provider. Many married men who applied for the dole were not rejected based on the premise that their dependents would suffer the consequences. This attitude of not allowing the dependents to suffer at the hands of the father is important to note as this dissertation moves forward to the final chapter. The policy of not rejecting fathers on the premise that it would create ‘severe distress for his wife and children’ challenged the very nature of the breadwinner ideal. As will be seen in chapter four in order to ensure that there was no distress, welfare policymakers were willing, in some circumstances, to allow women’s work as a way to support the family in order to ensure that young male children would learn the social value of working for higher wages in order to responsibly support their dependents.⁹⁰

Conclusion

This chapter explored the role that religion played in creating the characteristics that came to define women, as dependents and mothers. Women fulfilled their roles through their responsibilities as a mother, wife, daughter or sister; through her services to the family. The Canadian government adopted the ideals of dependency and motherhood when they introduced the *Canadian Patriotic Fund* and how it encouraged and rewarded mothers for their mothering

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁹⁰ Christie, 158. For a in-depth discussion see chapter 4.

abilities. The fund recognized the presence of the male breadwinner as being the basis in which society functioned as it ensured that once the male returned all support for the wife was to cease because it was presumed that family responsibility and security stemmed from the breadwinning husband. The fund encouraged women to remain as dependents and mothers, and moving into the depression, the work of Leonard Marsh gave a social scientific justification to feminine economic dependency. Marsh insisted that the government policies of the 1930s reinforce existing social constructs by arguing that 'it was only natural for women to be dependents within the family' as work was the source of the male's perception of self, and constituted the very core of family solidarity.

The ideal of women as dependents and mothers led to the question of whether women of the thirties recognized the inherent pride that earning a wage brought to their husbands. Based on the variety of sources examined here, it seems that women believed in the intrinsic value in men earning a wage and did whatever they could to ensure that their husbands pride and respectability were maintained as they progressed through the depression-era. Even when women took the opportunity to write to Bennett, they were sensitive to their husband's dignity and respect by insisting that work be provided for their husbands, and that their letters remain private. Women came to value their roles as mothers and dependents. Children also came to recognize the pride and dignity that waged-labour brought to their fathers. Whether it was sneaking down an alley way or not blaming their fathers for going through the routine of getting up for work when family came to visit, children came to acknowledge the pride that waged-labour brought their fathers and the humiliation that they felt when they came to the slow realization that work was not available.

Finally, this chapter examined how fathers viewed their families through their constant plea to provide for their wives and children's sakes. Fathers constantly made reference to their children and wives at home because that is how they were viewed within society, as being defined and rewarded for their dependents at home. The importance placed on children was something that was not limited to fathers themselves. Rather it was a reflection of societies' concern for children's well-being after the depression. More largely, the concern was part of the larger cultural ideals amongst the working-class of independence and autonomy.

The final chapter will address two significant areas; on the one hand it will examine the relationship between the men and women of the 1930s, and comment on their experiences with the Canadian government. The chapter will reflect on how letter writers viewed the role of government. Secondly, it is also important to explore the involvement of the Canadian government during the thirties from the perspective of the government itself and comment on the power they had over the destitute. It will explore the concerns the government had over the potential abuse of the relief system by recipients. It will then move to examine the use of letters to Bennett as a reminder to what had previously been promised to them and how the recipients were entitled to assistance. The threat of reform within Canada became a realization for many with the increased support of communist ideals and chapter four will comment on the risk of social unrest throughout the country. Finally, the chapter will discuss further the policy introduced in the last part of chapter three by speaking to the government's desire to ensure the viability of the breadwinner ideal, even if it meant having women enter into the realm of paid labour.

CHAPTER 4

MASCULINITY, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND POLITICS

I hope you will pardon me for writing to you but I feel that, as the head of our country you should be made acquainted with some of the things we of the poorer class are up against. Oh, I know you have all kinds of this stuff thrown at you but today I just have to unload... The people around this gritty hole are saying 'wait until the new government gets in'. Its all bosh. No party alone can change things much. My idea is that all must work together to accomplish much good. In trouble such as the country is labouring under now, the partyism should be forgotten for the good of all mankind.¹

Mrs. Eollicott's letter to the prime minister has very much of a political undertone. She thinks that it is her duty to ensure that 'as the head of our country [he] should be made acquainted with some things we of the poorer class are up against'. She also provides her understanding of what needs to be done in order to correct the difficulties that the country is facing: all, she writes 'must work together to accomplish much good'. And it is her reflection about government that will serve as the basis for this chapter. There is a dual purpose to this final chapter; on the one hand it will examine the experiences of men and women of the 1930s with the Canadian government. With the aid of letters and testimonies, this chapter will reflect especially on how members of society viewed the role of government and understood their place in politics. Secondly, it is important to explore the involvement of the Canadian government during the thirties from the perspective of the government itself and comment on the influence they had over the population. The government was able to exercise authority in areas such as overseeing the administration of relief, and through their concern with maintaining a working-class culture characterized by an independent and autonomous work-ethic.

This final chapter has four main sections; first it will address the concerns the Canadian government had with the potential abuse of the relief system by recipients. To do so, it will

¹ Mrs. Louise Eollicott, Bronte, Ontario February 28th 1935, Bennett Papers M-1324, 400091.

comment on the administration of relief through the constant surveillance and inspection of recipients, which demonstrated a form of distrust towards the unemployed and could be interpreted by men as public authorities questioning their ability to adequately provide the necessities for his family. As such, surveillance and inspection were challenging a man's providing nature, even if he was to provide by relying on public assistance. It is necessary to begin with this because it is likely to have been the main kind of relationship that public authorities had with married men. The second component to this chapter entails a discussion on the use of letters as a way for welfare recipients to remind Bennett and his officials of what he promised during his campaign that 'the right to work was the right of every man'. Also this section will examine how men used the language of entitlement as a mechanism to shield the humiliation that came with relying on public assistance. Historians have shown that it was the veterans from the First World War who led this insistence of welfare as a right to every Canadian citizen. A decrease in the ability of the municipalities and federal government to adequately provide for the nation's destitute led to an increased threat during the depression of social unrest amongst the populace. Thus, the third section of this chapter will use secondary literature to explore the manifestations of this social unrest and, comment on how the threat of revolutionary politics was not as appealing to the same people as those who wrote to Bennett. The chapter will conclude by commenting on the role the government played in maintaining a working-class culture of independence and autonomy, which paradoxically meant breaking the breadwinner ideal, in order to uphold the very ideal.

The ways by which masculine ideals fit into politics is important to this chapter and warrants a brief discussion. According to Alice Kessler-Harris's study of gender and citizenship in the depression-era, economic independence was deemed to be the single most important

criterion for democratic political participation.² As such, universal citizenship was predicated on the possibility of free and equal individuals associating together. This notion of citizenship relates to the ideals of men participating within the polity. For Kessler-Harris, men's relationship to work embodied "their capacity to exercise independent judgment and to command the respect required to participate in the polity. Early-nineteenth-century skilled workers like their brothers a century later, believed not only that paid labour would provide a putative independence but that it would lead the way to the relative self-sufficiency that constituted the essence of untrammelled political participation".³ The nineteenth century concept of free labour embodied a conception of male prerogatives rooted in an ordered and comfortable family life that relied on female labour at home, in the twentieth century, the idea of a male-headed family still regulated a wide array of political and economic alternatives including education, jobs, and ultimately individual self-sufficiency.⁴

4.1 The Politics of Surveillance: The Administration of Relief as a Challenge to a Man's Ability to Provide

As the second chapter has outlined, the reliance upon direct relief was often a humiliating experience for men and their families. The process of administering and ensuring the eligibility of applicants proved to be strenuous and highly regulated. The fact that many had to endure it, in order to qualify for direct relief, contributed to the negative connotation surrounding the 'dole'.⁵ There was the process of investigation of the applicants to "determine their need for assistance... [and] after a new applicant made his claim for assistance an investigator was generally sent to his home to check-up on the information he supplied. In some instances, it was required for the man

² Alice Kessler-Harris, "In the Nation's Image: The Gendered Limits of Social Citizenship in the Depression Era", *The Journal of American History* 86, No 3 (1999), 1258.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ It is important to note that this regulation of the poor was not a new system, but that by the depression much more citizens had to face it, especially after 1932, with the impossibility of being part of relief works projects.

of the family should appear weekly for his relief orders and this was accepted as a test of his continued unemployment".⁶ The need to uphold a 'clean living' standard for those receiving relief was necessary; recipients were cut off relief if caught drinking or gambling. Recipients often had to turn in their liquor permits to the relief offices and a number of offices consulted files of the Liquor Control Board frequently to make sure that none of their clients retained liquor permits.⁷

This need to uphold a clean standard of living in order to qualify for relief, and then maintain a clean lifestyle is noteworthy when one looks at the role that taverns, clubs, and bars played in the development and continuation of a masculine identity. According to Josh Tosh's reflection on nineteenth century masculinity in Britain, integral to promoting a man's identity was the homo-social environment of places such as taverns and bars, often places that had little to nothing to do with places of work.⁸ These all-male places of gathering embodied men's privileged access to the public sphere, while simultaneously reinforcing women's confinement to household and neighbourhood.⁹ Places such as these "oiled the wheels of friendship, politics, and leisure (as well as business)".¹⁰ The insistence that relief recipients withdraw from this leisure activity can be seen a form of distrust on the part of administrators towards the male breadwinner and that they would spend their assistance indulging in guilty pleasures instead of providing for their families. As such this can be interpreted as an attempt by relief administrators to remove an element which actively contributed to a man's sense of self.

⁶ H.M. Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929-1932*, (Toronto: J. M Dent & Sons Ltd., 1932), 173. In some municipalities a daily check-in with the local office was required.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸ John Tosh, "What should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain", *History Workshop Journal* 38, (1994), 186.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Another attempt was made to ensure that those on relief did not drive their motor cars, if they owned any. According to Cassidy, “in a few places, men were required to sell their cars before they might obtain assistance, but generally the regulation required only that they turn in their license plates or drivers’ permits”.¹¹ In light of this, a man’s mobility into the public domain can be seen to be hindered and reduced. The autonomy that came from driving a car can be seen to have been curtailed. As previous chapters have outlined, a sense of autonomy was a key component to a man’s masculinity, and with the need to turn in license plates, the ability to be autonomous was challenged. These spotting of abuses and regulation of the poor relates back to the negative ideas surrounding the poor, which the beginning of chapter two has outlined as being influenced by the ideas of the poor laws in Britain. It is interesting to reflect on how the letters used for the purposes of this dissertation do not echo what Cassidy is saying about the drinking and gambling culture. These people who are writing in, both women and men, are not engaged in, or at least are not reflecting, a culture of ‘drinking or gambling’.

Attempts to ensure recipients were maintaining a ‘clean living’ standard also meant that information was obtained from neighbours, from former employers, from clergymen and from other persons.¹² Neighbours regularly reported both real and imagined infractions of the relief rules and anyone who refused a job offer also ran the risk of being reported by employers.¹³ What is of interest is the discussion regarding the active involvement of neighbours in trying to report to the local relief administrators neighbours who did not observe the rules when it came to relying on public assistance. In the letters and testimonies used for this study, no author ever spoke of reporting abuse of the system themselves. Moreover, there was no concern that

¹¹ Cassidy, 175.

