

**A Response to the Depression:
The Local Council of Women of Vancouver¹**
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The National Council of Women of Canada was founded in 1893 to represent all women in Canada who were interested in organized work in any field. By 1937, it claimed affiliation with sixteen nationally organized societies and 49 Local Councils, including one in Vancouver. It was credited with 500,000 members, making it the largest women's organization in Canada. The Council had been recognized soon after its founding as the most influential group of women in Canada. This recognition was aided by the fact that Lady Aberdeen, wife of the then Governor-General, had founded it and became the first president. In a 1934 address, the Governor-General had acknowledged the primacy of the council's position, remarking that whenever he spoke to the Council, he felt he was speaking to "the whole great body of Canadian women who are devoting themselves to public service all over this immense country".²

The Council considered itself non-partisan, although it aimed to act as a political pressure group for women. Lady Aberdeen had stated that the Council "does not deal with politics, nor ask for the right to vote, nor does it urge the modern dress reform; but nevertheless, the scope of the Council is unlimited, for it includes every branch of moral reform and can take up any question pertaining to women's work and aims in life".³ The Council aimed to serve as a forum for discussion of topics in which women were interested and to make it known to all levels of government the legislation which women wanted, enabling women to speak with one unified voice.

Nevertheless, there were disputes within the Council about its function and nature. As late as 1930, the Convener of the Committee on Child Welfare devoted the majority of her report to a discussion of the nature of the National Council "in order to explain what might otherwise appear to be a rather academic interest, and a lack of practical activity in the Child Welfare program of the Councils".⁴ She saw the National Council as primarily a conference and not an operative body:

The National Council of Women seeks to afford a medium through which the considered opinions and conclusions of the various bodies of Canadian women associated therein may be discussed by a body fully representative of all the participating groups, to the end that judgments, tempered and affected by this interchange of widely differing bodies, may be issued, with the full weight of this corporate authority behind them.⁵

According to this interpretation of the Council's activities, it could act only if, after studying the situation, it found itself better equipped than any other group to initiate action. When questions arose about the efficiency of the Council's use of resolutions and deputations, these methods were defended on the grounds that they had proven very successful in the past. Certainly many reforms which the council endorsed were enacted by the government.

The Council had campaigned actively for many progressive reforms. From 1910 it had called for women's suffrage, and had supported legislation to improve the legal status and working conditions of women and to provide child and health care, as well as education of the handicapped and for consumers.⁶ Even a critic of the Council commented in the 1930's:

Forty or more years ago in its youthful zeal to get the 'voice' through which Canadian women might make themselves heard...this Council turned its energies to one crusade after another. It achieved scores of reforms which are now an accepted part of our social, economic, and political life.⁷

The Council of Women was organized on three levels: local, provincial and national. The National Council was actually a federation of many organizations over which its constitution claimed "no power...beyond that of suggestion and sympathy". Local councils consisted of at least five societies of women in any locality "federated for the purpose of carrying out the objects of the National Council".⁸ Provincial Councils, organized after World War I, Local Councils, and Nationally Organized Societies were known as Federated Associations.

The real power of the National Council of women resided in its Executive Committee which organized and set the agenda for the annual meetings, and carried on Council business in-between such meetings. By its control over the agenda, the Executive Committee could effectively exclude controversial topics, if it wished, since only a two-thirds majority of those entitled to vote at an Annual Meeting could suspend the agenda to present an "emergency resolution of national importance".⁹ Local Councils across Canada were rarely sufficiently unified in purpose to effect a change of the agenda. Yet despite the over-riding power of the Executive Committee, a mere 15% of its members constituted a quorum.

In each Local Council a Sub-executive Committee composed of the local representatives to the National Executive Committee wielded the real power. The Sub-executive managed day to day business, handled all correspondence from affiliated societies, and drew up the agenda of the National Executive Committee. However, the Sub-executive had no power to withhold resolutions or requests of the National Executive Committee, and all information from the Federated Associations had to be forwarded to the Executive Committee.

Standing committees of the National Council, formed "for the purpose of....creating interest in problems relating to the welfare of the country",¹⁰ including a national convenor elected at the Annual Meeting and one member from each Federated Association. The national convenor was responsible for outlining work to be done that year. Thus the work of local committees could be directed firmly from above. However, a resolution of the National Council in 1930 affirmed that no national policy on relief would be set.

