

URBAN RELIEF IN SASKATCHEWAN
DURING THE YEARS OF DEPRESSION,
1930-39

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IN SASKATCHEWAN
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1930-39.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of the thesis is "Urban Relief in Saskatchewan During the Years of Depression, 1930-39." It is composed of five main chapters, bounded by an Introduction and a Conclusion.

The Introduction attempts to justify the delimitation of subject matter to urban relief and to define the various types of relief and classes of relief recipient to be found in an urban municipality of the Province in the 1930s.

The first two chapters set the background to the three local studies which form the core of the thesis. Chapter one describes the response of the Federal Government to the problems of unemployment and relief, and discusses its failure to implement national policies to cope with the situation. The consequences of this lack of central direction for Saskatchewan are considered in some detail. The second chapter analyses the position of the Provincial Government during the depression decade from three major perspectives; political, financial and administrative.

The third, fourth and fifth chapters consist of a description and analysis of the impact of the depression and the federal and provincial policies pursued as they affected the cities of Prince Albert and Saskatoon and the town of Shaunavon. These places were selected for

special study because they are geographically representative. Shaunavon is situated in the south-western corner of the Province, approximately thirty miles from the border with the United States and one hundred and thirty miles from the Albertan border. Saskatoon is situated in the central part of the settled area of the Province and Prince Albert is in the northern part of the settled area, approximately one hundred miles north of Saskatoon.

Each local study consists of a consideration of the relief policies adopted and the administrative framework in which they operated. The financial and demographic consequences of the depression for each urban centre are described and the problems which were encountered are analysed.

The Conclusion seeks to assess the relative gravity of the impact of the depression in the three centres studied, and to relate the degree of suffering to political events in the individual municipality and the Province.

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Responsibility for all errors and omissions is mine.

Alma Lawton
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C.A.R.	The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs.
H.C.D.	House of Commons, Debates.
L.P.W.	Department of Municipal Affairs, Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare.
N.E.C.	National Employment Commission
R.L.I.	Department of Railways, Labour and Industries.
R.S. Commission	Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations.

INTRODUCTION

Depression, drought, dust and grasshoppers are the words which usually come to mind first in considering Saskatchewan history during the 1930s. The Province was simultaneously subjected to the ravages of two unrelated phenomena, a world-wide economic depression and a prolonged period of drought, which combined to provide the blackest period in its history. The coincidence of depression with drought meant that the Province suffered to a considerably greater extent than any other in Canada. The Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations discovered at the end of the period that the average per capita income in Saskatchewan fell by seventy-two per cent, a decrease twice that of Nova Scotia: ¹

Table 1. The decline in Provincial Per Capita Incomes
1928-29 to 1933.

<u>Province</u>	<u>1928-29</u> <u>\$ per capita</u>	<u>1933</u> <u>\$ per capita</u>	<u>percentage</u> <u>decrease</u>
Saskatchewan	478	133	72
Alberta	548	212	61
Manitoba	466	240	49
Canada	471	247	48
British Columbia	594	314	47
Prince Edward Island.	278	154	45
Ontario	549	310	44
Quebec	391	220	44
New Brunswick	292	180	39
Nova Scotia	322	207	36

1 Report of the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations (hereafter R.S. Commission)
book 1, p. 150, table 50.

The financial burden of the depression was five times that of Ontario and the Maritimes.

Table 2. Disparities in the Burden of Relief on the Various Provinces, 1930-37

<u>Province</u>	<u>Ratios of Total Relief Costs to Total Provincial Incomes</u>	
	<u>Relative Severity of Burden-Index of Ratios-</u>	
	<u>National average =100</u>	<u>Percentages^a</u>
Saskatchewan	367	13.3
Manitoba	115	4.2
British Columbia	100	3.6
Alberta	100	3.6
All Provinces-National Average	100	3.6
Quebec	90	3.2
Prince Edward Island.	76	2.8
Ontario	76	2.7
Nova Scotia	70	2.5
New Brunswick	67	2.4

^a Percentage of total relief expenditures in the province to total provincial income.

Moreover, while in most provinces the low ebb of depression had been reached by mid-1933, the worst years for Saskatchewan inhabitants were 1937-38. Thus the suffering endured by the province during this period was both prolonged and intense.

The 1930s were a truly Janus-like decade for Saskatchewan. On the one side the optimistic boom years of the middle and late 1920s, the years of record wheat crops and unbounded confidence, during which the Saskatchewan Government had extended public welfare and education services, and launched a substantial highway

2 Ibid., p. 164, table 58.

construction programme. An outward sign that the Province had emerged from its adolescent phase was to be seen in the vigorous and successful campaign for the transference of natural resources which had been held by the Federal Government since the formation of the province in 1905. When control of resources was finally handed over in early 1931, however, confidence in Saskatchewan's destiny was already being undermined. In the face of a lack of means and methods to cope with unprecedented disasters, the province was forced to turn to the Dominion Government for urgent assistance. Thus the dilemma of Canadian federalism was exposed. In their assumption of new responsibilities the provinces had had to rely on their own resources. The depression was a testing ground which exposed the vulnerability of their fiscal systems and the great disparities in the abilities of different provincial governments to carry their increased burdens.³

The Great Depression was, therefore, both a critical and formative experience in Canadian and Saskatchewan history: critical because it exposed the weaknesses and anomalies of the Dominion-Provincial constitutional balance which had evolved since 1867, formative because such a crisis accelerated the needed process of reform. There is an obvious reason for studying the impact of the depression in Saskatchewan since it was the

3 Ibid., book 1, p. 132.

province to experience this two-sided process to the greatest degree. However, there might seem some need to justify why the subject of the thesis is urban relief rather than rural, as the Province is usually thought of in agricultural terms. If population statistics and distribution are examined, it will be found that there has been an almost continual drift into the cities and large towns since the formation of the Province:

Table 3. Population of Saskatchewan and Distribution of Urban and Rural Population, 1901-1961

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total No.</u>	<u>Rural No.</u>	<u>Urban No.</u>	<u>Rural %</u>	<u>Urban %</u>
1901 ..	91,279	77,013	14,266	84.37	15.63
1906 ..	257,763	209,301	48,462	81.20	18.80
1911 ..	492,432	361,037	131,395	73.32	26.68
1916 ..	647,835	471,538	176,295	72.79	27.21
1921 ..	757,510	538,552	218,958	71.10	28.90
1926 ..	820,785	578,206	242,532	70.45	29.65
1931 ..	921,785	630,880	290,905	68.44	31.56
1936 ..	931,547	651,294	280,273	69.91	30.09
1941 ..	895,992	600,846	295,146	67.10	32.90
1946 ..	832,688	515,928	316,760	61.96	38.04*
1951 ..	831,728	579,258	252,470	69.60	30.40*
1961 ..	925,181	527,090	398,091	57.00	43.00 ⁴

In the 1930s approximately one-third of the Province's population was living in urban areas. This percentage was divided among eight cities, eighty towns and three hundred and seventy-eight villages. Since one hundred and twenty-six thousand urban dwellers lived in the cities of Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert,⁵ the major concern of this thesis is with the

⁴ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Saskatchewan, 1926, 1956, 1961.

⁵ Regina Daily Star, August 2, 1937.

* Note. The apparent decline in urban population between 1946-51 is accounted for by a change in the definition of "urban".

impact of the depression on the larger urban centres, particularly Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Shaunavon.

In many ways it is artificial to isolate the rural and urban aspects of relief. An urban centre in Saskatchewan during this period was essentially a service centre for its surrounding rural area -- a place for shopping, medical and legal aid, banking and insurance, and transportation and distribution facilities. The economy of the city, town or village was directly related to and dependent on that of the farmer. In years of good harvest urban relief costs were low, when crops were poor relief expenditure mounted. ⁶ There was a constant interaction between urban and rural communities in the depression decade. Redundant farm labourers sought refuge in the cities, while city dwellers tried to avail themselves of the land settlement schemes and eke out an existence from the soil. Much has been written about the plight of the Province's farmers, however, to the exclusion of that of its city dwellers. There is then a need to redress the balance.

6

Relief Year	Urban Mun. ^a	Rural Mun.	Local Improve- ment Districts	Indi- viduals Assisted	Federal Provin- cial Cost \$	Wheat Produc- tion ^b
1934-35	204	179	20	238,217	9,832,338	114,200
1935-36	207	231	20	183,645	7,406,629	142,198
1936-37	226	228	20	264,102	14,414,147	110,000
1937-38	351	298	20	423,958	26,741,898	36,000
1938-39	328	281	20	351,550	17,074,831	132,000
1939-40	232	215	20	96,675	4,425,000	250,000

a Municipalities

b Thousands of bushels per calendar year

Source; Department of Municipal Affairs, Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare Records (hereafter L.P.W.)
roll 31, file 40

The responsibility for the provision and administration of relief in the urban municipalities of the Province lay with the local authority. The provincial City and Town Acts had made these units of government responsible for health, police, fire and street illumination services. In addition the urban municipality had the duty of providing certain services for the protection of human life. These included the prevention and control of disease, the maintenance of hospitals, the provision of medical care or assistance to indigent persons, and direct relief to inhabitants.⁷ In normal years revenues enabled the urban municipality to fulfill these functions satisfactorily. However, the depression meant that the numbers of relief applicants increased dramatically, and costs rose proportionately. In 1936, the cities in the Province advanced eighty-three times as much relief as they had in 1927, while in 1937 the towns disbursed twenty-six times the amount which they had needed for relief in the year preceding the onset of drought.⁸

Obviously municipal finances could not bear these burdens. If unemployment relief became too great a strain, the municipality would appeal to the Provincial Government for assistance. Similarly in times of acute distress the Province could seek Dominion aid. However, throughout the

7 Submission by the Government of Saskatchewan to the Rowell-Sirois Commission, vol. I, 47-48.

8 Ibid., 55

whole depression decade unemployment relief was considered to be primarily a local responsibility and problem. Financial help from the Provincial and Federal Governments was offered only on an emergency basis. Both superior governments disclaimed the responsibility of administering relief in the average urban centre, and refused to contribute towards administration costs. Saskatchewan municipalities and the Provincial Government constantly urged that the Federal Government should organize and finance relief, and initiate a scheme of national unemployment insurance. Throughout the whole decade, however, the Federal Civil Service insisted that the administration of relief was a municipal responsibility. A letter to a Saskatchewan relief recipient in 1939 illustrates this point:

The Dominion Government while assisting the Province of Saskatchewan, do not administer the granting of assistance to individuals. This is the responsibility of the Municipality in which you reside, who must decide to whom, to what extent and under what conditions assistance shall be granted.⁹

The fact that urban municipalities were held responsible for relief, combined with the hope that the depression would not last for long meant that all dominion and provincial assistance was on a temporary basis. Hence relief policies in the 1930s consisted of a veritable patchwork quilt of yearly enactments, followed by dominion-provincial and provincial-municipal agreements, at annual or monthly intervals. Posterity has almost universally

9 L.P.W., roll 38, file 41, letter from the Assistant Dominion Commissioner of Unemployment Relief Branch, Department of Labour to Mr. A, June, 1939.

condemned the way in which the problem of relief was tackled. The Rowell-Sirois Commission concluded in 1938: "It is clear there was no co-ordinated or carefully planned relief policy in Canada in the Depression."¹⁰ The governments simply adopted whatever method existed for dispensing temporary relief and "extended it ad infinitum."¹¹

Prior to 1934 the Dominion Government contributed a fixed percentage of relief costs. After September of that year a system of monthly grants-in-aids was instituted, whereby a fixed sum was given to the Province each month. The amount given was constantly changing. The Province was left to determine what proportion of municipal relief costs would be paid from this grant. Each branch of government tried to extract a greater portion of relief costs from the others. The constant interaction between the Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments and the attempt to shift responsibility from one authority to another meant that the average relief recipient was totally confused as to who exactly was in control. Numerous recipients referred to the system as that of "passing the buck", while an individual closely concerned with their problems contended that a "vicious system of shirking responsibility was instituted."¹²

Relief administration becomes even more complicated when the different types of relief and the various categories of recipient are considered.