¹² Ibid., 173.

¹³ Mary Mackinnon, “Relief Not Insurance: Canadian Unemployment Relief in the 1930s”, *Explorations in Economic History* 27, (1990), 51-52. Offenders were sometimes let off with a warning, or made to repay part of their relief, and some were cut off welfare and in some cases prosecuted and imprisoned.

neighbours were involved in frivolous activity or abuse of the dole, such as drinking and gambling. Thus there does not seem to have been a snitching culture amongst letter writers. According to Baillargeon's study, it appears that people were not close to their neighbours, rather as one informant told Baillargeon, "I didn't bother with the neighbours. I stayed home in peace and did my work... Anyway, the way I look at it, our money problems, what's going on in our life, are our business. Other people don't have to know about them".¹⁴ It might be that the economic hardships of the depression fostered a sense of isolation amongst the population. These men and women were more concerned with trying to get the necessary assistance for their families than to report the misdoings of fellow neighbours.

There was an attitude of keeping private lives private, in order to camouflage problems and poverty. According to one of Baillargeon's interviewees, when it came to poverty, "nobody knew. Everybody kept everything hidden in those days".¹⁵ Being impoverished was hidden as much as possible, as it was "seen as shameful and synonymous with failure, and the attempt was made to project an image of an economically independent family".¹⁶ As such, this failure would have ultimately been a reflection upon the male breadwinner and his inability to provide and secure his family's independence and autonomy. There seemed to have been 'not interference, but indifference' when it came to defining good neighbourly relations during the 1930s.¹⁷ This is significant and relates back to the discussion in chapter three about how interviewees and letter writers did not engage in work so as to maintain the pride and respectability of their husbands. Remaining isolated was a way to keep the shame of the male breadwinner from the public which

¹⁴ Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, Trans by Yvonne Klein, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 160.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 161.

illustrates that by remaining private, in order to keep respectability and autonomy, there was a catering to the values surrounding the male breadwinner.

If the regulation of the country's poor, brought about by the depression, increased the control by the public authorities in order to eliminate abuses and misuse of the system and if this administration of the destitute can be seen as a sign of distrust on behalf of the authorities over the unemployed, then one can view the writing of letters as a way for the people to bridge the gap of distrust and build trust with Bennett and other authorities. One means evoked to build such trust can be seen through the constant mention of their families by the authors of letters. Chapter three has already suggested that many men reflected on their families at home because that is how they were defined within Canadian society and how they saw themselves. The reference to one's family could therefore demonstrate to Bennett, they hoped, that these men could in fact be trusted when it came to administering relief.

Indeed, as Joy Parr has shown, a man's credibility within the community was not "grounded in their maleness per se, not in their market allegiances alone, but rested as well in their demonstrated responsibility as family men".¹⁸ This 'responsibility as family men' was often reflected in masculine entitlements to public office. For Parr, from the early 1920s there were "always members of the municipal council elected to represent the working man's interest. These councilors were family men".¹⁹ These men recognized that their respectability went beyond the parameters of wage earner, and securing their family's well-being demonstrated 'responsibility' and a form of credibility. Thus, these men drew Bennett's attention to their familial responsibility, as an attempt to demonstrate their trustworthiness and a way to bridge the gap of

¹⁸ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 187-88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188. This municipal election of married councilors was influenced by the union interests as residents wanted their municipal politics to resemble social fathering. The union leaders, in places like Hanover Ontario were not typically single men, but family men. In this light, definitions of manhood were integrated into public politics.

suspicion. As the above section has demonstrated, the use of letters to the prime minister can be seen as a method for trying to ensure to both Bennett and relief administrators alike, that the poor could be trusted. There is another fascinating political aspect to the use of letters, which serves as the basis of the next section; the use of letters as a reminder to Bennett of the promises of a ‘right to work’ for those men most affected.

4.2 ‘We have a Right to Work’: Letters as a Reminder and An Inherent Sense of Entitlement

Prime Minister Bennett had come to view unemployment as being a national problem since his election campaign against Mackenzie King in the summer of 1930, and since it assumed national proportions, “it was the duty of [his] party to see that employment is provided for those people who are able to work”.²⁰ Since June 1930, Bennett had made it clear to unemployed Canadians that his promise was jobs, not relief, “an opportunity [for the unemployed] to toil with their muscles that their families may live...I will not permit this country...to ever become committed to the dole system”.²¹ The language used by Bennett, particularly the notion of toiling with one’s ‘muscles’ speaks to the physical aspect of masculinity, which has been identified in chapter one as being one measure of a man’s identity. There was an undertone of support, by Bennett, of appealing to the working-class cultural imperative of the individual’s male’s right to work and the notion of a traditional family wage. What is also captivating is the idea that the federal government was to be active in the overseeing of the nation’s poor. But, as chapter two has indicated, by 1932 the Canadian government abandoned the relief works projects in favour of direct relief as an approach to dealing with the countries destitute. This renege on campaign promises of a right to work is interesting when one examines some of the letters that made their way to Bennett’s desk and how letter writers

²⁰ John Herd Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1985), 202.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

appealed to the prime minister for work. Many can be interpreted as reminding Bennett of what he had previously said about the right to work. The letter writers remind him that they are not against nor challenging him, rather they are a reminder of past promises.

Another theme which presents itself from letter writers is the idea that the government ought to help out those citizens that can no longer provide for themselves. In essence, the state should step in and protect those who cannot protect themselves. An example of this can be seen in a letter dated February 19th 1935, where a Mr. William E. Balford reflects on promises that Bennett had made to the nations unemployed. In Mr. Balford words,

Dear Sir, As I saw your advertisement in the paper where you said you would see no one hungry or cold. and I am asking your assistance, as I am both hungry and cold, and all in my care- and I have payed my taxes for over forty year so I think the Government aught to help me now. and it is up to you for to do it. If you would be kind enough to send me a Little Help- as there is no work or no Relief in this parish, and there are a lot in need. Of Help as well as me- so if you would be kind enough to help me and I will help you all I can- so I hope you won't turn this letter down but answer by return mail with good satisfaction.²²

Mr. Balford uses this letter to remind Bennett of promises he had made about helping those people most affected by the hardships of the 1930s. In this particular case, attention is drawn to an advertisement in a paper where Bennett said he 'would see no one hungry or cold'.²³ The letter writer recounts that he is in fact 'both hungry and cold' and therefore 'asking for your assistance'. There is also a compelling component in Mr. Balford's letter when he draws attention to 'no relief in this parish'. He presents an ideal of geography of entitlement, or in the words of John Taylor, he is highlighting a 'geography of need', which can be described as "the pattern made by the indigent, the needy, the unemployed, or other type of impoverished person.

²² *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 115. William Balford, Tanner Junction New Brunswick, February 19th, 1935.

²³ It is unclear to as to which paper he is referring to or the date in which it was published. This also leads to the question of where the working-class were gaining their knowledge and understanding of the political process during this time.

It asks where are the poor? Rather than who are the poor?"²⁴ Mr. Balford is locating the poor as residing within the municipalities. He reminds readers that the responsibility for the poor is at the municipal level; however when the municipalities are unable to adequately provide, then someone else needs to step-in and provide, in this case he is appealing to the federal government.²⁵

What is also of interest in this letter is the idea that the government ought to step-in and help this man if he cannot help himself not only because of past electoral promises, but also because Mr. Balford 'have payed my taxes for over forty years so I think the Government ought to help me now'. The sense of entitlement to receiving aid is rooted in the fact that the author had paid taxes to the state for over 'forty years'. This notion of entitlement based on paying taxes reflects the notion of masculinity in the sense that the breadwinners were paying the taxes to the municipalities. Since men were paying the taxes there was a sense of entitlement to support.

This idea of entitlement or a right to assistance presented itself within another unique context other than taxation; the notion that aid was a citizenship right related to service to one's country. This unique notion that men were entitled to government aid as a citizenship right associated with service to the nation is illustrated in a letter excerpt taken from Mr. F. Deane, a veteran, father of three of Toronto, Ontario. In Mr. Deane's words,

Frankly after nearly two years of nerve wracking struggle and privation, only to land in absolute destitution is it any wonder that one is desperate. Is it what we fought for [referring to his time as a soldier] that the man who will gladly sink education, experience, pride and everything else he values to work in any menial capacity at any return which will provide the necessities of life for his family, food, shelter and clothing, cannot, despite superhuman efforts, find even that consolation.²⁶

²⁴ John Taylor, "Sources of Political Conflict in the Thirties: Welfare Policy and a Geography of Need", in *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada*, ed by Allan Moscovitch and Jim Albert, (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1987), 144.

²⁵ The letters used in this study are echoing their concerns at a municipal level, but are appealing to Bennett, who represents the federal level. The question remains: would letters at the municipal level reflect similar themes or trends.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 F. Deane, Toronto, Ontario, June 24th 1932. For the full letter see chapter one, page 19.

Mr. Deane's plea to Bennett for work relates back to his time as a soldier during the First World War. During the 1930s, many war veterans were active in protesting that the government provide and grant access to jobs for themselves. According to Lara Campbell's study of First World War veterans from 1929-1939, by the 1930s "veterans were engaged in political protest against the effects of unemployment and government policy on ex-servicemen. This protest was crucial to the development of government support for broader ideas of economic and social security, and the idea that social welfare was a right associated with the benefits of full citizenship".²⁷ These veterans sought benefits on the basis of rights and entitlement which were "clothed in rights-based rhetoric to give them the legitimacy, and this discourse was expressed in the language of citizenship and contract. To have certain rights as a citizen (and in the 1930s many of these rights revolved around access to jobs and a living wage and to a lesser extent, proper support during times of unemployment) an individual had to fulfill certain duties and expectations of citizenship".²⁸ Citizens of Canada, most often veterans, who are men, used a language of entitlement to make demands to social rights such as economic security, the right to employment and a living wage, and a comfortable standard of living for their families. In this, the entitlement to government aid through a living wage and providing for their families was based on the grounds that they had earned that entitlement through their war service.²⁹ Since soldiers were men, citizenship was invoked based on fighting and military service.

²⁷ Lara Campbell, "We who have Wallowed in the mud of Flanders': First World War Veterans, Unemployment and the Development of Social Welfare in Canada, 1929-1939", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 11, no. 1 (2000), 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 127. The more one could identify oneself as a true citizen of Canada, the greater the degree of entitlement and economic benefits in a society where full participation in state and society was predicated on employment and economic independence, the highest form of citizenship was gendered masculine, since entitlement to jobs was firmly entrenched as a masculine right.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

As John Tosh points out, since the Victorian era, there was a connection made between manliness and empire, more specifically the appeal of imperialistic ideals. Empire was associated with freedom from domesticity, as chapter one has outlined, a realm that had been redefined along feminine characteristics. By the late nineteenth century, as men were becoming increasingly restive at the constraints of domesticity, the empire became an attraction as a male-only sphere in both popular literature and individual life stories.³⁰ The appeal of empire, according to Tosh “might be summed up by saying that it represented an unequivocal assertion of masculinity, a place where autonomy could be achieved without constant negotiation with the opposite sex”.³¹ When wartime sacrifice and duty to the empire was combined with the manly duties of supporting a family, assertions of the right to jobs created a powerful sense of entitlement among veterans. By the 1930s, waged-labour became both the centrepiece of national well-being, and a vital force in animating individual self-consciousness. As such, once employment came to be identified as the preeminent national goal, “the rights of the male breadwinner became the sole basis of citizenship and hence of all state welfare entitlements”.³² The idea of who was deemed a good citizen is important as one explores the idea of citizenship and masculinity.