The national president, Winnifred Kydd, made a policy comment on the Depression by November, 1932:

Practical relief resolves itself today into the study of unemployment and its remedies, and that is receiving

the greatest share of the attention of Local Councils throughout the Dominion.¹¹

As an illustration, Miss Kydd quoted the efforts of various Councils, "The canning and preserving of fruits and vegetables, to be donated later to the unemployed; medical work in conjunction with the V.O.N. by assuming responsibility for expensive medical care and providing medical comforts; providing boots and shoes and stockings for children and working people in cooperation with civic authorities in opening clothes depots..."¹² Miss Kydd pointed out that because only the Local Councils knew community needs, relief programs would have to be handled locally. This was the extent of policy direction given to the Local Councils by their national organization during the 1930's. Therefore, the Vancouver Council was free to shape its own Depression policy. Unlike many of the other Local Councils in Canada, the Council of women in Vancouver noted the effects of the Depression soon after the beginning of the crisis. However, like many others, it did not consider the situation to be an emergency and so its first resolution concerning the Depression simply called for information from the Committee on Trades and Professions for Women. Susan Lane (Mrs. J.A.) Clark, the Convenor of the Committee on Trades and Professions for Women in 1930 and representative of the New Era League, had a realistic idea of the grave effects of the Depression on the lives of many business women. When the Mayor called a city conference on unemployment, Mrs. Clark attended, representing the Council. In February, 1930, she reported to the Council in detail about the discussions held at the Conference. Mrs. Clark made the first suggestion for Council responses to the Depression, recommending that the societies affiliated with the Council "consider the matter of unemployment carefully at their own meetings and invite speakers to explain the subject to them".¹³ The Mrs. Clark moved that the following resolution be passed by the Local Council and forwarded to the National Council:

As unemployment affects women just as much as it does men, any conference, commission or board that may be organized for this matter, official or otherwise, include women as members on the same terms as men.¹⁴

By this resolution, the Local Council in Vancouver had taken action on unemployment, small though it was, and had sent a directive to the National Council. Also, it was the first Local Council to call the attention of its members to the problem of unemployment. This resolution can be seen in the context of the continuing struggle by the Local Council to secure seats for women on government boards and committees of all kinds, but it was also a genuine response to the Depression. By 1933, the National Council was protesting "the deplorable tendency throughout Canada to entrust the planning, administration and distribution of relief even for families to the administration solely of male officials and the supervision of committees and commissions made up entirely of male members".¹⁵

By the beginning of 1934, the Vancouver Council still had not been able to place a woman on the local Relief Board, even in an advisory capacity. A new resolution was passed in April, again requesting that women be named to all the committees and boards which were being set up to deal with the situations arising out of the Depression. Because this resolution failed to elicit a response, the Council decided at its May

meeting to set up a special committee to consider matters relating to the City Relief Board and to attend its meetings regularly.¹⁶ The women planned that “after showing interest in and sympathy with the work of the Board for some time, the Council will press once more for women representatives on it in an advisory capacity and thus obtain power to bring about desirable improvements in methods of relief distribution”.¹⁷ This struggle to have women placed on relief committees continued throughout the Depression.

Although it was interested in many aspects of the Depression, the Local Council of Women devoted most of its attention to the problems of unemployed women. Working women on relief were a relatively new phenomenon during the 1930's. When the crisis began, no provision had been made for them. After many thousands of domestics, secretaries, and clerks were discharged from their positions, it became obvious that some provision for unemployed women had to be made. The Vancouver Local Council of Women was very active in bringing the problems of unemployed women to the attention of the authorities.

The Council's interest in this matter began very early in the decade. In September, 1930, a resolution drawn up by Susan Clark, urging relief for women was endorsed by the Council and forwarded to the City council, the Provincial and Dominion governments:

Whereas women have always done a great share of the World's Work, and as evolution of the present industrial system has forced women out of the home into a competitive labour market, and Whereas the recent voters census compiled for the recent election, show more women over twenty-one than men in the City of Vancouver, and as all relief and work schemes so far formulated by groups or Government, do not take cognizance of the needs of women. Be it resolved That the Local Council of Women of Greater Vancouver believe that equal consideration and opportunity for work be given to unemployed women, as well as to unemployed men, and further be it resolved That this Council of Women be the medium for conveying this resolution to the various authorities concerned.¹⁸

In November, 1930, Mrs. Clark again proposed an equal opportunity resolution to the Council, asking the City of Vancouver to allow unemployed women to register for relief under a federal government scheme for which the city was already registering unemployed men.