10 R.S. Commission, vol. 1, p. 172.

11 J.H. Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto, 1966), 14.

12 F. Eliason Papers, Biography of a Swedish Emigrant (sic.), 51.

Fundamentally two types of unemployment relief could be administered by an urban municipality -- public works schemes created to absorb the unemployed, and direct relief, which consisted of the provision of the necessities of life; food, fuel, clothing and shelter. The former of these methods was undoubtedly the more desirable, since it kept relief recipients in useful work. It was also far more expensive to operate than direct relief. Both labour and material costs had to be paid. In a prolonged period of depression it was not financially viable. Public works schemes were, therefore, generally abandoned after 1932, when it was apparent that the depression was no temporary aberration. Direct relief was resorted to on an ever-increasing scale.

There were considerable differences in the way in which Saskatchewan urban centres administered this relief. The most efficient system which evolved was that of the voucher. Relief recipients were issued with separate vouchers for food, clothing and fuel requirements, which could be exchanged at a local store. Some vouchers allowed the recipient to shop at any store, others stipulated that he trade at a designated one. One city operated its own civic relief store, thus ensuring that relief costs were kept to a minimum. Some vouchers were 'open', allowing the recipient to choose his food, others stipulated the types, amounts and prices of his order. The alternative to the voucher system was cash relief. Although this

entailed less paper work, it was open to far greater abuses. Consequently it was favoured by few urban municipalities. A compromise adopted by one city was to permit a small portion of the food quota (fifty cents) to be paid weekly in cash.¹³

All urban municipalities established food, fuel, clothing and rental schedules, providing set amounts to be supplied to different size relief families. In the early years of the depression there was considerable variation in these schedules in the different urban centres. Gradually, however, the Provincial Government attempted to standardize these provisions. It was hoped that this equalization of benefit might discourage relief recipients from moving to other municipalities in their search for better conditions. It must be emphasized here that relief was not given unconditionally to the destitute. The municipality could at its discretion require relief recipients to perform work or give an undertaking to repay relief in more prosperous times. Since the dominion and provincial contributions to direct relief were usually non-recoverable, this meant that only the municipal share could be demanded.¹⁴

Normally four classes of relief recipient could be distinguished in a Saskatchewan urban municipality;

¹³ L.P.W., roll 30, file 3

¹⁴ Ibid.

residents, transients, the physically fit single, homeless unemployed and the physically unfit single, homeless unemployed. The urban municipality was financially responsible for the relief of its bona-fide residents only. These were persons who had a defined period of self sustaining residence in the locality. Initially this was a six months period. After September, 1934, the residence qualification was changed to twelve consecutive months. In 1936 it was altered further to twelve cumulative months in a three-year period. Transients were persons without residence qualifications. They were granted relief at the expense of the Federal and Provincial Governments. The Dominion and Provincial Governments shared the costs of the relief of the single homeless unemployed; the physically unfit were cared for in the urban centres and the fit were relieved in Federal Government camps specially created for the purpose.¹⁵ Although the municipality bore the burden of relief costs for bona-fide residents only, it had to pay administration costs and medical expenses for both the unfit single homeless unemployed and the transients relieved through its offices by the Dominion and Provincial Governments. This proved a source of continual dissatisfaction to the municipality, and eventually some changes were instituted.

¹⁵ Ibid., circular 58, T.M. Molloy to the Towns and Villages, September 28, 1934.

From the previous description of the various types of relief recipient, it would appear that classification would have been a fairly simple process. In practise it proved a laborious procedure. Naturally the municipalities were anxious to support only their bona-fide residents. Consequently each new relief applicant's employment and residence history was carefully scrutinized. Cases of dubious or disputed responsibility were referred to the Provincial Government department in charge of relief administration. A ruling was then made as to where responsibility lay. The residence qualification laws bedevilled Saskatchewan urban relief history. The cost in human and financial terms cannot be calculated.

The great disadvantage of municipal responsibility for urban relief was that there was inevitably a degree of local variation in the policies adopted. If a city or town offered generous food and shelter allowances it was likely to be inundated with relief applicants. No urban centre wanted extra relief problems in the 1930s. Some authorities tried to encourage those whom they had to depart. In the town of Melfort, in the northern part of the settled area of the Province, local constables were reported to be in the habit of "persuading" prospective indigents to leave town before becoming a public charge.¹⁶

¹⁶ Department of Railways, Labour and Industries (hereafter R.L.I.) roll 41, file 28.

Moreover, local government was, and in some respects still is, the most politically susceptible. It was subject to more frequent elections than its provincial and federal counterparts. Since relief administration and policy were left in its hands, it was possible that there was greater scope for, and danger of, abuse. Charges were frequently levelled at urban centres, both by relief recipients and outsiders. They were accused of regarding money appropriated to them as a means of procuring the construction of necessary public works, rather than as a means of relieving the unemployment situation. Mackenzie King referred to this as the "Systematic looting of the federal treasury by the provinces and municipalities under the guise of unemployment relief."¹⁷ Civic relief officers were accused of making the senior governments contribute towards the cost of relieving unemployable, crippled persons by placing them on the unemployment relief roll.¹⁸ However, it was not merely the Federal and Provincial Governments which saw the grave disadvantages in municipal control. Relief recipients themselves were not altogether satisfied with administrative responsibility resting in local hands. Complaints that "All those who did not vote right can get scant sympathy from the powers that be,"¹⁹

17 Regina Daily Star, March 27, 1934.

18 R.L.I., roll 41, file 28.

19 Regina Daily Star, November 14, 1938. Complaint from a Loon Lake Farmer to C.C.F. Provincial Leader, George Williams

were not infrequently heard, and it was urged that the administration of relief impartially was "a job for a big man and should be removed entirely from local petty likes and dislikes."²⁰

One of the most glaring indictments of relief policies during this period was that of a man very closely involved in their administration, T.M. Molloy, Deputy Minister of the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, 1928 - 1934, and later Commissioner of the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare, the Provincial Departments responsible for relief. On June 19, 1931, he wrote an article severely criticizing unemployment policies. Confusion of a variety of unrelated social problems such as poor relief, unemployment relief, assistance to the aged poor, and invalidity, had, according to Molloy, "given rise to the theory, seemingly widely accepted in Canada, that unemployment is a municipal responsibility first, then provincial, and lastly, and only in extreme cases, a federal responsibility."²¹ Such a theory, he contended, was discredited as erroneous and absurd over a hundred years previously when the British Parliament amended the Poor Law, which had existed since Elizabethan times. Molloy then considered such matters as the British and European unemployment schemes, which established the now

20 Ibid., February 23, 1939.

21 R.L.I., roll 41, file 28.

universally accepted principle that unemployment was an industrial rather than a social problem, and was unrelated to sickness or shiftlessness. As such, it was obviously a problem of national proportions to be dealt with effectively only by the Dominion Government.

Every country in Europe has long since accepted the truth of the theory that unemployment is a national problem, as is evidenced by national labour exchanges, national unemployment insurance and national undertakings to provide employment.²²

During the depression the Canadian Government preferred to recognize unemployment as a local problem of national proportions. On the three major occasions when a complete reform of the system was suggested in this period; the Bennett New Deal of 1935, the recommendations of the National Employment Commission, 1936-38, and the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, 1937-38, the proposals were either rejected or shelved. It was not until 1940 that a system of national unemployment insurance was finally instituted.

In fact even if this had been introduced earlier, it would have done little to alleviate distress. Most European schemes of unemployment insurance in the 1930s gave benefit for a three month period, or less. These schemes were based on the idea of contributions by employer, employee and government during prosperous periods, which

22 Ibid.

would give relief in a time of temporary unemployment. In the 1930s many people were out of work for a number of years. In 1937 the National Employment Commission calculated that 20.5 per cent of all employable relief recipients had been idle for less than six months, while 68.8 per cent had been without work for more than one year.²³ Even with unemployment insurance, therefore, this large percentage would have remained on relief rolls. However, the failure to implement national policies earlier is symptomatic of the parochial and archaic attitude to the relief question. As one contemporary economist suggested, "whether or not a scheme of unemployment insurance should be introduced in Canada, a comprehensive and efficient scheme of unemployment relief for needy persons will still be indispensable."²⁴ This was signally lacking in urban relief in Saskatchewan during this period. The policies and attitudes within which administrators had to work can in some respects be compared to the Elizabethan Poor Laws. The significant similarities were the emphasis on local responsibility and control as opposed to central, and the residence laws, which were rigidly enforced.

However, if few policy changes occurred during the depression decade itself, the impact of this economic

23 Final Report of National Employment Commission, 62

24 L. Richter, Book Review of Men Without Work, Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol. 5, 1939.

upheaval reverberated in several spheres of Canadian life, accelerating the needed process of social reform. The period proved something of a watershed in Canadian history, both federal and provincial. Gradually, the laissez faire attitude towards social reform gave way to the idea of state intervention on behalf of the individual, and state planning to secure a minimum of social security for all.

Thus a study of urban relief in the depression should reveal an understanding not merely of the failure of certain old policies and attitudes, but the synthesis of new ideas regarding social legislation as well. With the advantage of hindsight it is easy to attack or condemn the relief policies pursued in the 1930s for their failure to grapple with the unemployment problem fundamentally or effectively. Judgement, however, must not be made before the evidence has been carefully narrated and examined. In all fairness to the policy makers of this period the problems which they faced must be considered from their perspective rather than the contemporary one.