According to Lara Campbell, to be deemed a ‘good’ Canadian citizen, one had to be “white, hardworking, respectable, married and raising a family. Good citizens, however, argued that in return for fulfilling these duties, the government had a reciprocal duty to support and maintain them, particularly in times of economic hardship”.³³ With this definition of what it

³⁰ John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914”, *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005), 8. The message was clear: the colonies stood for homosocial camaraderie, to be enjoyed in the imagination, or by going overseas.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³² Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 214.

³³ Campbell, 129.

meant to be a 'good' Canadian citizen in mind, one can see why many men and women in their letters to Bennett, referred to their work experience, the idea that they were hardworking and in many cases, raising a family. By mentioning some of these characteristics, they were, in a sense, demonstrating to Bennett that they were in fact 'good' citizens and as such, warranted assistance. In turn, those who were not deemed 'good' citizens were not entitled to such support.

Some letters reflect an attitude of disdain towards those who did not fit the mould of citizen and a concern that immigrants were taking away jobs from the 'good' citizens. In a letter dated February 22nd, an unnamed letter writer from Nanaimo, British Columbia, shows his animosity towards those immigrants, who he feels have taken away job opportunities for the remainder of the residents:

Dear Sir, before we are much older there is going to be trouble in Nanaimo & Cumberland owing to the foreigners having jobs while the men & boys are borne British subjects & who rightfully belong to these jobs have to go without jobs therefore they have to go without sufficient food & clothing, in Cumberland you have Japanese & Chinese working in & about the mines also other foreigners from other countrys who can neither read write or speak English...they hold the jobs which rightfully belong to us British although it is against the rule for these people to have jobs in the mines...I wish you could come yourself to the mines at Nanaimo & watch the amount of foreigners who are employed at these mines & then look at the number of British men & boys who go to these same mines every day begging for a job only to be turned away...I hope government will take a hand in this before it is too late.³⁴

There was much bitterness towards those 'foreigners from other countrys who can neither read write or speak English' and are taking away jobs that 'rightfully belong to us British'. This idea that only white, in this case, British subjects were entitled to assistance can be illustrated further by a letter from Charles Grierson, an electrical worker by trade, father of three, of Winnipeg Manitoba in January of 1934. In Mr. Grierson's words,

³⁴ Unnamed, Nanaimo British Columbia, February 22nd, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 18.

Dear Sir, I have been unemployed for nearly four years. I am a Canadian born subject and I am forced to believe that this is very detrimental in many ways. Recently there were several families whom were to be deported who were on Relief. In any other country these families *would have been deported* but our Government apparently wishes to continue to pay and pay for these families. Not only that they even go so far to assist them in receiving work. Something that I have almost forgotten what it is...I am married and have three children and it is because of them that I am striving to secure employment...we have been forced to exist on crusts four years too long. Have you tried it? It is very nourishing and very encouraging to tramp around in an endeavour to secure work. Some people like it but here's one that is disgusted to realize that because he is a Canadian by birth and has to stand for such Ballyhoo as is being shot around by our Government especially in upholding our laws regarding Immigration. Let this same family go into the States and see where they stop at. *They would be deported* regardless. But they get the break here in Canada. There are possibly 500,000 immigrants in Canada that are holding back the native of Canada from getting employment.³⁵

Again, reference is made to the fact that Mr. Grierson is a 'Canadian born subject' and there is much resentment towards those families that are able to receive relief in situations that would have resulted in many of them being 'deported'. He comments on how if these '500,000 immigrants' were living in the United States they would be 'deported regardless'.³⁶ It is in his opinion, that these immigrants are 'holding back the native of Canada from getting employment'.

A letter by Robert Jackson of Montreal Quebec continues this negative theme surrounding immigrants and the idea that they are not true citizens of Canada. In Mr. Jackson's words,

Dear Sir, Well I just left the relief office where I saw a Chinaman that couldnt read or write English or French apply for relief, that been in the Country since 1928. on previous occasion I saw Chines, Negros, and Greeks get relief checks, on July 2nd 1934 I applied for relief, but I havent realized any yet; altho my Grandfather and Grandmother settled here around 1835 my Father Mother and myself were born here, and I am destitute. Feed, Clothe, and Hose the foreign, while the natives starve and freeze is the slogan of our local politicians.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 68, Charles Grierson, Winnipeg Manitoba, January 26th, 1934. Italics original.

³⁶ The reference to the number of those immigrating to Canada seems to be exaggerated in order to get his point across. I have not come across any literature that has discussed or made reference to a large number of people immigrating to Canada during this time period.

³⁷ Ibid., 92. Robert Jackson Montreal Quebec, October 22nd, 1934.

The above mentioned letter writers took offense to the reality that non-British people were taking away jobs from the deserving Canadian 'subjects' who in their search for work, were 'begging for a job only to be turned away'. Mr. Jackson appeals to the fact that his family has been in Canada since '1835' and that both his parents and himself included 'were born here'. He feels that the government is favouring the foreign, while 'the natives starve and freeze'. This attitude regarding the treatment of immigrants was common for many Canadians during the depression-era. Identifying foreigners as outsiders or not 'good' citizens caused many municipalities to change the manner in which they provided relief for their residents. In Saskatchewan, for example, an influx of immigrants to the area of Saskatoon in April 1930, called for strict rules to be put in place when it came to the matter of trying to reduce the number of immigrants who could qualify for relief. According to Erik Strikwerda, "unless under very exceptional circumstances, only those who [were] at present time British subjects, either by birth or naturalization or those who have applied for naturalization papers [would] be employed".³⁸ This was a response taken by the municipality regarding the recent immigration of approximately five hundred to the city, as public outrage over the scarcity of jobs was becoming more apparent.³⁹

To sum up, one gains a sense that these letters served a dual purpose; first they served as a reminder to Bennett of the promises he made to every Canadian, that they had the 'right to a job' and that it had become the government's duty to provide for them in situations when they could no longer fulfill that mandate. As this section has shown, being a citizen meant contributing to the state through taxes, war service, and 'good' behaviour. Secondly, this duty was related to a sense of entitlement amongst the population based on their status as citizens of Canada. This sentiment also fostered a sentiment of hostility towards those who were not such

³⁸ Eric Strikwerda, "From Short-Term Emergency to Long-Term Crisis: Public Works Projects in Saskatoon, 1929-1932" *Prairie Forum* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001), 173.

³⁹ *Ibid.* Strikwerda takes this information from the *Star Phoenix* a Saskatoon newspaper dated July 10th, 1930.

good 'citizens' and as such, were taking jobs away from the Canadian born subjects. Coupled with this, hostility developed amongst the population as it became evident that both the federal and municipal governments were unable to adequately provide relief for those that needed it the most. As such, there was a threat of social unrest amongst the population, which was alarming for many government officials.

4.3 Social Unrest and the Threat of Reformism

As was discussed, Bennett had favoured work relief projects as a means to maintain the moral character of the unemployed; however, the switch to direct relief, in 1932, showed that the fear of killing the initiative or enterprise of working Canadians was a lesser fear than unbalanced budgets.⁴⁰ Under whatever form, work relief projects or direct relief, providing assistance to the public was becoming increasingly difficult for municipal governments. According to John Taylor's study of welfare policy at the municipal level during the 1930s, by the depression "most cities were in a fiscal squeeze in terms of sources of revenue. Relief of the large numbers of unemployed created by the depression imposed an expenditure crisis on top of the revenue one. More money was needed at exactly a time when relatively less was available".⁴¹ By 1934, a majority of cities were in serious financial difficulties, almost every device to reduce controllable expenses was tried; cut back work, wages and establishment, reduce or eliminate services, or dodge debt charges altogether. But the demands for relief overwhelmed every expedient and as such, "every major city in Canada was funding its relief, either directly through borrowing, or indirectly by suspending sinking fund payments".⁴² The problem for many cities was that due to

⁴⁰ Thompson, 218.

⁴¹ Taylor, 147.

⁴² Ibid., 149. A sinking fund is a method by which an organization sets aside money over time to retire its indebtedness. More specifically, it is a fund into which money can be deposited, so that over time its preferred stock, debentures or stocks can be retired. The amount invested in sinking fund can also be used for purchasing various assets.

the depression, there was a diminishing source of revenue that could be used to provide for the unemployed. This inability to fund relief at the municipal level led to the federal government stepping in to try and address the issue. As Bennett made clear, unemployment was a national problem and as such, it was his party's duty to assume some level of support.

However, there was a growing concern that the federal government did not possess the necessary resources to adequately provide for the destitute. As Bryan Palmer states "the Canadian federal government obviously could not play a role. Government revenues declined sharply during the 1930s as prices plummeted; costs for relief soared...credit no longer extendable, the government was unable to pay debt charges out of incoming revenue".⁴³ From a national level, the ability to care for the poor was becoming increasingly difficult, which led to dissent and uneasiness amongst the general population. The ability to provide for the nation's destitute was placing great strain on all levels of government. As chapter two has outlined, responsibility for the poor was a municipal responsibility; however, the inability to raise enough revenue to care for the unemployed was becoming apparent, thus making it a federal concern. With an increase in the unemployed and an inability to adequately provide for those affected, society began to voice its displeasures with the government.

Historians have shown how, through the aid of government documents, speeches, and personal memoirs during this time period, social unrest amongst the population was beginning to grow throughout the country as more people began to realize that Bennett and other government officials were unable to provide the basic necessities that they desired. Citizens began to challenge Bennett and his promises of a 'job for every man' in Canada as it became evident that employment was not attainable. As the letters have outlined in chapters one and two, it was

⁴³ Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), 243.

becoming apparent that employment was unattainable. In a letter dated January 28th 1934, an unnamed carpenter draws attention to the displeasure that he, and others like him, experienced since they were faced with unemployment. In his words,

Dear Mr. Bennett, Maybe you have never received a letter from any of the public about conditions. Us fellows down here are getting fed up with all your paper talk, what we want is action and pretty quick, we have been bluffed along by your big talk. Why dont you cut off about 2 or 3 thousand dollars from these big men and put men to work out of it what your doing is taking all you can get your hands on taxing us poor people so as you can make enough money to go to Florida for a vacation or England. You once made a speech about you would have all the men back to work as soon as you got in that was a lot of hooey. You can do what you like to me for writing you this letter it is all true. What we need is a new Government all through and us fellows down here are going to see we get it. I am telling you this something is going to happen soon if things don't get moving.⁴⁴

From this unnamed man, one can see that some men were beginning to question the promises that had been made to them once Bennett was elected in 1930. As such, this letter writer alludes to the idea that is in fact men who will lead the protest. According to this letter writer, people had accepted government action, but this action was nothing more than 'big talk', something that had been 'bluffed along'. These men in similar situations were 'getting fed up with all your paper talk, what we want is action and pretty quick'. According to these men, Bennett is not a man of his word and there is an element of inequality between the 'big men' and 'us poor people'. The most significant aspect to this letter can be seen in the comments 'What we need is a new Government all through and us fellows down here are going to see we get it. I am telling you this something is going to happen soon if things don't get moving'. Such letters signaled to political authorities that there were social forces that could potentially lead to a movement of opposition.