The Local Council during 1930 undertook practical programs for unemployed women. In addition to urging the government to set up registration offices, the Council itself tried to find jobs, housing and meals for unemployed women and girls. In November, 1930, the Council began a campaign in the newspapers, urging people to give unemployed women jobs. The “Who will give a woman a job?” campaign was carried on for several months, with the cooperation of the press. The president asked

the members to "take this to their associations and treat it very seriously as the conditions existing needed a great deal of help".¹⁹

Helen (Mrs. Paul) Smith (M.L.A. from 1933 to 1937), a member of Mrs. Clark's committee, in December, 1930, gave a short speech on the housing of unemployed girls. As a consequence, the Council decided to demand of the Million Days Work Fund, a volunteer "make work" organization, that its program for unemployed women included. When the President, Mrs. Kirk, reported back to her Sub-executive that the Fund had no provision for unemployed women, she quoted the manager of the campaign who said, "there were very few" unemployed women in any case. Not content with that assessment, the Council was able to persuade the Fund to give unemployed women the same consideration as unemployed men, although married men would continue to be given prior consideration. At the first general meeting in 1931, Mrs. Labsik reported that fifty women had been placed in positions. Most of the jobs had been found either through the individual efforts of members of the unemployed committee or through the cooperation of the Million Days Work Fund.

Although the work of the unemployment committee was commendable, temporary measures could not provide effective in the long run. The Committee had found an eating place for women who were completely destitute. It had secured the cooperation of the city relief officer, Colonel Cooper, who had issued meal tickets to a number of women who had applied to the committee. It had also aided the Y.W.C.A. in setting up a workroom for unemployed women, intended particularly to help those women who were not eligible for relief through the regular channels. The committee asked the Council to donate furniture to help set up a hostel for unemployed women. The hostel, "Dunromin" was an important part of the relief program of the Local Council.

In February, 1931, the Special Committee on Unemployment of the Local Council presented its report, which was printed in the yearbook of the National Council in 1931, as an outstanding example of what local councils could do to offset the effects of the Depression in their own communities. As yet the National Council had not given the Local Councils any direction concerning the Depression. Perhaps the Vancouver Local Council acted as it did because of the presence of such knowledgeable and experienced women as Susan Clark, Laura Jamieson, Helen MacGill, Helena Gutteridge, Helen Smith and Dorothy Steeves.²⁰ Because of them the Local Council as a whole may have been more active than others in Canada. The arrival of transients from all over Canada may also have dramatized the gravity of the crisis, especially since many of the women mentioned had strong ties with labour and the new CCF party.

The Committee on Trades and Professions for Women continued to be active demanding working for all unemployed women: single, married, divorced, or widowed. In October, 1931, this committee presented a resolution identifying work, rather than relief as the priority:

Whereas on account of world-wide conditions governments are providing work for their citizens, and the Dominion of Canada in cooperation with its provinces and municipal governments is providing work for men, Whereas there are many wage-earning and dependent women unemployed who do not wish

to take direct relief; Be it resolved that we, the Vancouver Local Council of women ask:

- a) that work be provided for women as well as men
- b) that the female earner in a family is just as entitled to relief work as the male members of the family
- c) that where a woman becomes the head of the family, through the loss of the natural bread-winner, that she receive the same consideration re: wages, work or relief as men...
- d) that this Council through its executive and seventy affiliated societies offers cooperation with many suitable schemes initiated by the authorities.²¹

Although the government had set up a registration system for unemployed women and allowed them to apply for direct relief, no government work projects for women had been established. The resolution of the Vancouver Council brought women's need for work to the attention of the civic authorities. However, the Council rejected a proposal by Mrs. Clark that a committee to investigate relief work for women be formed to gather data from as broad an area as possible. The Council was still conservative; it would not commit itself to more positive action. Even so, its influence as the largest and most representative women's organization had an impact.

The Relief Officer in Vancouver offered to follow up any work project for women given to him by those in authority. Mrs. Clark, who was prepared for just such a reaction, presented a work program to the Council immediately:

That a workroom be established along lines similar to that established by clubs last winter. That there be three hour shifts per day for 5 days a week. That the pay be 35¢ to 40¢ an hour. In order to avoid rush and confusion that those women who have already registered be first placed.

The women who registered became practically under three categories:

- 1) Women who through loss of bread-winner, have become the heads of families.
- 2) Single women living at home.
- 3) Single Women without home ties.

Class I

Heads of families to be given direct relief same as men heads of families. If family conditions permit, their women might supplement relief with some work.

Class II

Women living in homes where relief is given or who are not the immediate relative, be given 3 shifts per week.

Class III

Women without homes be given shift work five days per week. This should be sufficient to

provide room and food. These women might be placed in homes where they could do a certain amount of work for board and room and have, say, three shifts of work per week.²²

Her report, endorsed by the Sub-executive and the general meeting, was sent to the Mayor and City Council. The City Relief Committee put some of the program into effect almost at once. However, municipal/provincial jurisdictional problems interfered with the plan being totally accepted and by February, 1932, Mrs. Clark was urging the Council to write provincial and federal authorities still pressing for relief work for unemployed women.