The concern here is a small fragment of the depression - its impact on the urban centres of Saskatchewan, with particular attention being paid to a study of three geographically representative urban municipalities. To appreciate this impact, however, dominion and provincial responses to the relief requirements of urban dwellers must first be analyzed. In the maze of statutes, facts

and statistics, which inevitably surround a subject of this nature, care must be taken not to lose sight of the more human aspects of the theme. An understanding of urban relief demands a certain open-mindedness since several facets of history must be considered simultaneously; economic, political, constitutional and social.

The approach will be topical rather than chronological, since this seems the best way of describing and analyzing an extremely complicated subject. It is hoped, however, that the effect will be cumulative. An examination of dominion and provincial policies and administration separately should combine in the study of particular urban centres, to provide both a local, and national perspective on events and problems.

CHAPTER 1. ORGANIZED CHAOS - THE DOMINION RESPONSE

An examination of federal relief policies in the 1930s reveals an interesting consistency - interesting because there was a transference of political power from the Conservative Party under R.B. Bennett to the Liberal Party under W.L. Mackenzie King in October, 1935. Yet this change in government did not occasion any major change in depression policies. In spite of the fact that unemployment and relief were potent political questions in this period, in effect there was little to distinguish between the Conservative and Liberal responses. Both governments were handicapped by a twofold problem; the fact that the constitutional responsibility for relief lay with the Provincial and Municipal Governments and the fact that there was an unequal incidence of depression in the various provinces. The provinces which suffered most from the economic disaster, among which number Saskatchewan was obviously placed, were naturally willing to sacrifice some of their provincial rights, which might be described more correctly as burdens. However, any constitutional changes needed the support of all provinces. The relatively prosperous provinces were reluctant to relinquish any of their rights as the proceedings of the Dominion-Provincial Conferences throughout the 1930s illustrated. Consequently, the Federal Government was faced with a delicate situation; the obvious need for urgent remedial action to

alleviate distress, and the need to cloak that action in appropriate constitutional garb.

This dilemma haunted both the Bennett and the King administrations. Unfortunately, it was not their only problem. There were no precedents for the type of economic collapse which had smitten their country. They lacked the experience and the methods to cope.

Actual reaction to the problems of the thirties was compounded partly of the view that policy was helpless in the face of external factors, and partly of the lack of experience of such a collapse, lack of institutions through which policy could be expressed, and the problem of governmental allocation of powers and finances by the constitution. In the early years, in particular, it also reflected the attitude that recovery would be automatic if interference was avoided and 'natural' adjustments were allowed to operate.¹

Given the ignorance of means to contend with the disaster, and the hope that it would soon be over anyway, relief policies were essentially of a temporary, palliative nature. Legislation was passed on an annual basis, the familiar pattern being a series of extensions of the original Unemployment and Farm Relief Act of 1931, with minor modifications. Each new extension act, however, necessitated a new dominion-provincial agreement, which in turn occasioned

1 A.E. Safarian, The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression, (Toronto, 1959), 145.

a new provincial-municipal agreement. At the far end of the scale was the relief recipient for whom the minor details could be important.

In Saskatchewan, the prime concern of both the Government and the people was not constitutional rights, but where the next relief cheque would be coming from. To them, Parliament seemed to be wasting a great deal of time doing nothing. Urgent requests for action were sent to Ottawa from both official and unofficial sources. On March 21, 1932, J.T.M. Anderson, Premier of the Province, sent a telegram to Mackenzie King urging him to discontinue his constitutional objections to the Bennett Government's relief bill, and allow the bill to be passed before the Easter recess.² In 1936, when King himself was in power, a Saskatchewan relief recipient expressed his displeasure with the lack of action on the part of the Dominion and emphasized the similarity of the Conservative and Liberal responses to the depression:

I cannot say you have done any more than our most despised R.B. Bennett. Your farm scheme is still based on R.B.'s policy which was satisfactory temporarily but it has turned out to be permanent. Now what I am trying to say is this: Mr. King, why you do not get away from R.B. Bennett's policy is beyond my intelligence. It is not only making tramps,

² C. Horkins (ed.), The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs (hereafter C.A.R.), (Toronto, 1932), 57.

rod-riders, panhandlers out of us young men, but it is ruining us both mentally and physically, saying nothing of losing our morals and self-respect.³

There were actually three occasions during the 1930s when an attempt was made to 'get away from R.B. Bennett's policy,' and deal with the problem of unemployment basically and constructively. One of these attempts was made by Bennett himself. After four years of patch-work measures, and with a general election looming on the political horizon, Bennett announced his New Deal programme to the Canadian people in a series of radio broadcasts in January, 1935. This was to prepare the country for the legislation to be enacted in the last session before the election. Briefly the New Deal consisted of a full scale reconstruction programme of five principal acts; an Unemployment and Social Insurance Act, a Minimum Wages Act, an act limiting the hours of work of industrial workers, and as a corollary the Weekly Rest in Industrial Undertakings Act, and a Natural Products Marketing Act. The New Deal marked the beginning of extensive government intervention in private enterprise to secure certain standards of living and conditions of labour for all. This legislation was progressive and necessary. Unfortunately, the strategy

3 L.P.W. roll 38, file 41. Mr. B. to W.L.M.K.
November 25, 1936.

by which it was introduced frightened some, and the content shocked many Conservative businessmen. Moreover, to some of the electorate Bennett's conversion to centralized planning smacked more of political opportunism than sincerity. The Liberal opposition contended that the Conservatives had proposed the legislation in the knowledge that it would be disallowed by the courts. When the Liberals came to power in October, 1935, they referred the New Deal to the Supreme Court of Canada and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which disallowed most of it as ultra vires of the Federal Government's power. Thus ended the first serious attempt at reform.

The impact of the other two reforming attempts of this period, the recommendations of the National Employment Commission⁴ and the Rowell-Sirois Commission, was less dramatic, but the proposals more far reaching. A consideration of the reports of these bodies is important and relevant here since they illustrate some contemporary attitudes and solutions to the problem of unemployment and relief, which was the area of study of the N.E.C., and the complex field of dominion-provincial relations as they had evolved from Confederation, the concern of the Royal Commission. These commissions were set up under the Mackenzie King Government to provide information, essential

⁴ Hereafter N.E.C.

before any reforms could be attempted. They fulfilled valuable functions in this respect.

The N.E.C. was the first body from the beginning of the depression to compile regular relief statistics, classifying relief recipients into three categories; employable persons, unemployable persons and farm resident operators and their dependents. It was hoped that the immediate corollary of better statistics would be more enlightened relief policies. Before the end of 1936 the Commission had made several suggestions whereby the unemployment situation could be eased. A training scheme was recommended to increase the employability of the country's youth and to rehabilitate those in older age groups. Home and farm improvement schemes, land settlement schemes and the development of the tourist trade were envisaged as ways in which persons could be profitably occupied. In addition the Commission favoured government policies to control economic fluctuations. It suggested that in prosperous years expenditures be curbed and debts reduced. The monies saved could then be used in depression periods for public works projects.⁵ The Final Report of the Commission called for Dominion Government leadership in social security legislation and urged:

⁵ Final Report of N.E.C., (1938), 26.

if financial and constitutional considerations should permit, the co-ordination of a nationally administered system of Unemployment Insurance and Employment Offices, buttressed by a similarly administered system of unemployment aid, would have advantages over the present system in coping with the problems of employment and unemployment.⁶

Unfortunately, there was one dissenting voice from this strong recommendation for federal control. A minority report asserted that responsibility for unemployment aid rested with "the unit of government nearest the applicant",⁷ and concluded that the Dominion should only contribute in emergencies, when distress was especially severe. The old Poor Law attitude once again manifested itself. This minority report gave the King Government a good pretext for postponing the evil day of reform until the Rowell-Sirois Commission reported in June, 1938.

This report also strongly supported the idea of a scheme of national unemployment insurance and favoured a more powerful Federal Government which could help to introduce and maintain an equalization of social services throughout Canada. The Dominion was to receive exclusive instead of concurrent powers in certain tax fields--direct income tax, personal and corporate, and succession duties. In return for these increased powers the Federal Government was to assume the whole burden of provincial debt, and pay

6 Ibid., 28.

7 Ibid., 51.

the total costs of relief for employable unemployed persons and their dependents. Where necessary the Government would give grants to enable provinces to maintain an average Canadian standard of essential services, with an average level of taxation. A province like Saskatchewan, ravaged by depression and with a small population, naturally welcomed these proposals. However, there were two major economic and political obstacles to their general acceptance by all provinces. The 'have' provinces were understandably not eager to subsidize the 'have nots'. More importantly, the second half of the 1930s witnessed the emergence of several new provincial political parties which were opposed to strong Federal Government. The Social Credit regime in Alberta and the Union Nationale Government of Quebec were two added problems with which the King Government had to grapple. In 1937, when King offered to discuss constitutional amendments to facilitate a dominion unemployment insurance scheme, Quebec and Alberta refused to commit themselves until they had seen the proposed legislation. It was not until 1940 that the long demanded scheme became law.

Thus R.B. Bennett's reform measures failed to obtain a mandate from the people, while it would appear that commissions furnished Mackenzie King with a useful delaying tactic. Unless, like Hamlet, the "native hue of resolution" was "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of so many reports. With the failure of these basic reform

schemes to take root, what, it might be asked, did the Federal Government do in the depression? For the most part its response to the relief question consisted of steering a day to day, month to month, year to year course, insisting on the constitutional responsibility of the provinces and municipalities to relieve their inhabitants, and at the same time assisting the stricken regions with huge sums of money, both in the form of loans and grants. We must turn to a closer examination of the policies pursued, and, more importantly, the impact of these policies on Saskatchewan.

Although responsibility for relief rested with the provinces and the municipalities, appeal could be made in times of acute distress to the Federal Government. There was, in fact, a precedent for such appeal prior to the depression. It was on December 14, 1920, that the Federal Government had first helped the Provincial and Municipal governments to finance relief costs. Moreover, it was calculated that this power had been used in eight of the years between 1920 - 1934.⁸ Each time the power was invoked, however, the Federal Government was careful to affirm that it was only helping out because of an emergency. This attitude prevailed throughout the whole of the 1930s.