The concern for many was the increased threat of political upheaval among Canadian society, specifically the destitute. The appeal of socialists and Communists was becoming a genuine concern for both government and industry within Canada. According to Palmer, during

⁴⁴ A Carpenter, Toronto, Ontario, January 28th, 1934, *The Wretched of Canada*, 70.

this period of depression “most locales of any industrial significance likely gave rise to a movement of the unemployed. Where Communists were not present or were weak, socialists might take the lead; Conservative and Liberal working people were also commonly involved in numerous initiatives”.⁴⁵ There was a sentiment of co-existence amongst conservative and radical alike because “at the time most everybody felt just a little bit revolutionary and I think that it got to the point of desperation that something radical had to be done to better living conditions”.⁴⁶ The commonality of unemployment brought many workers together in a common fight for the necessities of life. It should be noted that the Communist Party during the 1930s was successful in attracting many members and sympathizers. During the 1930s, the communist appeal in both Canada and in the United States was successful in organizing a number of industries under the new Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO).⁴⁷ They were also instrumental in organizing the On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Canadian Youth congress.⁴⁸ No matter how desperate the Canadian people became, they still continued to hold faith in the parliamentary system as the vehicle for the redress of their grievances.⁴⁹ The party’s appeal during the depression can be seen through their members becoming active amongst trade unions, and as organizers of new unions throughout Canada for many unskilled and industrial Canadians.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) gathered considerable support in some western provinces. The party was founded in 1932 in Calgary as a political coalition of progressive, socialist and labour forces anxious to establish a political vehicle capable of bringing about economic reforms to

⁴⁵ Palmer, 244.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Norman Penner, *The Communist Party of Canada*, The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2010, (accessed May 15th 2010), <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0001810>.

⁴⁸ Ibid. After 1930 the Communists succeeded in electing a number of members to municipal and provincial offices and Fred Rose to the federal House of Commons. Among those were Jacob Penner and Joseph Zuken, who held municipal office in Winnipeg from 1934 to 1983.

⁴⁹ Thompson, 230.

⁵⁰ Penner, *The Communist Party*.

improve the circumstances of those suffering the effects of the Depression.⁵¹ The CCF quickly established itself in Canadian political life, electing members to Parliament and to several provincial legislatures.⁵² At the other end of the political spectrum, some citizens were attracted by rightwing propositions. During this the Social Credit received some support in the province of Alberta, where in 1935 the federal Social Credit Party won 15 of its 17 total seats in parliament.⁵³

The most significant threat for the government was the agitation amongst the single unemployed male. These men were reluctantly given aid and were placed into work relief camps. These were the men that the Communists courted for their party. The inadequacy of relief for these people caused social unrest to spread from camp to camp in the spring of 1933 and culminated in the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935.⁵⁴ The threat of single men is interesting in relation to the breadwinner ideal. The fear towards the unemployed single male could be related to their disconnection to the breadwinner ideal. As we have seen, married men were bound to providing for their family, while single males were not bound to providing for anyone but themselves. As such, the fear amongst both public authorities and society towards these single men was more prevalent due to a lack of responsibility towards a family. By not having a family to provide for,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² J.T Morley, "Social Credit", *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2010 (accessed may 15th, 2010), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0007518>. Social Credit is an economic doctrine that for a time was influential in Canada as the touchstone of a significant political party. Its principles were formulated by an English engineer, Major C.H. Douglas (1879-1952), who argued that economic hardships resulted from an inefficient capitalist economy which failed to provides people with sufficient purchasing power for them to enjoy the fruits of a well-developed productive capacity.

⁵³ Ibid. The popularity for the party in Alberta caused for them to receive 46.6% of the popular vote in the 1935 federal election. The federal party's support gradually declined in Alberta until 1968, when it became insignificant. During the 1950s and early 1960s the party won a handful of federal seats in BC.

⁵⁴ On the social unrest and ultimate trek to Ottawa see, for example, Lorne Brown, *When Freedom was Lost: the Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987), and Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003).

the unemployed male might have been more prone to public action. Thus, the breadwinner ideal affected the likelihood of a public display of discontent.

The breadwinner ideal operates in a distinctive manner when one looks at the issue of public action. On the one hand the ideal can be interpreted as being a reason as to why political action did not take shape. As chapter one has indicated, the breadwinner ideal placed the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the man, and relies on the success of the individual. When examining the failing of the public action, men were primarily concerned with their individual responsibilities, thus there was a lack of unification. On the other hand, as time progressed and the inability to provide individually became apparent, the ideal often acted as a unifying idea as more men began to realize that they were not alone in their concern and the ideal no longer represented an individual responsibility. Thus, breadwinners could think of fighting for a common cause.

In the selection of sources used for this dissertation, this attitude of 'revolution' was not a prominent or overwhelmingly popular theme throughout. Rather the letters written to Bennett, with the exception of a few, were void of any revolutionary political ideas. The letter writers did not associate themselves with ideas about uprising within society. There is a tendency amongst letter writers to reflect on their political roots and support as always residing with the Conservative party. For example, in a letter excerpt from P.W.L Norton of Sherbrooke Quebec he begins his letter by stating: "Always being a Conservative...I am taking the time to write to you".⁵⁵ In a letter from July 12th 1931, Roger Johnston of Pembroke Ontario reflects: "I am a young man at the age of twenty-four and a strong Conservative".⁵⁶ Mrs. Josiah Payne of Smiths Falls Ontario makes sure that it is known that both her and her husband, Joseph, have always

⁵⁵ Grayson and Bliss, 5. P.W.L Norton Sherbrooke Quebec, January 5th, 1931.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 14. Roger Johnston Pembroke Ontario, July 12th, 1931.

been Conservative supporters: "I am writing you a few lines we have always been supporters of the conservative Party on my side of the house. And also my husband".⁵⁷ Mr. W.M Spicer of Carvel Alberta highlights the support that he has for the party when he states: "I do not want to go on relief because I am ashamed. I have always been voting for the conservative party and always will. So please can you help me out a little".⁵⁸ Letter writers attempted to convey to Bennett that they were respectable and responsible citizens of Canada. A manner in which they tried to express their respectability was through drawing attention to their political history and comment on how they have always been and will be Conservative supporters. In a time when political stability was coming under question and the viability of a government to provide for its people was becoming ineffective, the appeal of radical reform throughout the country did not seem to take flight amongst a majority of those most affected. Rather there was a need amongst the population to reassure Bennett and other government officials that they were not revolutionaries.

According to Roger Riendeau's study of metropolitan Toronto during the 1930s, widespread radicalism and political upheaval did not precipitate during the depression.⁵⁹ Already, elements of radicalism spread with difficulty at the municipal level, which made the threat of national reformism harder to develop.⁶⁰ The innate conservatism of municipal politics reflected two political realities of the time. First there was the continued necessity of brokerage

⁵⁷ Mrs. Josiah Payne, Smiths Falls Ontario, July 17th 1935, Bennett Papers, M-1323, 398705.

⁵⁸ Mr. W.M. Spicer Carvel Alberta, March 30th 1935. Bennett Papers M-1323, 398499.

⁵⁹ Roger Riendeau, "A Clash of Interests: Dependency and the Municipal Problem in the Great Depression", *Journal of Canadian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1979), 56. There were minor anomalies, an election of a socialist mayor in 1935 and a CCF associate elected as Reeve of the Township of East York. However, both came under severe criticism for their heavier relief spending, higher tax rates and constant wrangling with Queen's Park. They were voted out of office the following year.

⁶⁰ An exception to this could be seen with the appeal of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in some western provinces. Founded in 1932 in Calgary as a political coalition of progressive, socialist and labour forces anxious to establish a political vehicle capable of bringing about economic reforms to improve the circumstances of those suffering the effects of the Depression; the CCF quickly established itself in Canadian political life, electing members to Parliament and to several provincial legislatures. In 1935, 7 CCF MPs were returned and the party captured 8.9% of the popular vote. In 1940, 8 MPs were returned on 8.5% of the popular vote.

politics that dependency and the municipal problem tended to foster: relief grants had to be negotiated with the upper levels of government; bankers and creditors had to be persuaded to delay payments, maintain investment, and give large overdrafts; and the taxpayer had to be soothed while he bore the burden of relief costs.⁶¹ Municipalities could rarely afford to aggravate their dependent situation with radical politics.

The second explanation as to why radical politics did not take solid roots at the municipal level has to do with the electoral system acting as a barrier against any shift to the left. Riendeau explains that “due to restrictions in the municipal franchise, the electoral base was more limited...by the 1930s, the municipal franchise had been extended to include those who held property by freehold or leasehold”.⁶² But the practice of renting on a lease was not common amongst the working-class, who preferred to rent by the week or month. The kind of long-term leases which brought franchise were only reserved for those whose jobs carried greater security.⁶³ During the 1930s as the unemployed were forced to move to cheaper accommodations and thus forego the possibility of a lease, the majority of the municipal electorate consisted of property owners whose taxes invariably financed the overwhelming share of municipal operation.⁶⁴ In essence, the tax base shrunk and the number of people who were eligible to participate within the electoral process was reduced at the very level of government which was responsible for relief.

Another captivating element that presented itself in a letter to the prime minister which articulates the displeasure that some had with the manner in which relief was being funded and helps to explain the absence of unrest. In cities throughout Canada during the latter half of the

⁶¹ Ibid., 57.