A "make-work campaign", which was to occupy the Council's time in 1933 and embodied much of its hope for a workable plan to aid the unemployed, was first mentioned at the November, 1932 meeting of the Sub-executive. The Vancouver Board of Trade had written to the Local Council, promoting the Employment Service Plan, a voluntary organization of 22 associations whose objective was to put people gainfully to work.²³ Every home, apartment block, retail store, and manufacturer was to be asked to pledge a sum of money to be used to hire an unemployed person. The donor of the money could decide how it was to be spent.

Membership was by association and each association was allowed one member on the executive. Mrs. Labsik, the president, would be the L.C.W. delegate. By the end of November, the L.C.W. had agreed unofficially to "take charge of the Women's Division and to be responsible for directing the women's part in the scheme".²⁴ Margaret (Mrs. Rex) Eaton represented the Sub-executive on a committee to make practical arrangements for starting the campaign. Curiously enough the Sub-executive requested "that limitation in canvassing be made in certain districts - that the women's part of the campaign be as small as possible and largely educational, as this is a man's job".²⁵ This was a remark not often heard in the Local Council of Women. Quite obviously the women found door-to-door canvassing against its mandate and preferred to assist the Plan by contacting its Affiliated Societies for aid.

The account of the Council's interest in the Employment Service Plan provides an excellent view of the real power within the Council. The Sub-executive had carried on negotiations with the members of the Employment Service Plan, sent representatives, and finally agreed to take over the whole women's division - all without mentioning the plan to the general meeting. By the time the majority of members heard about the organization at the February, 1933, General Meeting, the important decisions had been made and were being carried out. When it was introduced to the Council members they were urged to bring their widespread influence to bear on a project promising great value as a morale builder.²⁶

By the summer of 1933, programs of unemployed single women were still minimal. Both the Soroptimist Club and the Y.W.C.A. had failed in their attempts to run hostels for unemployed women.²⁷ However, through the Council, another group of women, mothers of families on relief, were receiving some aid from a new program organized by one of the Council's members, Mrs. Mildred Cunningham. Mrs. Cunningham reached mothers through the schools in outlying districts, so that they could be organized into groups for work and recreation. The work involved sewing, knitting or quilting, with materials provided by the Local Council. The object of the plan

was "the prevention of spiritual tragedies through fear and suffering".²⁸ Mrs. Cunningham had already started one such group in South Vancouver and it appeared to be quite successful. Gradually "a sort of combined mothers' meeting and work party evolved from which much useful work and social intercourse has resulted".²⁹ The self-help groups enrolled 103 women. Mrs. Cunningham's idea proved to be very fruitful. According to her: "The greatest tonic in time of trouble was interesting work and it was proving so in this case."³⁰ Of course, the very reason for the time of trouble was a lack of work, interesting or not. But Mrs. Cunningham's plan worked well within its limited horizons. The philosophy was to help women help themselves. The women in the Local Council endorsed the self-help philosophy, believing that charity, or giving something for nothing, was humiliating to the recipient.

The Board of Trade could readily win the direct support of the Local Council of women but it was a different story for the Socialist Party, who, like the Council, were also specifically interested in unemployed women. While the Board of Trade tried to drum up employment, the Socialist Party, observing the continued widespread unemployment, turned its attention to respectable relief payments. In September, 1933 the Vancouver District Council of the Socialist Party reported to the Sub-executive by letter that the City Council's new relief schedule for single women adopted in August was "one in which it is not possible to keep up standards of decency".³¹ It urged the Local Council to protest to the City, believing that a protest "emanating from such a body of women as the Local Council of Women would have a great influence".³² While the Sub-executive did not immediately support the Socialist demand the letter was read to the General Meeting and a provincial council conference on "Unemployment as it Affects Women" was called for.