8 The Financial Post, September 15, 1934.

Relief policy consisted of a series of yearly enactments allowing for moneys, specified or unspecified, to be appropriated for relief purposes. Initially, the Bennett Government favoured public work schemes rather than direct relief, since this seemed a more constructive use of available manpower. Moreover, Bennett disliked the idea of direct relief, not merely in principle but because it divorced administration, which was provincial, from financial responsibility, which, of necessity, was becoming increasingly federal. This preference for public works was apparent in the first piece of unemployment legislation passed by the Bennett Government in the Special Session of Parliament, summoned in September, 1930. The Unemployment Relief Act provided for twenty million dollars to be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund for the relief of unemployment "in constructing, extending, or improving public works and undertakings, railways, highways etc. that will assist in providing useful and suitable work for the unemployed."⁹ The Act also provided for four million dollars to be made available to affected municipalities for direct relief purposes, on condition that the Federal Government would pay a third of the cost of such relief, leaving Provincial and Municipal Governments to pay the remaining thirds.

⁹ House of Commons, Debates (hereafter H.C.D.)
Special Session 1930, 60.

This act was a temporary measure designed to deal with the unemployment problem while Bennett was away at an Imperial Conference in London. In the 1931 session of Parliament, a new Unemployment and Farm Relief Bill was brought forward on July 27. This was the basis of relief policies until 1934. The central government's attitude was embodied in the following resolution:

That it is expedient to bring in a measure to confer certain powers upon the governor in council in respect to unemployment and farm relief, and for the maintenance of peace, order and good government in all parts of Canada; and to authorize the governor in Council to expend, for the said purpose, out of the consolidated revenue fund, such sums as may from time to time be necessary.¹⁰

The lack of a definite estimate of relief expenditure, and the wide scope of the powers granted to the Governor-General aroused the opposition of "constitutional champion" Mackenzie King. King's criticism was based on the fact that the resolution dealt with three matters simultaneously; unemployment relief, farm relief and the maintenance of peace, order and good government. On the second reading of the bill, on July 31, he criticized it as "a complete usurpation of the rights of Parliament."¹¹ Moreover, Bennett's refusal to give a definite financial estimate was

10 Ibid., 1931. Vol. IV, 4177.

11 H.C.D., 1930-31, 73

seen as "a submarining of the right and duty of the Commons to control taxation".¹² In spite of King's eloquent defense of the constitution, the bill passed its third reading on August 1. Its expiration date was set for March 1, 1932. In view of the "constitutional" controversy it had occasioned in 1931, it was inevitable that when extension acts were introduced in the 1932 and the 1933 sessions, they encountered similar opposition. These constitutional wranglings are of no immediate importance here, but they do serve to illustrate one of the problems of relief legislation.

It is necessary to consider the consequences of the 1931, 1932, and 1933 relief acts for Saskatchewan. The Dominion Government contributed towards the cost of public work schemes until May, 1932, when this method of relief was abandoned as too expensive. However, between 1930 and 1931, the Dominion had paid twenty-five per cent of the cost of public work schemes in Saskatchewan urban municipalities, (the Province bearing twenty-five per cent and the Municipality fifty per cent). Between 1931 and 1932, the Dominion portion of expenses had been increased to fifty per cent. When the scheme was abandoned, the Federal Government consented to the completion of works not finished, for which the Municipality and Province had contractual obligations. With the collapse of public works relief, other schemes to

12 H.C.D., 1931, Vol. IV, 4449.

absorb the unemployed were devised. A Farm Labour Scheme was introduced in 1931 whereby the Dominion promised to pay a bonus of five dollars a month to each person placed on a farm. The scheme had the two fold purpose of supplying needy farmers in dried out areas with necessary help and obtaining employment for qualified farm labourers unemployed in the urban centres of the province.¹³ In 1932 relief camps were established where physically fit, single homeless men could be looked after. These camps were financed by the Federal Government and operated by the Department of National Defence.

However, direct relief was more important than any of these projects, because it applied to a larger proportion of the relief population in the Province. Until July, 1934, the Dominion Government contributed one-third of direct relief costs in urban municipalities, the Province and Municipality paying the remaining thirds. The following table indicates the costs of urban direct relief and public work schemes, and the numbers which they relieved in the early years of the depression in Saskatchewan.

Year	Direct Relief Costs	Numbers Assisted	Public Works Costs	Numbers Employed
1930-31	\$ 709,895.63	17,211	\$ 113,889.85	11,093
1931-32	1,037,168.33	39,581	1,766,243.16	7,230
1932-33	1,690,262.10	46,394	1,072,545.07	2,697 ¹⁴

13 Unemployment Relief Report, Supplement to Fourth Annual Report of the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, 1931-32, 39.

14 L.P.W. roll 30, file 3.

The statistics illustrate the greater numbers that could be relieved by direct relief rather than by public works schemes for the same capital outlay. Between 1931-32 approximately fifty per cent more was spent on public works than on direct relief, and yet it relieved less than fifteen per cent of the numbers aided by direct relief. The figures also illustrate the continually diminishing numbers relieved by increased public works expenditures. This trend lends weight to Mackenzie King's suggestion that municipalities were using government moneys on materials rather than labour.

In August, 1934, at the Dominion-Provincial Conference in Ottawa a radical departure from the Federal Government's direct relief policy was made. Prime Minister Bennett informed the provincial premiers that from August 1 onwards, the Dominion, rather than paying a consistent percentage of relief costs, would make a monthly grant-in-aid. The reason for this change was primarily financial. The grants were to be negotiated individually with each province, and vary according to need. The effect of these new agreements was to reduce federal expenditure by approximately twenty per cent.¹⁵ This policy was continued by the Liberal Government until March 31, 1939, when a percentage basis was once again instituted; forty per cent Dominion, forty per cent Provincial, and twenty per cent Municipal.

15 C.A.R. 1934, 35.

The consequences of the grant-in-aid for Saskatchewan may be appreciated by an examination of the following information.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Amount per Month</u>
August 1, 1934 - November 31, 1935	\$200,000.00
December 1, 1935 - March 31, 1936	350,000.00
April 1, 1936 - June 30, 1936	297,000.00
July 1, 1936 - March 31, 1937	267,750.00
April 1, 1937 - October 9, 1938	230,000.00
October 10, 1938 - March 31, 1939	175,000.00 16

The Province's grant was continually changing. In 1936 it altered no less than three times. The grant was given on condition that it was used for the purpose of unemployment relief without discrimination of race, colour or creed. It was extended each month by Order-in-Council.¹⁷ The grant system had put the onus on the Province to determine the percentage of relief expenditure it would assume. Constantly declining grants forced the Province to adopt a parsimonious attitude towards relief. The need for economy dominated all others. In addition to these disadvantages in the grant system, the Dominion was perpetually in arrears with payments. This financial time lag was one of the most serious problems confronting local and provincial relief administration. Its consequences will be considered in detail in the next chapter.

Although the Liberal Government's response to the

16 Regina Daily Star, March 4, 1939.

17 Department of Municipal Affairs, First Annual Report of the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare, 1935, Appendix 8.

depression seemed to consist largely of commissions and monthly grants-in-aid, there were several measures enacted in the late 1930s which helped to alleviate unemployment distress. The Municipal Improvements Assistance Act of 1938 and the National Housing Act were attempts to stimulate certain sectors of the economy in the hope of opening up employment opportunities. The former made available to municipalities a sum of thirty million dollars for low interest rate loans so that they could embark on projects which were labour-creating and self-liquidating. The latter provided a similar sum to municipal housing authorities and limited dividend corporations to undertake the construction of low rental houses. In addition it made twenty million dollars available to prospective home owners. It was hoped that these measures would stimulate the construction industry. Simultaneously the Government launched a forty million dollar public works programme aimed at the development and conservation of national resources.¹⁸ These schemes came late in the decade when an economic upswing was apparent in most areas.

How then, does one estimate the Federal Government's response to the depression and the impact of its relief policies on urban Saskatchewan? "Organized chaos" is perhaps the most appropriate description. This might

18 C.A.R. 1937-38, 74-6

at first seem a contradiction in terms. What is meant is that chaos prevailed since there was no fundamental attempt at reforming the constitutional balance which handicapped effective relief policies. At the outset, unemployment and relief were understandably dealt with by ad hoc and emergency methods. Unfortunately, these formed the basis of relief policies throughout the whole period. The grants-in-aid system, although it lasted five years, was essentially irresponsible, as the Final Report of the N.E.C. indicated. The money was wasted without administrative control.

In the second half of the decade there was little excuse for the great time-lag between investigation and legislation. Information and recommendations existed then which could have alleviated the administrative and legislative chaos. Although the direction given by the Federal Government was chaotic, its administration was efficient. The Department of Labour, the "bureaucratic Leviathan," was on guard against municipal and provincial inefficiencies and corruption. Municipalities had to submit monthly reports and claims to the Provincial Government, which in turn submitted them to Ottawa. Public works contracts had to be approved by the Minister of Labour and the work supervised by a Federal Government engineer.¹⁹

19 C.A.R. 1935-36, 115.

The Saskatchewan Government was faced by chaotic policies and a Federal Government whose primary concern was economy. After 1932, when the Province's borrowing powers were gone, it had no alternative but to follow its master. Relief policies were inevitably orientated towards the prevention of starvation rather than the cure of unemployment.

CHAPTER 2. "NO ONE WILL STARVE" -- THE PROVINCIAL RESPONSE

The promise that no inhabitant of Saskatchewan would be allowed to starve was made by Premier J.T.M. Anderson in a speech at Yorkton on July 23, 1931.¹ That the Premier thought it necessary to make such a pledge is at once an indication of the depth of depression and the limitations of the Provincial Government's response. This was both the least and the most that the Saskatchewan Government could promise to do.

The position of the provincial authorities was in many respects the most difficult of the three spheres of government concerned with relief. There were two provincial administrations during this period. The Anderson coalition Government held office between 1929 and 1934, when the Liberals took over, initially under the leadership of J.G. Gardiner and subsequently under W.J. Patterson. The Liberals remained in control of provincial politics until the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation victory of 1944. In the 1930s both the Anderson and Liberal Governments were caught in the crossfire of constantly changing federal policies and continual municipal appeals for greater assistance. The function of the Provincial Government was twofold: it was the interpreter of federal legislation

1 C.A.R. 1932, 259.

and the arbitrator of municipal demands. There are three major aspects of the Provincial Government's response to the depression which must be considered; political, financial and administrative. All these spheres naturally interpenetrated and reacted on each other. For the purpose of clarity they must initially be considered separately. An understanding of the political background is an indispensable starting point.