⁶² Ibid. The free and leaseholds were valued at \$100 for villages and townships, \$200 for towns under 3,000 people, \$300 for towns over 3,000 people, and \$400 for cities.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

nineteenth century, critical services and infrastructure were beginning to develop. Items such as transportation services to admit daily movement of people, prevention services such as firefighting, and health services to protect city from drowning and dying in their own pollution all began to take shape.⁶⁵ As such, during the early stages of the twentieth century cities were becoming “the engines of economic growth, and, as a result, the foundation of the tax system, property was steadily expanding in value...the growth of the tax base meant that civic improvements could be funded without much increasing the tax or mill rate”.⁶⁶ However, by around 1919, the expansion of property tax base seemed, in many cities, to stop growing and developing. As was discussed above, money available for new urban services, including the emerging social services like welfare and pensions could only be generated by increasing the tax rate.⁶⁷

As a result, by the 1930s, a majority of cities were in a financial squeeze when it came to obtain the funds needed to provide relief for the cities’ destitute. According to John Taylor, “more money was needed at exactly a time when relatively less was available”.⁶⁸ More pressure was placed on those who had not lost their jobs or who were well-off financially to provide the money that was needed to fund expenditures like relief. This increased pressure did not resonate well with some members of society. In a letter to Prime Minister Bennett, an outraged resident of Ferguson New Brunswick voices her concern regarding the manner in which the city was dealing with the administration of relief. In Mrs. Ernest Ferguson’s words,

Dear Sir, The respectable people of this country are *fed up* on feeding the bums for that is all they can be called now. This ‘free’ relief (free to the bums) has done more harm than we are altogether aware of. The cry of those who get it is ‘Bennett says he wont let anyone starve’. They don’t consider that the *people* (many poorer than

⁶⁵ Taylor, 147.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

themselves but with more spunk) have to foot the bill. The regulations (which are only a poor guide after all) were too loose from the start and *could be* and *were* easily side stepped many times. Getting relief has become such a habit that the majority think only of how to get it regularly instead of trying to do without once in a while...Now the taxes are going to be forcibly collected to pay for the good-for-nothings for whom the debt was made. Those people should be made to work and there wouldn't need to be much forcing for taxes. The taxpayers don't consider that they should keep people as well and sometimes better off than they are and their wives agree with them. We see plainly now that those being kept will not help themselves so long as they are fed for nothing. Notice should be given at once to enable them to get crops in and so on and relief stopped altogether. Also please remember there are other people in the country who need your thought as well as those on relief as it is now they are struggling along somehow....I am not stating this idly because I have talked with many others many times and that is the general feeling. I could write more but will let this suffice for this time but Please consider this question of relief as a very important one because a deal of trouble may brew from it.⁶⁹

Through this letter one is made aware of the resentment that some better off Canadians had towards those people who had come to rely on city relief. In this case, Mrs. Ferguson introduces herself as being part of 'the respectable people of this country'. This idea of being respectable is interesting because she is drawing on the same values that had come to define the masculinity for many men. As various letters have shown, men who wrote to Bennett commented on the fact that they were respectable citizens because they worked. In this case, Mrs. Ferguson is using the same values, related to masculinity, to try and pull Bennett in the other direction and cut off relief. She also refers to masculine ideals of the hardworker, which men assured the prime minister they were when they asked for assistance. Here we see a paradox; masculine ideals once used to gain assistance, were also being used to end relief.

She also has become the voice for others as she 'is not stating this [her concern] idly because I have talked with many others many times and that is the general feeling'. As such, in her opinion, those in a similar situation to her are 'fed up on feeding the bums for that it all they

⁶⁹ Mrs. Ernest Ferguson, Ferguson, New Brunswick, March 21st 1933, *The Wretched of Canada*, 41-42. Italics original.

can be called now'. It is interesting that this letter was written in 1933, which means that Bennett had already called for relief works projects to end and direct relief to be put in its place. As previously discussed, the process to obtain direct relief might have been more strenuous and invading, but it differed from relief works in that people did not have to work out their relief. Thus, Mrs. Ferguson is of the opinion that relief is 'free (free to the bums)'. As John Taylor has outlined, by the 1930s the cities were at a fiscal squeeze when it came to collecting the funds needed to pay for relief, which undoubtedly placed greater strain on those taxpayers who were contributing to the city's financial stability. Many cities were left to deal with the issue of unemployment relief with a limited and regressive tax structure.⁷⁰ The prevailing cyclical pattern of fiscal policy "tended to accentuate the deflationary spiral and create further dependency for the municipalities to cope with".⁷¹ This placed more pressure on the taxpayers and according to this letter writer, 'the people (many poorer themselves but with more spunk) have to foot the bill'. The municipal response to the problem of mass dependency during the 1930s was determined by conflicting interests of the federal and provincial authorities, and disgruntled municipal creditors and taxpayers. Having to support the bulk of the new spending, they were often the ones for whom 'taxes are going to be forcibly collected to pay for the good-for-nothings for whom the debt was made'.

One can see that the government had to deal with revolutionary ideals amongst the population. The most realistic threat for the government was the growing presence of communist ideals; however the lack of organization and municipal political structure, in places like Toronto, made it increasingly difficult for the threat to be realized nationwide. Another source of growing dissent was that of more conservative citizens who complained about the manner in which relief

⁷⁰ Riendeau, 56.

⁷¹ Ibid.

was being funded. Many people, as outlined by the above letter, were growing bitter towards the fact that they were becoming relied upon more heavily to fund the municipal relief effort. As such, the Canadian government was faced with an increasing burden of responsibility from both sides of the political spectrum during these turbulent times.

Another area of responsibility was placed onto the government during the 1930s, which is the object of the final section to this chapter. The government had come to recognize the presence of the breadwinner ideal within society, and ensured that the policies they adopted would continue to keep the ideal thriving in a time when living up to the ideal became increasingly difficult. This meant that in order to preserve this ideal, the government was willing to stretch the model further than before.

4.4 Pushing Breadwinning to the Extremes: Maintaining a Working-Class Culture of Independence and Autonomy

This section builds on the last section of chapter three, in which it was discussed that governments were concerned with the well-being of the wife and children, which resulted in relief being given even if the husband was unwilling to work. It becomes important to examine, in more detail, how this concern for wives and children resulted in a breaking of the breadwinner ideal in order to maintain that very same ideal. As has been discussed throughout this dissertation Canadian society, before and during the 1930s, had come to recognize the presence of the male breadwinner within society. According to Linda Gordon's study of single mothers in the United States and their relationship to state welfare from 1890-1935, society had come to identify that the dominant family include "a breadwinner husband/father and an economically dependent, domestic wife/mother. Although this standard was never an accurate description of most...it nevertheless guided most welfare designs". She continues: "aid to unemployed men, for example, aimed to preserve the male breadwinner status and to keep wives and children at home.

Aid to single mothers aimed to prevent its recipients from being too comfortable on their own”.⁷² This understanding of how the family should function was prevalent in Canadian society well-before the economic hardships of the 1930s. By the time the economic hardships of the thirties affected thousands of male workers, it was commonplace that the key function of the welfare state was to replace wages lost through illness, disability, death, and more significantly for this study, unemployment. As we have seen in chapter two, the government implemented welfare programs that were intended to replace and defend the family wage, by which is meant the wage that should, theoretically, allow a husband to earn enough to support a non-employed wife and children.⁷³

As chapter two has also brought to light, Bennett had acknowledged and intended to defend the family wage through his use of relief works projects for all married and able-bodied men. The various relief projects undertaken by the local municipalities under the directive of the federal government’s funding offered some men salvation from their feelings of inadequacy, and some through their contributions, saw themselves as not being shiftless or lazy or paupers.⁷⁴ Ensuring the longevity of the breadwinner model allowed for society to maintain several essential principles within the social order, without the breadwinner ideal, these principles, it was believed would have come unravelled. According to Gordon, abandoning the breadwinner ideal would have resulted in “men [losing] their authority in families and households- and possibly as a result, in the nation; women would be drawn into public employment” and, as a result, a “greater public activity and independence; women’s time and energy for domestic labour would diminish; women would have an incentive to lower their fertility and some of the constraints on

⁷² Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935*, (Toronto: Maxwell MacMillan Canada: 1994), 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁴ Eric Strikwerda, “From Short-Term Emergency to Long-Term Crisis: Public Works Projects in Saskatoon, 192-1932” *Prairie Forum* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001), 178.

their sexual activity would be lost”.⁷⁵ There was a sense that the masculine influence would become challenged and face a ‘crisis’.

An overwhelming concern for government officials in Canada during the depression-era was that the influence and power of the male breadwinner would become non-existent and create a ‘crisis’ within the social order.⁷⁶ In her study of gender and unemployment insurance during the depression, Ruth Roach Pierson shows that the narrative of the Great Depression:

both as told at the time, and in the main by historians after the fact, it is men who fill the ranks of the unemployed- men who ride the rails, men who stand in the bread-lines, men who sell apples on street corners. Single unemployed women have a shadowy presence at best. The married woman appears not as a person in her own right. If she was employed, she was seen as a symbol of the cause of unemployment among men and, if dependent, as a symbol of the high cost of male unemployment to society.⁷⁷

As such, the depression at the time and in contemporary terms, is also construed as a period of gender crisis. The focus at the time, however, was masculinity in crisis, as the perception of crisis “was framed by the belief that the position of head of household and family provider was an essential property to masculinity, a position that male unemployment undermined”.⁷⁸ While female unemployment was trivialized, male unemployment was seen not as undermining, but rather, as intensifying what was believed to be a woman’s complementary and natural role as nurturant wife and mother.⁷⁹ The above discussion about the potential threat to social order and crisis for male breadwinners is interesting when one reflects back on the content of the letters and memoirs used in this study. The sources used for this study do not seem to suggest a weakening of authority or presence of the male breadwinner within the family or society. Rather,

⁷⁵ Gordon, 12.

⁷⁶ Ruth Roach Pierson, “Gender and Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1940”, *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990), 78.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the sources used seem to draw attention to the male influence within the family, as men and women alike tried to ensure the stability of the breadwinner ideal.

The act of letter writing from the perspective of the male head of household can be interpreted as a demonstration by these men of their public presence. By writing to Bennett and presenting their concerns, they can be seen as attempting to fulfill the provider and protector role by placing the concerns of their families before their own. These men appealed to their work history and capabilities as a way to demonstrate their masculinity and maintain their strength and influence in both their family and society. Even though there might be shame in asking for help, these men did all they could to demonstrate their authority within the household. For example, Mr. Thomas Gibbs of Sarnia Ontario in a letter dated December 1st, 1930 comments: "I am taking this privilege in my own hands of writing you which a person of my class should be ashamed to take such authority. But I am down and out and do not know what to do. We have six children and I don't believe it right to see them suffer for the want of food".⁸⁰ If one looks at the language used in this letter, one can see that Mr. Gibbs presents himself as being the head of his household. He is 'taking this privilege in my own hands of writing you which a person of my class should be ashamed', which suggests that he is in a social class that would not necessarily need assistance. However, he is doing it for his children as 'I don't believe it right to see them suffer'. This is intriguing because he uses the phrase 'I don't believe', which suggests that maybe he is the one making decisions within the family. He feels it is his responsibility, as the head of his family, to ensure that the welfare of his family is looked after. He does this by writing to Bennett and presenting himself as having the authority within his household.

⁸⁰ *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B Bennett 1930-1935*, ed with an introduction by L.M Grayson and Michael Bliss, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 3 Thomas Gibbs, Sarnia Ontario, December 1st, 1930.

From what is presented in the sources men displayed themselves as strong and dependable. As one woman interviewed by Baillargeon comments on her husband, “sometimes I would cry...He would say ‘keep your chin up, we may be having hard times now, but we’ll be better off by and by, you’ll see’”.⁸¹ Indeed, some women confessed that their husbands had been in better spirits than they were, or at least appeared to be. According to another informant, “he wasn’t a man who got depressed very easily- he kept his morale up”.⁸² According to Baillargeon, “it is certainly possible that some of these men had kept their feelings of insecurity or desperation to themselves in order to preserve their image as protector able to cope with any situation”.⁸³ Through the examination of several letters and memoirs, men do not comment or reflect on their situations in a manner that would suggest that they were losing authority within the family or larger society.