At the General Meeting in February, 1934, the Committee on Trades and Professionals for Women proposed a resolution which appears to be a direct result of the letter sent by the Socialist Party months before:

In consideration of the lengthening period of the Depression and the conditions of unemployment, particularly for women, showing little or no improvement, your Committee on Trades and Professions for Women submit the following for your consideration: Whereas, the Relief Allowance for single unemployed women has thus far been set too low for decent living conditions, and Whereas, many unemployed single women have been on prolonged relief, their resources being at this time much depleted; Be it therefore resolved that this Local Council of Women does not approve of the present low scale of relief for single unemployed women and goes on record as recommending an upward revision in the scale of relief to these recipients.³³

It is precisely the protest that the District Council of the Socialist Party had requested of the Local Council. The Local Council made the protest only after study by one of its own committees, since it was not willing to be more directly associated with

the Socialist Party of Canada. One of the Council's most compassionate pleas was on behalf of single women:

With 500 single women on Vancouver's relief role, a major portion of the Council's time has been given to the problems connected with this situation. It has repeatedly been asked that women be placed on all boards dealing with relief but without success as yet. It has been asked that the present relief scale of \$2.80 per week be increased to the point where a woman might hope to live without paying too great a physical and spiritual price during the years of depression. A room must be found for \$1.20 a week and food for 20¢ a day. Week after week and month after month of living on this scale is intolerable to health and morals and the grave social problems which inevitably arise should be the concern, not only of the Council, but of every group of right thinking people in Vancouver.³⁴

Other organizations solicited the lobbying power of the Local Council of Women. A delegation from the Women's Labour League spoke at the General Meeting of the Local Council in May, 1934, and successfully requested the support of the Council in protesting relief procedures currently being used. They asked specifically that the relief authorities supply clothing more readily and at different intervals and that a complete dental service for the unemployed be supplied. The British Columbia Joint Committee on Unemployment and the Y.W.C.A. requested the assistance of the L.C.W. with similar resolutions. The L.C.W. combined them into one resolution asking relief authorities to create employment by public works, to raise the relief and food allowance for single women, to end the practice of sending single men into camps, and to provide medical attention and hospitalization, maternity and prenatal care for those unable to pay.

The Vancouver Local Council of Women remained concerned about the inadequate relief rates. At the General Meeting in February, 1935, the special committee on methods of distributing relief suggested a permanent solution. Not surprisingly, the impetus for this committee came from the New Era League representative, Susan Clark. The committee had drawn up a resolution calling for the establishment in Victoria of a Public Welfare Portfolio. It would coordinate the various phases of social welfare work, including Mothers' Pensions, Old Age Pensions, Child Welfare, health and mental institutions, homes for delinquents, and unemployment relief. Though the resolution had no success at the time, a Portfolio of Health and Welfare was eventually established by the government of British Columbia.

While the Council's work for unemployed women was its major interest during the Depression, a related problem it addressed was that of mothers' allowances. The controversy over the amount and administration of Mothers' Pensions began in 1932. In February the Sub-executive heard Mrs. R.F. Murray of the Civilian Pensioned Mother's Association speak in favour of a resolution which this organization had sent to the Local Council. The resolution protested the rumored government interference in the

name of economy with certain social legislation, particularly the Mother's Assistance Act.

The special committee on the Mother's Pension Act made its report in August, 1933, recommending passage of three resolutions by the Local Council:

1. The restoration of Mother's Pensions completely according to the Act.
2. The taking over again by the Provincial Government of the full financial responsibility for the Act and of full control of its administration.
3. The clear statement by this Council of Women of its position re the Mother's Pensions Act at the coming provincial election.³⁵

The Council, which was concerned about unemployment generally, had taken an early interest in the relief camps organized for unemployed single men. In June, 1933 the Vancouver Council had formed a committee to organize and administer a "Comforts Fund" for the camps nearest to the city, i.e., West Point Grey, Salmon Arm, and Hope. The committee provided magazines, books and games for the men.

By April, 1934, the Council was aware that all was not as it should be in the relief camps. A resolution was passed, asking relief authorities "that conditions in relief camps be made as healthful in every sense as possible, with the hope that in the near future the need for these camps may cease and the men be returned to normal life".³⁶ The Relief Camp Workers' Union began corresponding with the council in 1934. Although the Sub-executive refused union members permission to speak to the General Meeting in January, 1935, it assured the workers that the Council was closely following their program and working in their interests. At the General Meeting in January, 1935, the members discussed the grievances of the men in the camps. The Council forwarded to the National Council a resolution petitioning the Department of National Defense to establish an organized department of physical education in all camps under their administration.³⁷ The resolution noted that voluntary efforts to provide this service were inadequate. While a physical education program would not have been able to solve all the grievances of the relief campers, it went a step further than merely deploring the conditions in the camps.