The General Election of June 6, 1929, marked the beginning of a period in parenthesis in Saskatchewan political history, a break in the Liberal monopoly of power which had prevailed since the formation of the Province. The results of the election were indecisive: Liberals 28, Conservatives 24, Independents 6, Progressives 5.² However, a special session of the Legislature, summoned by the Liberals, resulted in a Conservative, Independent and Progressive alliance under the leadership of J.T.M. Anderson, which successfully forced Premier Gardiner and the Liberals to step down. Thus began a brief alliance between Conservative and Progressive forces. If the economic climate had been more favourable, subsequent Saskatchewan history might have followed a different course. Unfortunately,

the Anderson Government didn't stand a chance. It had sound plans, but the burgeoning*drought and depression ruled them out. As with most

* (sic)

2 Ibid., 1929-30, 494.

new governments: it wasted much time in dis-interring the 'scandals' of its predecessors.³ It also faced a strong and united opposition.³

The scandals are of no concern here. The strong opposition which the Anderson Government faced is of importance. The chief problem which had to be met was the depression. The opposition, rather than co-operating, chose to exploit the difficulties besetting the Government for the purpose of political propaganda. At one stage it was impossible for the Government to sell Saskatchewan bonds because of opposition statements implying that the Province was bankrupt.⁴ The most effective criticism the Liberals employed was constant reference to the provincial balance of payments situation. Unfortunately for the Anderson Government the last years of Liberal administration had coincided with prosperity and balanced budgets. With the onset of depression, budgetary surpluses soon became deficits. The advent of depression and the experiment in co-operative government occurred simultaneously. This was a fatal coincidence for the coalition. All the Liberals had to do was to point to the balanced sheet which had been their legacy, and indicate the huge deficits which were being incurred:

Under the present Tory Administration the gross public debt in Saskatchewan has increased \$21,000,000 in the last eighteen months. For every day they have been in power, they have

3 C.H. Higginbotham, Off the Record: The C.C.F. Party in Saskatchewan (Toronto, 1968), 34.

4 C.A.R., 1934, 278.

added \$41,000 to our public debt, or \$29 for every minute day and night. If this orgy of extravagance is to be maintained, what will eventually become of this province?"⁵

The relief question became a political football. The prime concern of the opposition was economy rather than relief. In the General Election of June 19, 1934, the "main plank of the Gardiner programme was retrenchment in expenses" since "the province has already experienced five years of extravagance."⁶ This approach certainly paid dividends. Not only was the Co-operative Government defeated, but not one Government candidate was elected.⁷

It is interesting to compare the process of political martyrdom suffered by the provincial Conservatives with that of their federal counterparts. In both cases the Liberal party was able to exploit successfully the economic disasters with which the Conservatives had to contend. Both the federal and provincial Liberals questioned the constitutionality of the legislation proposed by the Conservatives, and thereby wasted valuable parliamentary time on theoretical issues. The Conservatives were held responsible for failure to solve unemployment, and resoundingly defeated both provincially and nationally in the mid-1930s. The irony is that both the federal and provincial

5 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, June 1, 1931. Quote from a speech of Dr. Ulrich's, Minister of Public Health, 1934-1944.

6 The Dispatch, Alameda, March 8, 1935.

7 1934 General Election Results: Liberals 50, Farmer Labour 5, C.A.R., 1934, 284.

Liberals, for all their criticism, were unable to devise any better methods to alleviate distress. In general, they continued the policies of their predecessors with minor alterations. A contemporary newspaper compared the Gardiner Government's response to relief to Owen D. Young's description of the United States:

It strikes me that we're all in the same boat with Christopher Columbus. He didn't know where he was going when he started. When he got there he didn't know where he was. When he got back he didn't know where he had been.⁸

Although the personnel of the Provincial Government changed quite dramatically in June, 1934, policies throughout the period were similar to those pursued by the Federal Government. Moreover, because of the financial dependence of Saskatchewan on dominion grants and loans, these policies were predetermined by those of the central government. Provincial relief policies, therefore, up to 1934 consisted of yearly agreements made with the Federal Government in accordance with the details of the latest Unemployment and Farm Relief Act. After 1934 when the grant-in-aid was introduced, the Province was made more directly responsible for relief expenditure.

Saskatchewan suffered from the lack of central planning and organization in relief policies. The Provincial Government pursued two main courses. It met

⁸ Regina Daily Star, October 23, 1934.

situations, as they occurred, with the means available, and persistently endeavoured to have the Federal Government assume responsibility for a larger share of the relief burden and for some part of the cost of social services.⁹ It succeeded only in securing temporary assistance from Ottawa as emergencies arose. As a result provincial assistance to the urban municipalities was on a similar basis.

Although this attitude prevailed for the whole decade, the Provincial Government really favoured a federally controlled and financed scheme of relief and unemployment insurance, as the Saskatchewan brief to the Rowell-Sirois Commission illustrated.

It is the considered opinion of the Government of Saskatchewan that, only by assumption by the Dominion Government of the financial burden of a large part of the costs of social services, and the entire cost of relief, coupled with provision for a flexible system of emergency grants to meet immediate and pressing needs as they arise from year to year, can a measure of financial security be obtained.¹⁰

A scheme of contributory unemployment insurance was urged since: "in this province where income is extremely variable, the insurance principle must be resorted to as frequently as possible."¹¹

For the Saskatchewan Government to be prepared to

9 C.A.R., 1937-38, 454.

10 A Submission by the Government of Saskatchewan to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, vol. I, 45.

11 Ibid., vol. II, 277.

relinquish provincial rights, elsewhere held as sacred, the depression must indeed have had a revolutionary impact. An examination of the financial plight of the Province in the 1930s will give an understanding of its willingness to part with some of its constitutional responsibilities. As the Provincial Government was the legislative and administrative mediator between the federal and municipal levels of relief, so it was the vital link for financial matters, the crucial aspect of relief policy. A detailed consideration of how the urban municipality met its weekly obligations is an important part of the subject under consideration here.

As the depression deepened the urban municipality was unable to finance relief from diminishing revenues on the scale required. The number of relief applicants increased as urban tax arrears mounted. Thus the costs of relief varied inversely with the ability to meet them. The sudden acceleration of direct relief costs and the methods adopted to finance them can be elucidated from the statistics in table 4.

The graph of city direct relief costs (Histogram 1) shows that these remained fairly constant in the late 1920s. Between 1929-30, however, relief expenditure doubled, while between 1930-31 it increased approximately seven times. Costs doubled again in 1932 and 1933. By 1933 direct relief costs were forty times as much as those of 1929. Even with the Federal and Provincial Governments bearing two-thirds of

Table 4

GOVERNMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF SASKATCHEWAN

DIRECT EXPENDITURE BY MUNICIPALITIES

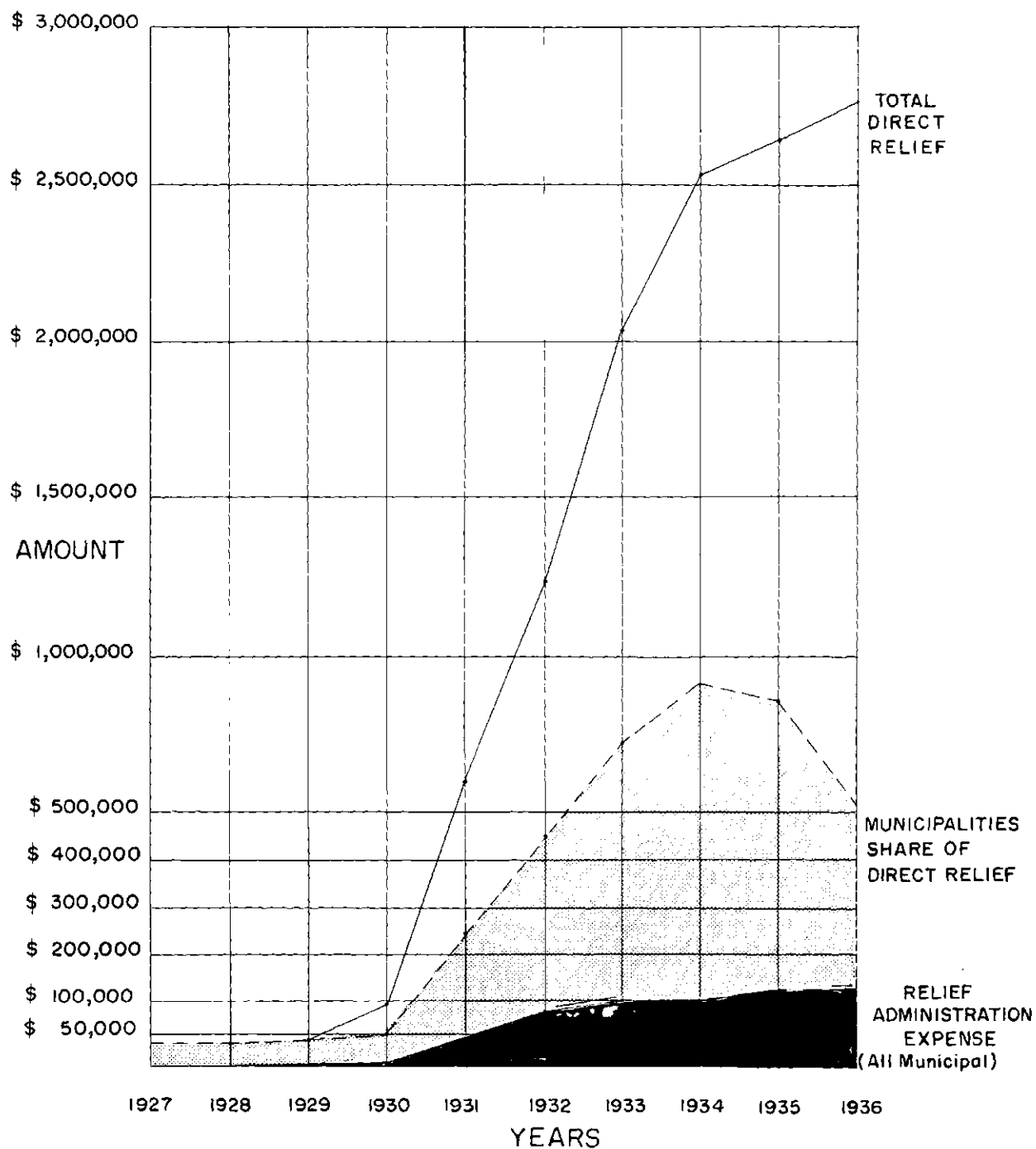
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ANALYSIS OF CITY DIRECT RELIEF 1927-1936

SOURCE - Saskatchewan Govt. submission to the Royal Commission
on Dominion-Provincial Relations. Volume II. Page 410