Similarly, women did not seem to be criticizing the notion that the male was the head of the household. As has been discussed previously, women were offering little challenge to the state’s welfare policy and seemed to respect their role within the household. Women did not feel the need to dispute the breadwinner ideal. According to one woman; “I loved my husband so much. And he was so good. Provided I had my husband at my side, I never lost heart. We made it through as if it were nothing”.⁸⁴ According to another respondent, I’m not the sort of person to criticize him, whatever happened. It wasn’t his fault- it was the same for everybody”.⁸⁵ Women did not resent or despise their husbands if they were not able to carry out their role as breadwinner. Rather there seemed to offer compassion and understanding towards their husbands

⁸¹ Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, Trans by Yvonne Klein, (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 152.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

who were facing difficult times. Even in difficult circumstances, women did not offer a challenge to the breadwinner ideal.

The majority of women did not think of looking for work during the depression. Based on the collection of sources from chapter three, one can see that women assumed their role was within the home and they had no desire of seeking employment outside the home. Women offered little criticism to the ideas of the male breadwinner and the various social policies of the Canadian welfare state. For Nancy Christie, Canadian women, before and during the depression, were at the forefront of calling for a redefinition of the role of the Canadian State, for the movement of family from a private institution to one subject to public policy, and more significantly “for the endowment of motherhood as a nationally recognized goal, and for a redefinition of ‘the deserving poor’; yet at the same time they sought out ideological alliances with organized labour by endorsing a panoply of progressive labour legislation that had as its goal the bolstering of the male family wage”.⁸⁶ In fact, as has been discussed previously, most working-class wives preferred the paternalistic policies whereby the State acted as the economic replacement for lost husbands, because it enabled them to preserve their functions as non-wage-earning mothers, on their notions of respectability and independence hinged. Working-class mothers did not desire going to work and losing that element of respectability and independence that accompanied their role as caregiver to the children. According to labour historian Bryan Palmer, “notions of ‘the family wage’ obviously lay behind the relief provisions that spelled out the difference between single and married men and assumed all women to be properly located in the private sphere of the home, rather than the larger public arena of political economy”.⁸⁷ As such, women assumed their role to be ‘properly located in the private sphere of home’ rather

⁸⁶ Christie, 97.

⁸⁷ Bryan Palmer, *Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991: Working Class Experience*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1992), 242.

than the public arena of the economy. This acceptance of their role can be further illustrated in a letter by Mrs. Camille Pirot of Easterhazy, Saskatchewan who vividly depicts her role as a mother and wife. In her words,

Dear Sir, Forgive a poor woman who dares to come to you in her troubles but I do like a child would come to a kind father. I take you as a father also as you are at the head of us all. I am in desperate need of money being in the area where crops failed partly and having a sick husband who can't work. I beg you some money to help my husband as if you can't help me please ask some rich people who would be kind enough to do so. May the Almighty bless + guide everyone of your _____ as you can lead us the right way. I am living in hopes that your kind fatherly heart will have pity on me.⁸⁸

This letter is interesting because of the manner in which this woman presents herself to Bennett and how the ideas of the letter fit into the ideal surrounding the father as the protector and provider for his family. As chapter one has established, providing for a family signified more than the obvious material provision associated with 'breadwinning', it also "signified real fatherly devotion, paternal protection from neglect, harm and danger, the cruel realities that men had to confront".⁸⁹ Husbands and fathers were in charge of their families' well-being at more than a material level. Society well before the depression-era functioned under the dynamics of the *paterfamilias*; the husband and father had patriarchal authority within the family as he often made the decisions on behalf of his wife and children.⁹⁰

These views of paternal practices of Canadian society were perpetuated "in the main by consent, by identification with the status quo and a belief in common interests or inevitability".⁹¹ Mrs. Pirot turns to Bennett 'like a child would come to a kind father', which demonstrates that she is in a position of lesser influence, dependent upon Bennett to provide for her like a child and

⁸⁸ Mrs. Camille Pirot, Easterhazy Saskatchewan, March 4th, 1935. Bennett Papers M-1323, 398685.

⁸⁹ Comacchio, "Bringing up Father", 295.

⁹⁰ Comacchio, *Infinite Bonds*, 19.

⁹¹ Mark Rosenfeld, "It was a hard life: Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950" in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed by Bettina Bradbury, pp. 241-280, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1992), 255.

wife depends upon a father/husband for protection. She is accepting the 'status quo' of the paternal practices within Canadian society by turning to a father figure for protection as her own husband was 'sick' and 'can't work'. She presents herself as vulnerable and only through the assistance of Bennett can she overcome her impoverished position. By commenting on how she is 'living in hopes that your kind fatherly heart will have pity on me' she once again presents herself as a dependent to the male head of household and that only through Bennett's 'kind fatherly heart' can she have her needs met. As such, women, like Mrs. Pirot, tended to respect the breadwinner ideal and tended not to step beyond its boundaries. The acceptance of the ideal however, was under extreme strain and was pushed to the limits during this trying time.

The 1930s were a time when the possibilities of following ideals surrounding the breadwinner were pushed to the extreme. This extreme strain can be seen especially well to have occurred when one examines the discussion surrounding the Canadian governments' unwillingness to allow family members, wives and children in particular, to suffer from a husband's unwillingness to work. As chapter three has outlined, in many places a man's 'willingness to work' was used as a way to keep the ideals of the breadwinner alive when Bennett switched from relief works projects to direct relief in 1932.⁹² However, it was often difficult to enforce this principle because "relief cannot be very well refused [to] a man who avoids work because this may lead to severe distress for his wife and children; and there are very few relief officers who in practice are willing to permit the sins of the father to be visited upon the innocent members of his family".⁹³ Administrators viewed the wives and children of these men as being totally dependent upon the support of the male provider. Many married men who applied for the dole were not rejected based on the premise that their dependents would suffer the

⁹² For a detailed discussion see chapter three, page 32.

⁹³ H.M Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario, 1929-1932*, (Toronto: JM Dent & Sons Ltd., 1932), 179.

consequences. This is interesting because one can see that there was a breaking or stretching of the breadwinner model. The government was willing to step away from the ideal in order to ensure the well-being of the family.

In order to ensure that there was no ‘distress’, welfare policymakers were willing, in some circumstances, to allow women’s work as a way to support the family in order to ensure that young male children would learn the social value of working for higher wages in order to responsibly support their dependents.⁹⁴ According to Katrina Srigley’s study of women wage earners during the depression, women engaged in the workforce in a variety of jobs ranging from teachers, domestics, clerical staff, garment workers and the like.⁹⁵ These female breadwinners were major players in the labour market during the early part of the depression. In many more households than before, ‘the gender of breadwinners’ was female, as women’s wages fed, clothed and provided for their families.⁹⁶ Mothers were permitted to work because of the necessity that arose from the increased unemployment of their husbands. Margaret Hobbs’ study of women workers in 1930s comments on this idea that women worked out of necessity not by rights or choice. According to Hobbs, “through instrumentality or personal conviction, most promoted a gender conservative image of wage or salary-earning wives as nurturant, self-sacrificing wives and mothers taking work outside the home only to meet the material needs of their families, and of working girls as unfortunate daughters forced to work by the absence or impoverishment of the usual male provider”.⁹⁷ As such, the presence of female labourers’ as ‘breadwinners’ was a ‘necessity’ and through this necessity, these wives and mothers were only

⁹⁴ Christie, 158.

⁹⁵ Katrina Srigley, “In case you hadn’t noticed!: Race, Ethnicity, and Women’s Wage-Earning in a Depression-Era City”, *Journal of Canadian Labour Studies* 55 (2005), 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 70. As one looks to the sources used in this study, there was no mention amongst women in either the memoirs or letters to Bennett of women working or desiring to work. But it must be kept in mind that because the sources do not reflect female wage-earners, it does not mean that they were not any female-headed households.

⁹⁷ Margaret Hobbs, “Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers During the Great Depression”, *Journal of Canadian Labour Studies* 32 (1993), 202.

working to meet the ‘material needs of their families’. Stepping into the realm of the male breadwinner meant that upholding the breadwinner model was less important than the belief in the larger notions surrounding a strong work ethic, which had come to define many working-class families.⁹⁸

As chapter two has outlined, there was a heightened fear that surviving on relief would develop a pauper attitude amongst those men who found themselves unemployed. According to Nancy Christie, the fear was premised around those families which survived on relief and how they would develop:

pauper attitudes in substantial numbers of working people... [there has been a] remarkable growth of dependent attitudes. The doling out of relief, it was said, was having a definite pauperizing effect. Fears were expressed...regarding the effect of relief upon young children. It was said in many instances parents were falling into the habit of sending the children to the relief office or the social agency to ask-or demand- food, clothing or other assistance; and it was felt that this experience of getting something for nothing was a very bad one for the children.⁹⁹

In such cases notions of charity and idleness challenged the notions around a strong work ethic within Canadian society. There was a concern amongst workers and government alike that the ‘pauper’ attitudes would have negative consequences for society’s future generations, specifically children. There was a grave fear over the fact that relief was having a negative effect upon young children. It was becoming habit that parents were sending the children ‘to the relief office or social agency to ask-or demand- food, clothing or other assistance’. This experience of ‘getting something for nothing was a very bad one for the children’. This notion of sending children to relief offices can be seen from the experiences of a couple of children mentioned in the previous chapter who were sent to the relief office to claim their family’s groceries and other necessities. The presence of female labourers in the workforce can be interpreted as an attempt to

⁹⁸ It is important to note that in none of the letters I found were the personal implications of such strategies discussed.

⁹⁹ Christie, 253.

maintain the working-class work ethic, characterized as independent and autonomous, in order to avoid having male children, the next generation of male breadwinner, develop a 'pauper' or lazy attitude when it came to providing for their family.¹⁰⁰

According to Nancy Christie, with the underlining goal of protecting the domestic ideal of the male breadwinner "middle-class government officials mounted what was in effect an attack on working-class women's notions of work. Welfare policymakers were willing to countenance the temporary breakdown of the breadwinner idea; that their encouragement of women's work represented, in order to achieve their higher goal of reforming delinquent families so that young male children would learn the social value of working for higher wages in order to responsibly support their dependents".¹⁰¹ There was an emphasis placed on not diminishing the ideas of independence and initiative within the home that the working-class work ethic promoted; therefore, government officials encouraged the reversal of traditional gender norms by encouraging women to work and often have disabled or unemployed husbands supervise the children while their wives became the 'wage earner'.¹⁰² In other words, Canadian society was willing to permit these women to leave the home to engage in waged labour and subsequently challenge traditional gender roles and the cultural norms of domesticity within society, in order to reinforce the very ideas surrounding domesticity and demonstrate to future generations the importance of wage-earning and the working-class beliefs that accompanied the breadwinner ideal.

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that this concern for the children was not new or distinct to the 1930s, rather this was an issue that plagued Canadian society since the First World War and the implementation of the Canadian Patriotic Fund. In some instances, women were encouraged to work as a way to promote the ideals of independence and autonomy. The issue of laziness and idleness became more distinct and evident during the depression, as many were faced with the harsh realities of unemployment.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 151.