At the fortieth Annual Meeting of the Vancouver Local Council in March, 1935, Mr. Shaw and Mr. Cameron were finally allowed to address the Council on behalf of the "Blacklisted Men"; that is, those who had some part in organizing the Relief Camp Workers' Union to protest camp conditions and were for this reason prevented from re-entering a relief camp and from receiving city or provincial relief. They spoke for some time on the problems of life in the camps and proposed resolutions asking for relief for all blacklisted men.³⁸ The Council discussed various plans for immediate action. According to the report in the Minute Book: "the inhumanity of this is more than the women can stand".³⁹

An emergency resolution, proposed at the same meeting, asked for "immediate remedial action" from George Pearson, Minister of Labour, and the Attorney-General, and stated "that the women cannot tolerate these conditions any longer".⁴⁰ The Council sent two representatives to the Cabinet for an interview. They "put the women's stand

very firmly before its members".⁴¹ Rarely had the Council taken such quick action or such a firm stand as it did in the relief camp situation.

Throughout 1935, the Council continued to be concerned with the problems of the relief campers. The President reported to the Council at the General Meeting in May, 1935 that she had represented it at a public meeting in connection with the strike of the relief campers. She had expressed the sympathy of the Council for the situation in which the campers found themselves.

In December, 1935, the Sub-executive heard from a representative of the relief campers again. Mr. Cumber, speaking for the blacklisted men, urged the Council to help in obtaining immediate relief for them. The Welfare Foundation in Vancouver had set up a Homeless Men Committee and Mr. Carey, the chairman of this committee, also spoke to the Council sub-executive urging and reorganizing of the whole camp system. The Sub-executive referred the matter to the Unemployment Relief Committee, under the chairmanship of Mrs. David Hall, and requested the committee to bring in a report to the General Meeting. Mrs. Hall was prepared for this request and the Unemployment Relief Committee brought in a resolution at the General Meeting on December 2, 1935 asking for the abolition of relief camps, and that the single unemployed men in the camps be absorbed into normal community life within the coming year. The resolution also expressed concern for the situation of the blacklisted men⁴², although it did not make any more concrete proposals for action to be taken on their behalf. Mrs. Hall was also appointed to meet with the commission which was investigating the relief camps when it met in Vancouver.

At the Sub-executive meeting in April, 1936, the members heard a representative of the rejected relief campers. He outlined the situation of the men and appealed for the support of the council "in effecting some form of immediate relief from the City Council since at present their only means of relief is collecting on street corners".⁴³ The Sub-executive wrote to Norman Rogers, Minister of Labour, deploring the fact that these boys were in Vancouver without means of support. Although the Council was unwilling to go further, at least it heard the complaints of the men and urged that something be done for them, rather than ignoring them as rabble-rousers or "Communists" who should be allowed to starve for the trouble they had caused.

At the Annual Meeting in March, 1937, the Council endorsed a resolution "that the special committee set up for providing comforts for the boys at Relief Camps be now dismissed".⁴⁴ The Council had little idea of the conditions that continued to prevail at the relief camps, nor could it foresee the trouble to come during June of 1938 when the men from the provincial forestry projects and some from the camps would stage a sitdown strike in the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery.

In October, 1937 the Sub-executive again heard speakers from the single unemployed men, and also from the Ex-service Veterans. Mr. Harvey, of the Ex-service Veterans organization, spoke first, and asked that the Local Council request the British Columbia government to institute a works program or relief. He complained that ex-service men had been cut off relief if they were under the age of 50. Then Mr. March, representing the Relief Projects Workers' Union for single unemployed men, spoke, explaining that these men, including the ex-service men, had cooperated to the best of their ability but wanted some work scheme to support themselves. The Sub-executive listened and turned the issue over to a special committee for study. The situation was

addressed at the General Meeting in October, 1937. Helena Gutteridge, Vancouver's first alderwoman and a member of the CCF, had studied the position of the single unemployed men in the city and urged haste in dealing with it. The New Era League had also sent in a resolution in favour of a works scheme, which was read by the President. Dorothy Steeves, a prominent CCF M.L.A., moved that the Local Council appeal to the provincial government to take immediate steps to provide food for the single unemployed men.⁴⁵ The General Meeting also decided to send a delegation to Victoria, to relay to the Minister of Labour the gravity of the situation in Vancouver, where more unemployed men were drifting into the city daily, and many were being sent to jail.

In January, 1938, the Council endorsed yet another resolution from Susan Clark:

Resolved that any works scheme, either now existing or arranged in the future, by civic or legislative bodies shall provide for the payment of wages, sufficient to maintain a standard of living based upon the government figures as contained and published in the *Labour Gazette*.⁴⁶

Since the Council had continued to press for higher relief scales, the resolution was not a new policy, but it was indication that the Council continued to be aware of the Depression and its problems.