HISTOGRAM 1

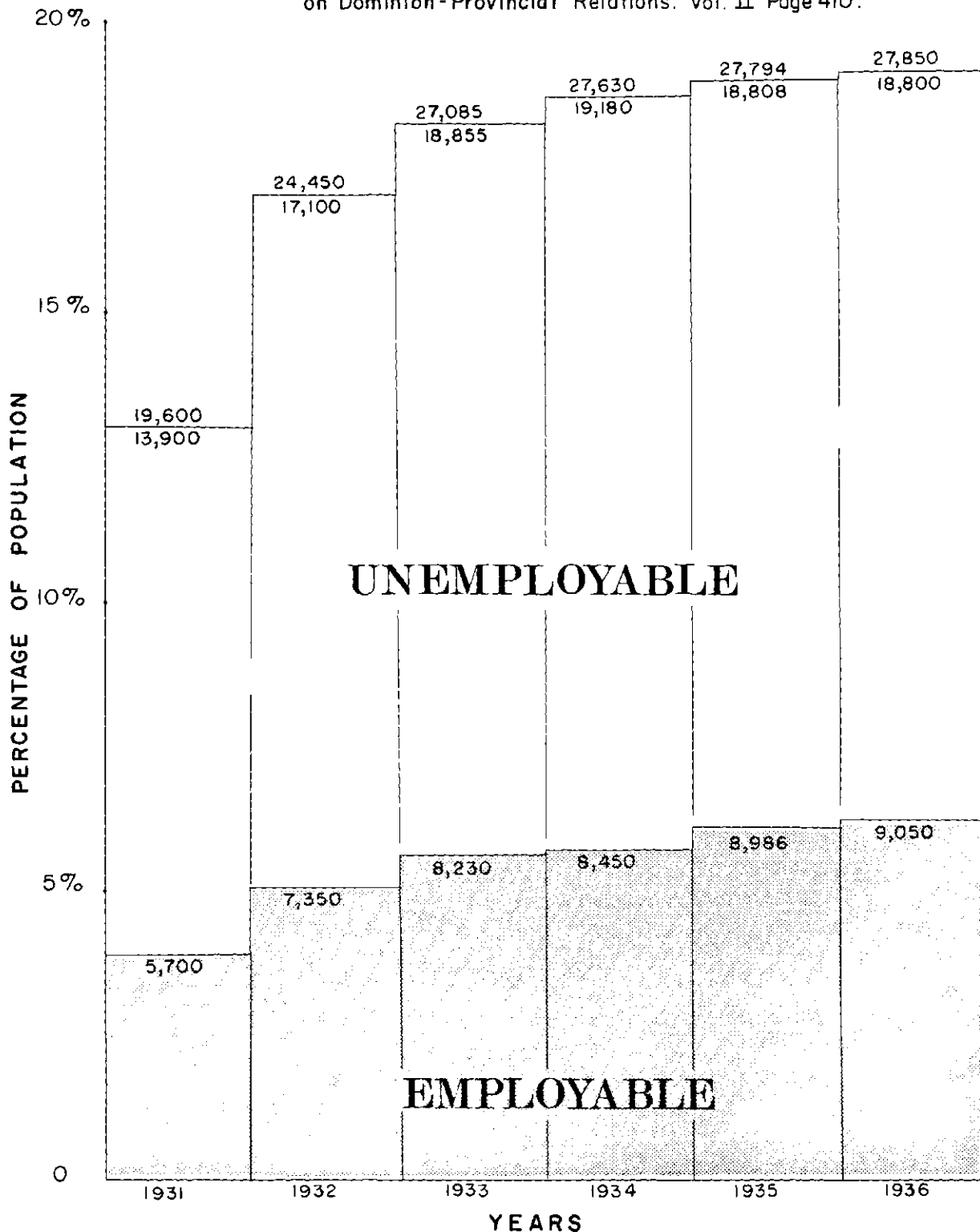


PERCENTAGE & NUMBERS OF PERSONS

(EMPLOYABLE & UNEMPLOYABLE)

ON RELIEF IN CITIES HISTOGRAM 2

SOURCE - Saskatchewan Govt. submission to the Royal Commission
on Dominion-Provincial Relations. Vol. II Page 410.



this expenditure in the first half of the period, and the Province contributing eighty per cent of direct relief costs after December, 1935, the actual cost of relief to the municipality was substantially increased. Added to this was the total cost of administration. Although the salaries of relief officials were reduced, the extra staff needed to cope with the numerous relief recipients offset any advantages derived from this economy. Administration costs formed a substantial part of municipal expenditure in the 1930s. From a relatively insignificant sum of \$2,646 in 1927, they reached \$108,363 in 1935, a figure over three times the amount spent on all direct relief in 1927. Increased costs were primarily the result of greater numbers requiring relief. The graph of the percentages of civic population on relief in the first half of the 1930s (Histogram 2) indicates the substantial numbers affected. In 1931 thirteen per cent of the cities' population were on relief, while in 1932 this figure had increased by thirty-five per cent, after which it remained fairly constant.

Obviously municipal tax levies were not designed to cope with relief on the scale illustrated here. There were two chief methods by which money for relief costs could be raised. Short term loans could be obtained pending the payment of provincial and federal shares of relief costs. The municipality gave promissory notes or treasury bills as security for such loans. However, the

only means open to an urban municipality to finance its own portion of relief expenditure was to apply to the Local Government Board for permission to issue debentures in favour of the Province. From the statistics in table 4 it can be seen that from 1932 onwards debenture issues financed a substantial part of city relief costs. Debentures were usually issued for a five-year period at a fixed interest rate. They did not solve the financial problems of the municipality, but merely postponed the day of reckoning. Debts accrued with interest. In 1935 the annual charges on city relief debentures were four times the costs of all direct relief advanced in 1927. The annual rate of taxation increased because of the necessity to repay debentures with interest.

Although the municipality applied to the Province and received capital with which to continue direct relief from that source, this was merely the first step in the complex system of relief financing. The Province itself found its share of the burden to be far in excess of its credit resources.

After 1932 its borrowing powers were gone. Henceforth the Dominion provided nearly the whole of the funds required for relief either by direct payment of the cost or by loans directly to the Province or by guarantees to the banks.¹²

12 R.S. Commission, vol. I, 170.

Some concept of the vast scale on which relief had to be advanced can be given by the following table of the costs and the shares born by the three levels of government; local, provincial and national.

Table 5. The Cost of Relief and Municipal-Provincial Finances, 1930-37

Source: Rowell-Sirois Commission, Vol. I, 169.

(Millions of Dollars)

	<u>1930</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1932</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1935</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1937</u>
Total Mun.-Prov.								
Current Revenues	41.5	37.9	39.4	38.7	36.5	36.8	35.4	38.3
Total Mun.-Prov.								
Current Expenditures ^a								
excluding Relief.....	43.0	41.0	39.4	38.5	38.1	37.6	35.7	36.7
Surplus available for								
Relief or Deficit....	1.5	3.1	-	.2	1.6	.8	.3	1.6
Total Relief Costs								
expended through								
Mun.-Prov. Agencies..	5.9	21.0	13.2	10.3	21.1	18.6	22.7	62.3
Deficiency of Mun.-								
Prov. Revenues.....	7.4	27.1	13.2	10.1	22.7	19.4	23.0	60.7
Less Share of Relief								
assumed by Dominion..	.5	7.9	7.1	2.4	8.0	7.2	11.3	27.5
Mun.-Prov. Deficit....	6.9	19.2	6.1	7.7	14.7	12.2	11.7	33.2
Dominion Loans to								
Province for Relief								
& General Purposes ^b ..	-	11.5	5.3	3.1	13.5	11.1	6.1	11.5
Seed Grain Bank Loans								
Guaranteed by								
Dominion	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.6	14.5

a Including municipal sinking fund contributions and debt retirement.

b \$17.7 million of these advances were written off by the Dominion in 1937.

In the period from 1930-37 it can be seen that municipal-provincial current revenues and expenditures, excluding relief costs, either balanced or incurred minor deficits. Relief costs, however, turned these minor sums into substantial deficits, ranging from \$7.4 million in 1930 to \$60.7 million in 1937. Dominion contributions to relief

costs reduced these deficits on average by approximately fifty per cent. Thirty-five per cent of the remainder was supplied by direct and guaranteed Dominion loans.¹³ Only about fifteen per cent of relief moneys was raised by the Province and municipalities. The municipalities were able to pay a very small part of this and resorted to debenture issues on a large scale, as has been shown. Thus the "Provincial Government undertook, either directly or indirectly, virtually the whole of the liability in excess of the Dominion share."¹⁴ The total debt of the Provincial Government more than doubled between 1930-37. Three-quarters of this increase was attributed to relief.¹⁵ The catastrophic results of the depression for Saskatchewan can be appreciated by the following comment from the Report of the Rowell-Sirois Commission;

In 1929 the per capita deadweight debt of the Province of Saskatchewan was the lowest in Canada with the exception of Quebec; in 1937 it was the highest.¹⁶

The problem of debt was not confined to the Provincial Government. It was a central concern of many of the inhabitants of Saskatchewan who had expanded their businesses or farms in the boom years of the late twenties, and found themselves in the 1930s with large debts and no means, or hope, of meeting them. Both the Anderson and Gardiner/Patterson Governments passed debt adjustment

13 Ibid., 170

14 Ibid., 170

15 Ibid., 170

16 Ibid., 170

legislation in an attempt to alleviate the problem. Debt adjustment measures were, therefore, a species of relief. Although these acts were aimed primarily at the farmer debtor, they could also work to the advantage of the urban householder, who found himself in arrears with mortgage payments. Unfortunately, it is impossible to estimate the relative importance of debt adjustment in urban relief. The most that can be said is that it was a further type of relief available to the urban dweller.

From a consideration of the financial and political aspects of relief in Saskatchewan in the depression, attention must now be focused on the framework through which relief policy was administered. Urban and rural relief were dealt with from the outset by separate authorities. Prior to the re-establishment of the Liberals in 1934, urban relief was superintended by the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries.¹⁷ This Department, in addition to overseeing direct relief expenditure and regulations, operated employment branches in urban centres, and supervised the urban municipalities public works programme, until it was abandoned in 1932. The Saskatchewan Relief Commission was established on August 25, 1931, to make rural relief during the Anderson period just and efficient. The Commission of five persons had one great advantage over the Department. It removed

¹⁷ Hereafter referred to as the Department.

relief administration from direct political control. During its three years of existence the Commission did important work. It ensured that relief schedules were standardized throughout the drought stricken area of the province by implementing price-fixing for relief goods.