In such cases, despite the rhetoric claiming the primacy of motherhood, the Canadian government and various policymakers in practice “willingly transgressed traditional gender roles by forcing women to seek paid work outside the home, because of their overweening concern for reinforcing the work ethic and the ideal of family economic cooperation within working-class homes” and the government perceived that the ideal was as threatened by “unemployment, the dilution of skill among workers, the problem of desertion, and changes in how young people viewed their family responsibilities”.¹⁰³ The system was sustained by a consensus that the position of the male breadwinner was to be defended by allowing women to assume that role in order to display the characteristics of the breadwinner so children would see the inherent value in waged-labour and the stability and security that it brought a family. This partial abandonment of the breadwinner ideal was something that would affect Canadian society moving forward after the depression and the Second World War.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

This chapter examined the explicitly political interaction between the population and the government during the economic hardships of the 1930s. Government played a pivotal role in several areas during the thirties as it attempted to maintain stability and security throughout Canada. It was responsible for overseeing the administration of relief in an attempt to reduce the number of recipients abusing and taking advantage of the system. They played a surveillance and inspector role, which can be seen as a form of distrust for welfare recipients. The writing of letters to Prime Minister Bennett can be seen as a way for the people to bridge the gap of distrust and demonstrate to officials that they were not engaged in a culture of distrust or abuse. From

¹⁰³ Ibid., 158. This was a concern that plagued government officials from the end of the First World War moving through the 1920s and culminating with the economic hardships and unemployment that impacted many men and their families.

¹⁰⁴ This trend will be discussed in the conclusion of this study.

there, the chapter progressed to comment on the use of letters as a way for people to remind Bennett of what had been promised to them. Prior to Bennett's election as Prime Minister, he had promised that it was the duty of his party to ensure that every man has the right to work. However, as the instabilities of the depression worsened, Bennett began to abandon those promises. The use of letters acted as a mechanism to remind Bennett of what he had promised and to ensure that delivered on his pleas to the public. This reminder was framed around a language of entitlement amongst those who fought in the First World War, that providing work was a demonstration of good citizenship and a right.

There was a very real threat during the depression of social unrest amongst the population in favour of deep political change. People were coming to a breaking point given the federal, provincial, and municipal governments' inability to adequately provide for the poor. Bitterness towards the government increased and ideals of communism and social democracy took shape throughout cities. This however, was an exception rather than the norm. People also turned to the right during this period as seen through the appeal of the Social Credit in Alberta. With the aid of letters, one could see that many people reaffirmed their loyalty to the democratic process and to the conservative party. Finally the chapter acknowledged that the government was conscious of the breadwinner ideal and tried to maintain the ideal at all costs, even if it meant transcending the very boundaries of the ideal and allowing women to enter the ranks of paid labour. Amongst working-class families and governments alike, there was a greater concern for upholding the working-class ideal of a strong and independent work ethic within society amongst the children, in particular male children. They wanted the next generation of breadwinners to avoid becoming lazy and idle and to ensure that boys and girls valued of a strong work ethic.

CONCLUSION

The Great Depression was a trying time for many working-class Canadian men and their families. In a society that had come to recognize and acknowledge the presence of the breadwinner ideal, the economic instabilities of the thirties pushed and stretched the family waged economy to the extreme. The purpose of this conclusion is to provide a general overview of my study, including a summary of chapters, to identify common themes and trends, to comment on overall experiences and expectations while engaged in this study, and what questions were left unstudied which would now be interesting to follow. It needs to be kept in mind when reading this conclusion that there are no definitive answers surrounding the ideas of masculinity during the depression. What this study has taught me is that the depression shook the ideals of masculinity; it was an especially disorganized period, but a period in which everyone was referring to the ideals and values of the male breadwinner. To begin, it is important to provide a brief discussion of what was examined in each chapter.

Reviewing the Chapters

As the first chapter outlined, the definition of what it meant to be a husband and father changed over the centuries. The expectations of fathers and husbands were altered with the shift to a more industrial society. Prior to this shift, the British North American economy was a predominately family-based agrarian economy in which men, women, and children all played distinct but interdependent productive roles. Most husbands and fathers worked alongside their families as the family was understood as an economic unit. The notions of fatherhood were precise; fathers were to take an active role in the development and maintenance of their families. In Canada, as in the England studied by gender historian John Tosh, the idea of an active and involved father was “fundamental to...masculinity because it contributed so markedly to a man’s

immediate social standing”.¹ With a change to industrialization, the expectations of fatherhood were altered.

What was also interesting was many letter writers and interviewees reflection of their fathers’ experiences. Thanks to the economic opportunities of recent past times, men’s fathers and grandfathers had rarely set their pride aside to ask for assistance, even when providing might have been difficult as they moved westward for the first time. As a result, these men recounted their fathers’ experiences as a measure of what a successful father and husband should be. Indeed, many men of the thirties commented on how their fathers and grandfathers ‘never had to go on relief’. For men who often compared themselves and looked to their own fathers as examples of what a successful father should be, having to admit failure to adequately provide and protect their family was seen as humiliating.

During the mid nineteenth century changes within the economy, accompanied changes and expectations for fathers and husbands. Ideals surrounding motherhood became the basis around which the home was to function and fathers were pushed outside the realms of the family. With industrialization came the removal and separation of men from the everyday tasks of domestic work. Men successfully ‘fathered’ by earning their family’s keep through waged labour.² This notion of the father providing and protecting for his family, through the earning of a wage became interconnected within the rising working-class culture. A man’s identity became synonymous with wage labour and his masculinity defined by the stability and security that providing for his family brought. Moving forward, the idea of a male breadwinner within became

¹ John Tosh, “Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The Case of Early and Mid-Victorian England”, *Gender and History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 50.

² Cynthia Comacchio, “Bringing Up Father: Defining a Modern Canadian Fatherhood, 1900-1940” in *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed by Lori Chambers and Edgar-Andre Montigny, (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 1998), 292.

prevalent within Canadian society and policies and ideals increasingly aimed at the maintenance and upkeep of a breadwinning culture.

R.B. Bennett's time as prime minister illustrated the government's concern with upholding the breadwinner ideal within Canadian society. Chapter two brought to light that the creation of various works relief projects and the administration of direct relief were attempts by the government to ensure the longevity of the family waged economy. Similarly, there was a concern amongst relief recipients that turning to government assistance was humiliating, shameful, and disrespectful. This deep-rooted feeling of shame and humiliation, when it came to accepting relief, was echoed through the various letters and memoirs of those men who had to finally succumb to the realization that there was a scarcity of work available. The work relief projects, despite their 'pick and shovel' nature, attempted to provide an inherent dignity to those involved through the money they received. The projects tried to adhere to the breadwinner ideal of independence and autonomy that accompanied waged labour. Bennett publicly underlined the value of work and tried to emulate those values through the establishment of work relief projects. The able-bodied were demonstrating a willingness to work and the policies reflected that ideal. However, the turn to direct relief as a less expensive measure despite Bennett's commitment to work, proved to be intrusive and demeaning for recipients, as administrators tried to ensure that only the most 'deserving poor' were provided for. With a switch to direct relief, those values of the breadwinner were abandoned by the federal government as everyone, including the able-bodied, were placed onto direct relief.

Another important idea that became evident in this second chapter relates back to comments made by Blair Neatby: "in the 1930s the industrial machine slowed down and thousands of wage-earners lost their jobs. Without wages, families were destitute...it was only

then that the precarious nature of industrial society became glaringly apparent that able-bodied men, willing and eager to work, realized that, through no fault of their own, they could not support their families".³ The evidence used in this study show that this process was uneven. One can see that these men were having difficulty at the beginning to realize that unemployment and an inability to support their families was 'no fault of their own', and they continued to be 'willing and eager to work'. To suggest, with certainty, that it was one way is difficult. Rather, it seems to have been an ongoing process with no definite conclusion. This is important because it highlights the uncertainty of the 1930s and demonstrates that there can be no definitive conclusions drawn when one examines the depression-era in Canada.

The importance that the breadwinner ideal played within the family becomes evident as one progresses through the third chapter of this study. This chapter explored the dynamics of the family and how women, children, and fathers interpreted the unemployment that came to plague Canadian society. The characteristics of dependency and motherhood defined wives and mothers. Women fulfilled their roles through their responsibilities as a mother, wife, daughter or sister; through their services to the family. As chapter three has discussed, women recognized the inherent pride and values associated with the breadwinner ideal. Through the aid of my sources, it became evident that women saw an intrinsic value in their husband earning a wage and did whatever they could to ensure that his pride and respectability were maintained as they progressed through the depression-era. Even when women took the opportunity to write to Bennett, they were sensitive to their husband's dignity and respect by insisting that work be provided for their husbands, and that their letters remain private. Children also recognized the pride and dignity that waged-labour brought to their fathers. Whether it was sneaking down an alley way, or not blaming their fathers for going through the routine of getting up for work when

³ H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 46.

family came to visit, children came to acknowledge the humiliation that their father felt when they came to the slow realization that work was not available. The family during the depression all continued to believe in the importance that the breadwinner ideal played in the daily lives of all members. There was a sense amongst wives and children alike, that they possessed more of a willingness to see that men were unemployed through no fault of their own, as if not having the direct responsibility made one more lucid, or flexible in front of the norm.

The final chapter in this study examined the explicitly political interaction between the population and the government during the economic hardships of the 1930s. The public authorities played a pivotal role in several areas during the thirties as it attempted to maintain stability and security throughout Canada. They oversaw the administration of relief in an attempt to reduce the number of recipients abusing and taking advantage of the system. In doing so, they played a surveillance and inspector role, which can be seen as a form of distrust for welfare recipients. As chapter four has brought to light, the writing of letters to Prime Minister Bennett can be seen as a way for the people to bridge the gap of distrust and demonstrate to officials that they were not engaged in the culture of distrust or abuse that public authorities assumed. The use of letters to Bennett was also a way for people to remind Bennett of what had been promised to them. Prior to his election as Prime Minister, he had promised that it was the duty of his party to ensure that every man has the right to work. However, as the instabilities of the depression worsened, Bennett began to abandon those promises. The use of letters acted as a mechanism to remind Bennett of what he had promised and to ensure that delivered on his pleas to the public.

We know from the political historians that there was a very real threat during the depression of deep political change and social unrest amongst the population. The federal and municipal governments' inability to adequately provide for the poor brought many to a breaking

point. Ideals of communism and social democracy took shape throughout cities as bitterness towards the government increased. However, this attitude was an exception rather than the norm: through the aid of letters, one could see that many people reaffirmed their loyalty to the democratic process and to the conservative party despite their contradictory pressures, cultural norms, policies and economic changes brought to gender ideals. Finally the chapter acknowledged that the government was conscious of the breadwinner ideal and tried to maintain the ideal at all costs, even if it meant transcending the boundaries of the ideal and allowing women to enter the ranks of paid labour. This is because amongst policy makers, there was a greater concern of upholding the working-class ideal of a strong and independent work ethic amongst the children, in particular male children. They wanted the next generation of breadwinners to avoid becoming lazy and idle by seeing the whole family on the dole and ensure that they recognized the value of a strong work ethic.