The Depression was brought home again to the Council by the sitdown strike in the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery by unemployed men from the relief camps and the provincial government forestry projects. The Council castigated both the Provincial and City governments for doing nothing to relieve the situation. An emergency resolution was brought forward, at the General Meeting in June, asking federal authorities yet again to provide a works scheme for single unemployed men, and to give them food and housing at once to try to alleviate their plight.⁴⁷ This quick and drastic action by the Council is not the last mention made of the situation or the fate of the men involved in the strike. In September, 1938, a letter from the Mothers' Council was received asking that the Local Council of Women "consider the boys who were convicted during the Post Office trouble, by attending the Assize".⁴⁸ The Council decided "that we as a Council cannot be represented but we go on record as reiterating our stand for a works program".⁴⁹ There must have been some dispute about this resolution because another was drawn up and read to the General Meeting:

As a Council we have every sympathy with the young men but cannot represent the Council as a whole, but in the matter of attending the trials we suggest any Council woman can attend and get information.⁵⁰

Some members of the Council probably believed that the men were getting just what they deserved, but the Socialist women, like Clark, Gutteridge, Jamieson and Steeves, would have been adamant in their support of the strikers. The resolution, which was a compromise between the two, did not commit the Council to any action or principle.

The attitude of the Council towards the underlying causes of the Depression was demonstrated by the measures it advocated as possible cures for the economic crisis. In August, 1930, the Council Sub-executive had endorsed a project which was to become one of its most important campaigns during the Depression. The group issued

“Where From” slogan cards to their members. Shoppers were to buy B.C., Canadian or Empire goods only. Half of the card was to be kept as a pledge, and the other half was to be deposited in a box during the Pacific National Exhibition. This was not a new idea for the Council, which had always supported such campaigns to buy only provincial, Canadian or Empire products, but the reasoning behind its endorsement of the campaign had changed. The “Where-From” project would help unemployment in Canada and in the Empire. This fitted in very well with the emphasis being placed by the National Council of Women on the recommendations of the Imperial Conference. The Council continued to endorse such plans as the “Where-From” campaign throughout the Depression.

The fact that the Council continued to hear speakers dealing with the economic crisis in its various manifestations demonstrates that it was sincere in its fear that it did not know enough to take action. It is impossible to estimate how much influence these speakers had on the council and its policies. The continued emphasis on buying B.C., Canadian and Empire products was encouraged by any number of speakers, particularly by those from the B.C. Board of Trade. In thanking one of these speakers, Margaret Eaton said that “if every country’s resources were pooled internationally, the greatest era of prosperity the world has ever seen would result”, and “it is up to the women of the world to see that the principles of separatism, racialism, and nationalism be overcome”.⁵¹ This sentiment directly opposed the idea that buying local products would end the Depression. Certainly, vague and nebulous as it was, Eaton’s statement was as liberal as any of the Council’s progressive pronouncements, but it does not seem to have had any lasting effect.

The Council was exposed to radical proposals for dealing with the depression. At the General Meeting in November, 1933, the President of the Local council read a manifesto for the use of any affiliated society from the International Women’s Congress. The manifesto asked women to undertake a crusade “directed towards the winning of security and opportunity for all mankind”,⁵² stating:

We recognize that, beneath the perplexities and dislocations of the present period, there has occurred a shift from the problems of production and of the mastery of the material forces to the problems of social control. To build a social order providing security and opportunity for all we accept as the task of our time. In it there is no place for complacent reliance upon fixed concepts and specific measures of reform.⁵³

It called for a comprehensive government public welfare plan, and regulation of industry and agriculture. The Manifesto struck a responsive chord in the Vancouver Local Council, although it was much more radical than any of the Council’s resolutions or actions had been. The Vancouver Local Council was more liberal than the National Council, which did not discuss the Manifesto. Given the fact that the *Minute Book* for these years reads like a “Who’s Who” in provincial socialist circles, it is likely that the Vancouver Council was more radical than most other local councils.

The Council was not hostile to radical solutions for the Depression, but it did not initiate any such solutions, nor did it ever fully endorse one. That would be unlikely, in

view of the majority of the Council members. Its official view of the crisis was basically conservative. The plans initiated by the Council were temporary measures and were designed only to alleviate some of the worst results of the Depression.

During 1938 and 1939, the Council became more and more concerted with the international situation, and correspondingly, less and less concerned with the Depression and unemployment. Domestic problems paled before the possibility of a World War, although a special Committee on Unemployment Relief still existed. Pleas to help the unemployed elicited a stock response from the Council:

That we the Vancouver Local Council of Women reiterate our stand taken on several occasions that a works program with fair wages be provided for unemployed men, and until such work is provided, that relief be given with no discrimination.⁵⁴

This resolution was passed again on June 5, 1939, at the General Meeting. Predictably, from this time on, all the attention of the Council was caught up by the war effort which brought the Depression to a halt as the unemployed were absorbed into the armed forces, the war industries, or forgotten.