Although the Commission was primarily concerned with rural relief, it was responsible for one aspect of urban relief, the care of the physically fit, single, homeless unemployed. There were three methods by which these persons could be relieved--farm employment, work camps or concentration camps. It was the last of these with which the Commission was concerned. These were the places where the single homeless were lodged pending their appointment to one of the other two schemes. Concentration camps were established at the Exhibition Grounds in Regina and Saskatoon, accommodating five hundred and four hundred men respectively. The Commission was responsible for the administration of these camps.¹⁸ Thus it became involved in relief administration in some of the larger urban centres.

In addition the Saskatchewan Relief Commission could take over the administration of relief in an urban municipality at the recommendation of the Department. In October, 1931, for example, the Commission took over the relief of several villages, sending one of its relief officers

¹⁸ Saskatchewan Relief Commission, (hereafter S.R.C.), roll A, file 1.

into each of these places to superintend relief. The centralized planning and control exerted by the Commission made for greater efficiency and justice in rural relief administration. Many villages and small towns petitioned for their relief to be taken over by the Commission. Invariably these requests were rejected. The fact that they were so frequently made draws attention to the major defect of urban relief in the 1930s--local responsibility with a consequent lack of uniformity and direction. Local self-government rather than a central organization had to attempt to cope with the problem of relief. As a result the function of the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries was that of an expert consultant who could offer advice when asked, but without the power to initiate policies and control administration which the Commission had. An unresolved mass of localisms bedevilled urban relief history from the outset.

The year 1931 witnessed more than a political change for Saskatchewan. The change in government occasioned alterations in relief administration. The Gardiner Government decided to close the Saskatchewan Relief Commission and to discontinue the Railways, Labour and Industries portfolio. The reason for these modifications was twofold: certain economies would be effected and relief activities would be brought under the control of one department. A distinction was therefore made between direct relief, or the provision of food, fuel, clothing and shelter, and agricultural aid,

or the provision of feed, seed and fodder.¹⁹ The former was administered until 1938 by the newly-created Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare, under the supervision of the Department of Municipal Affairs. After that date a direct relief branch within the same department took over. Agricultural aid was to be handled by the Department of Agriculture. All relief was to be brought more tightly under government control. From 1934 onwards the Liberal Government formed a cabinet relief committee to co-ordinate policies with the departments concerned. This increased governmental control can be attributed primarily to the change in the Federal Government's relief policy. The grant-in-aid system meant that the Province was responsible for the allotment of relief moneys. Since the monthly grant had to relieve thousands of Saskatchewan inhabitants it might have been thought advisable to keep a more watchful eye on relief administration in the interests of economy.

Although the departmental jurisdiction for urban relief changed in 1934, there was continuity of the personnel involved. This continuity is apparent in the career of Thomas M. Molloy, the Deputy Minister of the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries and the Commissioner of the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare. On Molloy's leaving government service his duties were assumed by W.H. Dawson,

19 C.A.R., 1934, 285.

who had been closely involved with relief administration for several years. Those in charge of the provincial departments responsible for relief had valuable experience in this field, and were well versed in the problems confronting urban municipalities, and the policies devised to cope with them. The long experience of the chief relief administrators was an invaluable asset. One of the major functions of the Department and the Bureau was to inform urban municipalities of new relief agreements and legislation, and answer enquiries and complaints from both municipal authorities and individual relief recipients. The correspondence of the Department and the Bureau was voluminous, and an examination of some aspects of it is indispensable to an understanding of the impact of relief policies in a particular locality.

Both Molloy and Dawson as co-ordinators of relief policy and administration, were inundated with query or protest letters. On the whole it appears that they were prompt and helpful correspondents to both the municipalities and individuals concerned. If a complaint was received from a relief recipient, a copy of the reply was forwarded to the municipality involved, together with a letter from Molloy or Dawson, referring the case to the municipality or asking for more information so that the matter could be clarified. There were three frequently occurring problems, which urban municipalities referred to the government. They will be considered in some detail since they indicate the main areas of concern of the

urban municipality, and will, therefore, provide a background for the local studies.

The major task confronting any relief applicant was to prove that he had the necessary residence qualifications which were a prerequisite to the granting of relief on a permanent basis. The major concern of the urban municipality was to ensure that only its bona-fide residents obtained relief at its expense. The Department and the Bureau became involved in cases of dispute. As an impartial third party it was the duty of these departments to ascertain where responsibility for relief lay. Usually in such cases the urban municipality would submit details of the indigent person's residence and employment record. Rulings were made in accordance with the stipulated residence requirements (six months self-sustaining residence prior to September, 1934, and twelve months thereafter). The decision of the Provincial Government departments was binding on the municipality. If the municipality itself was found responsible then the matter ended there. If an applicant was found to be the responsibility of another municipality, however, a new series of correspondence would ensue. The permission of the municipality responsible had to be obtained before an indigent person could be returned there. Some municipalities rather than having such persons returned, preferred to pay the costs of their relief to the municipality in which they were residing. This invariably made for complications.

Payments would fall off, and the indigent person would become dependent on the place where he was living, rather than that to which he belonged. Eventually the Provincial Direct Relief Act of 1936 enabled municipalities to sue each other for such relief expenditures.

There was a third possibility in these cases of dispute--an applicant might be the responsibility of no municipality. In such cases the indigent was declared to be homeless and unemployed, and relief was administered at the expense of the Federal and Provincial Governments. For the physically fit, single, homeless, there were farm labour and work camp schemes. Transient families and the physically unfit were relieved in the urban centre, through the municipal administration.

The second major problem submitted by the urban municipalities concerned deportation and transportation requests. The provincial agencies had to be consulted because they were usually asked to bear one-half of the costs. Deportation to the country of origin of an unnaturalized relief recipient, or transportation to a new area where an indigent person could become self-supporting, were two devices frequently used in the 1930s by Saskatchewan urban municipalities to reduce the numbers on their relief rolls. Before the Department or the Bureau would sanction a contribution towards transportation or deportation costs, written evidence had to be submitted to prove that the person

or persons concerned had homes and jobs to go to, and, therefore would be self-sufficient and not future relief burdens. This policy was enlightened, benefiting all three parties concerned. The relief recipient had a chance to make a new start, the Saskatchewan urban centre's financial and administrative burden was lightened, while the new place of abode had a potentially hard working resident.

Occasionally an individual transported to another part of Canada would find himself in need of relief again. In such a case he might be returned to his municipality of origin. This ruling also held for persons who had left Saskatchewan by their own devices, and had become indigents in other provinces. There was no dominion legislation defining what constituted provincial residence. Consequently the provinces made agreements among themselves to cope with relief residence problems. Early in 1936 agreements were made between Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario whereby families going from Saskatchewan into any of these provinces, without government assistance, were to be treated as residents of such provinces. Similarly families moving unaided into Saskatchewan were to be taken care of by the Saskatchewan Government.²⁰ This worked to the advantage of Saskatchewan, since the province was losing more prospective relief cases than it was gaining.

20 Saskatoon Relief Appeal Board Minutes, February 21, 1936.

The final and, in some respects, the most crucial point of contact between urban municipalities and the government relief departments concerned financial affairs. Although the Province and the Dominion assumed large percentages of relief costs eventually, the tragic flaw in the system of relief financing was that initial payments had to be made out of municipal revenues. Obviously no municipality had the ready cash to administer relief on a large scale. Money was borrowed from local banks to meet weekly expenses. At the end of each month accounts were submitted to the Department or the Bureau which in turn passed them on to the Provincial Treasurer, who finally forwarded them to the Federal Government. Payments came via the same route in reverse. There could be a two to six month time-lag in accounts being paid. During this period the bank loans would be gathering interest, none of which was added to the original estimate of relief expenditure. The municipal share could increase considerably because of this delay. In 1932, a Regina newspaper contained an interesting article about theoretical and actual municipal relief costs. It was calculated that with administration expenses, the interest on debts and the tardiness of payment of the dominion and provincial shares, Regina was in effect paying fifty per cent of direct relief costs, as opposed to the thirty-three and a third per cent stipulated.²¹

21 Regina Leader Post, July 20, 1932.

Occasionally, banks would refuse to make further advances to a municipality. The affected authority would then telegraph Molloy or Dawson and ask for immediate payment of provincial and dominion shares of relief, so that the next relief allowances could be made. The difficulties of the urban municipality in initially financing total relief rather than its actual share can be readily appreciated. There was little an urban centre could do in the face of such a system, other than to budget from one week to the next, and constantly petition for a redefinition of the constitutional responsibility for relief, and a reform of the whole administrative system.

In addition to informing municipalities of new relief agreements and answering complaints the Department and the Bureau fulfilled one other function in respect of urban relief. Both sent out suggestions for the improvement of relief administration. The circulars and memoranda which were sent out by these bodies were, in some respects, the most valuable part of their work. However, in considering these, it must be stressed that the provincial authorities could only suggest, and not force urban municipalities to adopt such ideas. Constant care was taken not to interfere with municipal autonomy:

The only policy laid down by the Government is that the Government will contribute two-thirds of the amount required to relieve distress due to unemployment in urban centres, where a serious unemployment situation exists, provided such relief is confined to the provision of food,

clothing, shelter and fuel and provided further, that only the necessities are supplied to the relief recipient, and that in all cases where the municipal council, or the relief organization contributes comforts and conveniences, or anything outside the necessities, the Government will expect the municipal organization to bear the full cost of such extras.²²

Here government intervention is seen in financial terms only. This negative attitude towards relief was very unfortunate since some of the provincial circulars, if they had been obligatory rather than permissive, would have made urban relief practice more efficient and just.

As early as 1932 the Department was issuing circulars describing the best methods of relief investigation and registration, rules for regular and emergency relief, and guides to the cost of direct relief and the amounts deductible for any earnings. The Bureau during its term of office sent out memoranda relating to topics such as drugs, fuel, cars, dependents' earnings and food schedules. This last subject was one in which the Bureau could take some initiative.

In October, 1933, it had been decided that the dietitians of the Universities of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba should collaborate to prepare standard food allowances for relief recipients in the three provinces.²³ The logical step from standardizing food allowances was to

22 L.P.W., roll 30, file 3. R.L.I. circular 28.

23 Regina Daily Star, October 10, 1933.

attempt price-fixing. The Bureau tried to do this indirectly. Urban municipalities were asked to submit monthly reports of the prices of food in their area. On the basis of this information the Bureau compiled food schedules and price lists, which were circulated among the local authorities. An idea of how much relief costs increased during the decade can be obtained from the following comparison.

Weekly Food Rates (as suggested by the Bureau)

<u>Number of Persons</u>	<u>1934-35</u>	<u>September 1, 1936</u>
1	\$ 4.50	\$ 6.40
2	7.00	10.30
3	8.00	12.40
4	9.00	14.50

In 1934-35 it was suggested that if a recipient could provide his own meat, ten per cent be deducted from the allowance. Ten per cent was also deducted if dairy products were available from a private source, and five per cent for potatoes similarly obtained. In 1936 these deductions had been raised to fifteen, ten and ten per cent respectively.²⁴ This regular information was a yardstick by which urban municipalities could attempt to standardize their provisions.