Several trends and themes which present themselves throughout this study can be seen in the following period. The section below will highlight how the experiences of the early part of the 1930s acted as a precursor to the manner in which masculinity, unemployment and the welfare state were interpreted and dealt with after the depression. After the Second World War, the experiences of the thirties brought some changes to the manner in which the unemployed were dealt with. But the experience of the thirties also help explain why this would not be a full-blown change to a welfare state.

Common Trends and Themes

The first interesting trend that can be followed from this study is the popularity of the idea of savings; it might have made the reliance on the welfare of the state more acceptable moving beyond the 1930s. The ideas of 'loans' and 'savings' presented themselves in chapter

one as desirable for many of the letter writers and interviewees. The idea of welfare being humiliating and shameful might have been surrounded by the *Employment and Social Insurance Act* of 1935. This piece of legislation required “compulsory coverage for all employees over the age of sixteen and earnings less than \$2,000 per year”.⁴ Workers were now supposed to contribute to the insurance plan through a minimum of forty weeks within a two-year period before the worker could claim thirteen weeks of benefit.⁵ Also of significance was a flat rate of benefit was used, graded according to age and sex. For example, male workers over twenty-one could qualify for the highest weekly benefit of \$6.00; women of the same age bracket were paid a maximum of \$5.10. Married workers were given a supplement of \$2.70 to be paid with 90 cents for each child under fourteen.⁶ The idea of relying on the state for assistance was still there, as it was during the early parts of the 1930s; however, with the Act, the language of assistance changed. People were still relying on the state, but it was presented in terms of insurance and something that people had to contribute to in order to receive it. As such, by contributing to the insurance plan the stigma of having to turn to assistance might be less devastating.

Another trend that can be seen to announce later developments relates back to part of the discussion in chapter one and four of the notion that unemployment was now beyond the control of the worker. With the developments of the *Employment and Insurance Act*, what many workers and their families had come to realize with pain and uncertainty became a norm.⁷ The public

⁴ Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991), 88. It is important to note that even then, a sizeable amount of occupations were excluded, such as agricultural workers, domestic servants, loggers, trappers, and fishermen. This amounted to one-third of the labour force.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. The total amount of benefit could not exceed 80 per cent of the income normally earned when in work.

⁷ D.A. Smith, “Employment Insurance”, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* 2010, (accessed May 15th, 2010) <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0008203>. It should be noted that the Act was introduced by Bennett by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Privy Council of Great Britain declared the Act to be unconstitutional on the grounds that it was an infringement of provincial authority. The first compulsory national unemployment insurance program was instituted in August 1940 (it came into operation in July

understanding of one of the principal causes of poverty and dependency in Canada changed significantly. Unemployment was now publicly defined as a “socio-economic problem of national dimension rather than a personal problem and local responsibility”.⁸ As such, there was a tendency to interpret unemployment as transcending local and individual responsibilities and reflecting a national issue. The economic system was seen as culpable on two grounds; it not only produced recurring periods of unemployment for which insurance protection was required; but also the wages paid during ‘good times’ were recognized as insufficient to permit saving for anything other than the briefest interpretations of income.⁹ There was also the recognition that workers’ earnings were not enough to maintain stability and security for their families when faced with unemployment. Therefore, workers needed to have some sort of insurance or social safety-net in place to ensure the well-being of their families continued even through unemployment.

This is significant because Bennett’s introduction and ideas surrounding the Act of 1935, in some sense, acknowledged that “a reasonable degree of protection in times of unemployment was the worker’s right and not a subject for charity”.¹⁰ This interpretation of unemployment benefit as a ‘right’ may have been influenced by those letter writers during the early parts of the 1930s who insisted that work be provided for them based on a sense of entitlement rooted in their service to the state during the war. More generally, sentiments of this ‘right’ can be seen through insistence that the Canadian government should step-in and protect and provide for families when the male breadwinner was unable to do so effectively. This is also important as we move forward after 1939, as it may be that for the generation who had seen their fathers’

1941) after a constitutional amendment gave the federal government legislative power over unemployment insurance.

⁸ Ibid., 89.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

unemployed, the weight of the memory of an employed father, the willingness to do as he did, would not mean the same enduring self blame.

A final trend that could be highlighted from this study is the notion that the breadwinner ideal was a concept that was recognized as the basis on which Canadian society functioned. Fathers were expected to provide for their families through waged labour; however, the economic instability of the 1930s did not allow for many of these men to live up to the established norms. The government played a pivotal role in the maintenance of the ideal before, during and after the depression-era. Already, the CPF had been created during the First World War as a means to encourage working-class men to enlist their services to the war effort. It had recognized the presence of the breadwinner by providing assistance to wives of those soldiers gone to the fronts in Europe. Once they returned, the assistance would end as it was assumed that the breadwinner would resume his customary role as provider. This importance of the male breadwinner was upheld during the 1920s and into the 1930s. Welfare policy in the depression centred on the maintenance of the breadwinner ideal and the importance that waged labour played in defining a man's sense of self. The relief works legislation acknowledged the significance of the ideal through projects that paid married men, with dependents, for their services on various jobs. Even with Bennett abandoning the projects and switching to direct relief, a 'willingness to work' still needed to be present amongst recipients of relief, which reflects the presence of the breadwinner ideal.

At the same time, the government's unwillingness to allow children and wives to suffer due to a husband's unemployment led to a breaking or stretching of the breadwinner model, paradoxically, as an attempt to reinforce the presence and importance of the ideal. This happened when mothers were permitted by relief administrators to work outside the home to ensure the

well-being of their children. Larger notions surrounding a strong work ethic, which had come to define many working-class families trumped the notion of the prominence of the father's work. An emphasis on not diminishing the ideas of independence and initiative within the home that the working-class work ethic promoted led government officials to encourage the reversal of traditional gender norms by allowing women to work and have disabled or unemployed husbands supervise the children while their wives became the 'wage earner', when no other solution was in sight.

In other words, Canadian society was willing to permit these women to leave the home to engage in waged labour and challenge traditional gender roles and the cultural norms of domesticity within society, in order to reinforce the ideas surrounding domesticity and demonstrate to future generations the importance of wage-earning and the working-class beliefs in autonomy that accompanied the breadwinner ideal. The Canadian government and various policymakers in practice "willingly transgressed traditional gender roles by forcing women to seek paid work outside the home, because of their overweening concern for reinforcing the work ethic and the ideal of family economic cooperation within working-class homes" and the government perceived that the ideal was as threatened by "unemployment, the dilution of skill among workers, the problem of desertion, and changes in how young people viewed their family responsibilities".¹¹ The system was sustained by a consensus that the position of the male breadwinner was to be best maintained by allowing women to display the characteristics of the breadwinner so children would see the inherent value in waged-labour and the stability and security that it brought a family. In a sense, one can see that the ideas surrounding masculinity were full of contradictions during the 1930s. The depression shook the ideals of masculinity: the

¹¹ Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 158.

ideas surrounding it were disorganized and muddled, but everyone continued to refer to the very ideals of the breadwinner.

This constant referral to the breadwinner ideal was something that surprised me as I moved forward through my study. It is now necessary to comment on the overall expectations that accompanied this study. From there, I will discuss some of the areas that were understudied in this dissertation and address some ideas that could serve for future studies.

Overall Expectations of this Study

Going into this study, I was unsure as to what to expect from the primary sources. I had initially written a proposal which had an aim of engaging with diaries. I felt that using such a source would allow me to understand and present the intimate experiences of those most affected by unemployment. However, as I began trying to locate these diaries, it became apparent that the number of diaries needed and the possibility of locating these sources in a timely fashion was going to pose the greatest challenge. As a result of this difficulty, I decided to modify my source selection. I came across Grayson and Bliss's *Wretched of Canada* and began to read the letters. The themes and ideas I wanted to discuss in this study presented themselves in this collection. From here I added new letters found at Library and Archives Canada and several collections of oral histories.

The sources used, in particular the letters, surprised me the most during the course of this study. The men and women, and sometimes children, who wrote to Bennett during his time as Prime Minister presented their situations in a very emotional and revealing manner. I was surprised to see how during the 1930s, these letter writers reflected explicitly on the very idea that I wanted to bring to light in my work; the presence and importance of the male breadwinner. I was interested in how men reflected on their abilities to provide and protect their families

through their wage earning capabilities. These men saw themselves as the ones who needed to care for their families and saw an inherent value in what their waged labour brought to their families. I was also fascinated with the sense of pride that these men took in their abilities to provide for their family and how ashamed and humiliated they were when faced with the problem of unemployment. A great value was placed on the breadwinner ideal and by not being able to fulfill that role; these men seemed to fully burden the responsibility.

I was also astonished to read how the breadwinner ideal was also deeply embraced and cherished by public authorities. The government's insistence on maintaining this ideal before and, more importantly, during the Great Depression intrigued me because I did not expect this ideal to be so significant. I knew that Canadian society, for the most part, was influenced by patriarchal ideals, but I did not anticipate policies and attitudes during the 1930s to embrace the breadwinner ideal as systematically as they did and to try to shore-up the notions and values that accompanied it. The various relief works projects which favoured married men over all others, and the efforts of the government and relief administrators to ensure the well-being of fathers and husbands, made it evident that the breadwinner ideal was important and as such, something that needed to be upheld.

Studies Moving Forward

Keeping all the above mentioned trends, themes, and expectations in mind, how could my study be used as a beginning for other studies? The first area that would prove to be an interesting study centres on the use of letters. What I have collected here were letters written to the Prime Minister. Throughout this study it has been mentioned that the administration of relief was a local responsibility, but the letters reflect a national perspective. I think that an intriguing study moving forward would be to try and locate letters written to municipalities. It would be

interesting to see if the language used in those letters complement or vary from what has been presented in this study.

Another aspect of this study which could prove to be fruitful would be to compare it with studies of men and women from the United States and Britain. It would now be captivating to see how, in letters and testimonies that speak of the Great Depression in those countries, masculinity presents itself to readers. We know that the breadwinner ideal was not limited to the Canadian experience; a variety of sources used here indicate, the breadwinning concept was influenced by developments in Britain and the United States. But were the experiences of those families similar?

Finally, an exciting study would be to explore further the experiences of veterans during the thirties. Lara Campbell's article explored the demands of war veterans during the depression-era. It would be fascinating to dedicate an entire study to the experiences of those men during the Great Depression, to use sources such as legion newsletters, newspapers, and letters from veterans to gain an understanding of their emotions during this period. This would enable researchers to explore, in more detail and depth, the idea of entitlement and rights when it came to work, citizenship, and family relationships.

Overall, this study aimed to engage with and reveal the experiences of the working-class married men and their families during the 1930s. The collection of letters and testimonies illustrated the humiliation, shame, and disgrace that unemployment brought to many men and their families. It also shows to what extent all members of the family went to maintain the ideal, and the many beliefs associated with it. In doing so, it showed why government policies based on the ideal remained popular and, maybe why, later on, the adoption and the maintenance of the welfare state remained such a contested affair. I also showed how painfully and unevenly

elements of acknowledgement that unemployment occurred “through no fault of one’s own” came to being. The study also demonstrated that if the depression-era was a time of hardship, challenge, and contradiction for government and society alike, the notion of the importance that the male breadwinner played within Canadian society showed a remarkable resilience.

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