The Vancouver Local Council of Women was recognized as the outstanding Local Council in its efforts to deal with the results of the Depression. The Council attempted to understand the Depression which neither it nor others affected by it could totally explain. Yet, it did not fail in its attempts to help those most affected by the crisis. The Council worked successfully in its attempt to get relief for single unemployed women, a group totally unrecognized by the authorities at the beginning of the Depression.

The Council also worked to alleviate the plight of unemployed men in British Columbia's relief camps, not only by providing funds for recreation, but also by pressing for an end to the camps, and for provision for alternative forms of assistance for the single unemployed men.

The women of the Vancouver Local Council may not have been able to understand why the Depression occurred, but they gave practical help to those most affected by it, and consistently represented those whom others preferred to forget.

AFFILIATED SOCIETIES OF THE COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF VANCOUVER, 1935

Altar Society of Our Lady of Perpetual Help	1 st Baptist Women's Society
Altar Society of Holy Rosary Cathedral	Girl Guides of Greater Vancouver
Alexandra Orphanage	Kerrisdale Baptist Women's Auxiliary
Business and Professional Women's Club	Ladies' Guild British Sailors Society
Canadian Daughters' League No. 1	League of Women Voters
Canadian Daughters' League No. 4	L.O.B.A. No Surrender Lodge No. 90
Canadian Daughters' League No. 8	New Era League
Canadian Daughters' League No. 9	Ryerson United Church Women's Association
Canadian Daughters' League No. 16	St. Andrews-Wesley United Church Women's Association
Canadian Daughters' League No. 22	St. John's United church Women's Guild
Catholic Women's League	St. Paul's Anglican Church Women's Guild
Canadian Memorial U. Church Ladies' Aid	St. Paul's Hospital Auxiliary
Chalmers United Church Women's Guild	Soldiers, Sailors, Mothers and Wives Association
Chown United Church Ladies' Aid	Soroptimist Club
Canadian Federation For The Blind	Vancouver Graduate Nurses' Association
Civilian Widows and Orphans Association	Vancouver Horticultural Society
Crippled Children's Hospital	Vancouver Women's Liberal Association
Dunbar Heights United Church Women's Association	Victorian Order of Nurses
Daughters of England Queen Of The West Lodge No. 33	Women's Alliance Unitarian Church
Daughters of England Glazier Lodge No. 96	Women's Missionary Auxiliary To Church Of England
Daughters of Scotia Heather Lodge No. 84	Women's Educational Auxiliary To United Church
District King's Daughters	Women's Auxiliary To The Hellenic Community
King's Daughters Van. Mizpah Circle	Women's Building Limited
King's Daughters Insasmuch Circle	Women's Institute, Point Grey
District W.C.T.U.	Women's Institute, The Delta, Ladner
Kerrisdale W.C.U.	Women's International League of Peace and Freedom
Fairview W.C.T.U.	
Mary Forges W.C.T.U.	
West End W.C.T.U.	
Kitsilano W.C.T.U.	
1 st United Church Ladies' Aid	

Footnotes

¹ This is an edited version of Chapter Three of "Response to the Depression: Three Representative Women's Groups in British Columbia" by Mary Patricia Powell. M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of British Columbia, 1967.

² Rosa Shaw, *Proud Heritage* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1957), p. 185.

³ National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1933, p. 29.

⁴ National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1930, p. 63.

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- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Shaw, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
- ⁷ "A National Waste - Leaderless Women", *The Financial Post*, XXXII (December 10, 1938), p. 1.
- ⁸ National Council of Women of Canada. *Yearbook*, 1933, p. 244.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.
- ¹¹ Local Council of Women of Vancouver, *Minute Book* 1932 - 1933, p. 112.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 1929 - 1930, p. 121.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1933 - 1934, p. 11.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1934 - 1935, p. 17.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1930 - 1931, P. 58.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73
- ²⁰ See the biographies in this volume.
- ²¹ The Local Council of Women of Vancouver, *Minute Book*, 1931 - 1932, p. 84.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 1921 - 1933, p. 91.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1933 - 1934, pp. 67 - 70.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1933 - 1934, p. 97.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1934 - 1935, p. 102.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 1935 - 1937, p. 69.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1937 - 1938, p. 14.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1938 - 1939, p. 27.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1932 - 1933, p. 13.
- ⁵² National Council of Women of Canada, *Yearbook*, 1934, pp. 140 - 141.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ The Local Council of Women of Vancouver, *Minute Book*, 1939 - 1940, p. 8.