The Department and Bureau were also the medium through which economic nationalism was brought to the urban municipality. On December 15, 1931, a circular was sent out urging that all Canadian materials should be used where possible on public work schemes.²⁵ Economic provincialism

²⁴ L.P.W., roll 30, file 3.

²⁵ R.L.I., roll 40, file 5, circular December 15, 1931.

was apparent in another circular, when "for economy and employments sake" Molloy urged the use of only Saskatchewan lignite coal and wood for fuel allowances.²⁶ The natural tendency to favour local industries at a time of economic depression also manifested itself at the municipal level.

Although the function, policies and personnel of the two Provincial Government agencies responsible for relief administration during this period had many similarities, there were some important differences. The earlier Department tended to nurture municipal autonomy whereas the Bureau attempted to implement standardization policies. Thus the former favoured the multiplicity of application forms used by the various urban centres. The reason given for this is symptomatic of a parochial attitude towards relief--the larger towns and cities needed more information about relief applicants since they were not so well known to civic relief officers as village indigents were to their respective authority.²⁷ The reasoning which lay behind this attitude understood relief as an essentially local problem. Gradually there was a shift in emphasis. The length and depth of depression demanded some attempt at greater centralization and an equalization of benefits between the various urban municipalities. There was a need for increased uniformity and efficiency in urban relief administration. The

26 L.P.W., roll 30, file 28.

27 L.P.W., roll 30, file 3, circular 28 of the R.L.I.

Bureau responded to this pressure by such innovations as the price lists for food, and by appointing representatives in the urban centres from 1937 onwards to give assistance to local councils in relief administration. At stated periods these representatives had to submit a price list of the various commodities given to relief recipients. If the total cost of commodities varied more than five per cent in either direction then a revised food schedule was to be made.²⁸ There were both advantages and disadvantages in this government intervention. The pendulum could swing from excessive local variation to uniformity at any price. This potential danger was manifest in 1939. A municipality which had estimated its needs for butter, to be supplied by the Dominion, at a higher level than the average received a letter demanding that the estimate be reconsidered, and a warning:

In the event of our not hearing from you by that date (June 5), we will reduce the number of families to be provided for in your municipality to the average reported by other municipalities in the Province, where conditions appear to be somewhat similar.²⁹

Centralization became increasingly necessary after 1934, since with the grant-in-aid the Province was more directly in control of relief administration. After this date, urban municipalities were constantly urged to eliminate all wastage

28 Ibid., roll 38, file 41.

29 L.P.W., roll 30, file 3, letter May 29, 1939.

of relief allowances. The avowed aim of the Provincial Government was "to obtain a fair and equitable distribution of direct relief."³⁰ However, the lack of national unemployment policies limited what the Provincial Government could do, or was prepared to admit. In 1939, therefore, a circular sent out to the Field Men of the Department of Municipal Affairs, Direct Relief Branch, contained the same "official" attitude towards relief which had prevailed in 1929:

Prior to the inception of Federal and Provincial relief programmes municipalities--even in the best years had some relief problem. This they met from ordinary municipal funds without any question of Government assistance. You should make every effort to convince the municipalities in your district that they should reassume that responsibility.³¹

Thus direct relief policies in Saskatchewan remained substantially consistent for almost the whole depression period. Responsibility for urban relief rested with the municipality throughout. There were administrative changes for the purpose of greater efficiency and uniformity, but no fundamental reforms. However, the effect of the depression on attitudes to the problem of relief was comparable to that of a catalyst. Although there was little perceptible change in the 1930s, there seemed to be a burst of activity in the 1940s. The word 'relief' was replaced by that of 'welfare', and a major reorientation of policy accompanied this change.

30 Ibid., circular 334.

31 Ibid., circular 394, November 17, 1939.

The concept of curing an evil after it had appeared was replaced by the idea of preventing acute distress before it arose. Central planning and control became essential. The experience of the depression undoubtedly accelerated the process of reform, if it did not make it inevitable.

However, the central concern here is not the repercussions of the depression for the future, but its impact on contemporary urban society. To understand this fully a detailed study of certain urban centres is necessary. Three geographically representative centres have been chosen for this purpose; the city of Prince Albert, situated in the northern part of the settled region of Saskatchewan, the city of Saskatoon, located in the central part of the settled area, and the town of Shaunavon, situated in the southwestern corner of the Province.

The local studies which follow mark a change in approach from the general to the particular. To the urban municipality the relief problem was practical rather than theoretical. It was to be remedied by action rather than discussion. To the relief recipient the question of relief was neither constitutional, nor political, nor economic, nor administrative. It was simply a matter of where the next meal was coming from.

CHAPTER 3. PRINCE ALBERT

The City of Prince Albert during the 1930s fared a great deal better than most urban centres in Saskatchewan. The chief reason for this more favourable condition was geographical. Situated in the northern part of the inhabited region of the Province, Prince Albert was not subjected to the rigours of drought, dust storms and grasshopper invasions to anything like the same extent as its southern counterparts.

Some of the inhabitants of the city were quick to appreciate the relatively prosperous economic situation which they enjoyed. On July 28, 1931, the local newspaper carried the headline, "Prince Albert Progresses Despite the Depression,"¹ drawing attention to the new railway lines under process of construction, which promised to enlarge the city's trading territory, and an influx of new settlers which had placed unoccupied lands at a premium. This optimistic note was reiterated in an editorial in late 1933:

A fortunate city today is one which has been able to meet the requirements of the unemployment crisis, but yet maintain its strength for the renewed race of progress ahead.

Judged in this light, one will unhesitatingly declare that Prince Albert has been more fortunate than most cities in Western Canada....²

It was, therefore, no great surprise that Prince Albert was

1 Prince Albert Daily Herald, July 28, 1931.

2 Ibid., November 14, 1933.

found to be the fastest growing Prairie City in 1936.³

Although the city was comparatively well off during the depression years, this is not to suggest that there was neither suffering for its inhabitants, nor problems for its administration. The evidence which remains implies that there was plenty of both. Moreover, the very fortunate position of the city in some respects caused special problems. Rural dwellers from the surrounding districts and numerous transients were attracted to seek refuge within the city limits, thereby causing a perpetual headache to the municipal council and relief administration. One other factor must be borne in mind from the outset; the city finances prior to the depression were in a vulnerable state. A massive burden of debt from the ill-fated La Colle Falls power dam project of 1911 haunted the city throughout the decade. The city was paying \$139,600 yearly in interest on its consolidated debt, a major part of which consisted of expenses incurred by the dam.⁴ Civic finances, therefore, were not likely to be able to meet any extra expenditure for relief.

Unemployment relief was regarded as a municipal function by the Federal and Provincial Governments. These Governments had pursued a hesitating and vacillating policy since the beginning of the depression. The proposals of the

3 Ibid., September 19, 1936.

4 G. Abrams, Prince Albert; The First Century, 1866-1966, (Saskatoon, 1966), 326.

Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities to the Rowell-Sirois Commission drew attention to their plight, faced as they were by a lack of leadership and central initiative:

The municipalities have never known from one year to the next, and sometimes from one day to the next, to what extent the Federal or Provincial Governments would share in the costs of providing for the unemployed.

Nor have they known on what basis such relief would be forthcoming. The administration of relief, as a consequence, has proven a nightmare to local government.⁵

The full impact of the relief policies of the senior governments was felt at the municipal level. To what extent did this experience prove to be a nightmare to the City of Prince Albert?

Throughout the 1930s the municipal council was prepared to accept responsibility for relief applicants who had the necessary bona-fide residence qualification. Initially relief was dealt with by the Health and Relief Committee of the council at weekly council meetings. However, as the numbers of relief recipients increased, this body found it expedient to appoint a sub-committee to deal exclusively with relief matters. On September 29, 1931, a Special Relief Committee was formed. At first the major function of the Special Committee was to assist the unemployed and the council in establishing a medium whereby the most needy civic cases would secure first preference in any city relief

5 Prince Albert Daily Herald, January 25, 1938.

work. When public works schemes were abandoned in 1932, the committee became responsible for enforcing various aspects of civic direct relief policy: for example, on or after February 1, 1933, families changing their place of residence were supposed to obtain the permission of the committee.⁶

The relief policies pursued by the Prince Albert Council differed in some details from those followed in other urban centres in the Province. Initially direct relief was issued by the voucher system. Food vouchers for a specified amount at a named store were issued at weekly or two weekly intervals. Fuel vouchers for two cords of wood were given at monthly intervals in the winter months, and clothing and shoe vouchers were provided as needs arose. These vouchers were exchangeable at local stores. Rent allowances were usually paid directly to the landlord concerned. In April, 1935, the Health and Relief Committee decided to experiment with cash rather than voucher relief for the food allowance of certain recipients. Cash was to be paid only to those who worked for their food allowance, and it was to be available at the end of each day's work. The great advantage to the recipient of cash relief rather than a voucher was that it enabled him to buy exactly the articles he required, at the stores of his choice. Thus he could budget for the extras

6 Prince Albert Relief Records.

which the voucher system failed to provide. The disadvantage of cash relief, as far as the authorities were concerned, was that irresponsible recipients could squander their allowance. It was established, therefore, that relief recipients who "abused the cash system to the detriment of their dependents" were to be re-instated on the voucher system.⁷ The following summary of the allowance given to a family of five persons in April, 1936, indicates the amounts allowed to recipients for their various needs. The grocery allowance was \$18.90 per month, rent \$10.00 per month, fuel in season \$8.00 to \$16.00 per month, water \$1.25 and light \$1.00 to \$1.50. In addition, clothing, medical and hospital care, drugs, a garden lot, seed, sugar for canning and cod liver oil for children were provided free of charge.⁸

In return for granting relief, a municipality could demand either a promise of repayment or work in lieu of payment from a recipient. Throughout the period the city of Prince Albert favoured the latter. As Mayor Fraser explained to Molloy in 1936:

This city has never required any Relief recipient to give an undertaking to repay advances made by way of Relief, but it has from the outset adopted the policy of requiring Relief recipients, where physically capable, of performing certain labour or rendering certain services to the City for Relief assistance rendered, and this policy is still in effect.⁹

7 Health and Relief Committee Minutes, April 29, 1935.

8 Prince Albert Daily Herald, April 4, 1935.

9 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41, Fraser to Molloy, March 16, 1936.

Prince Albert was one of the few urban centres to extract work as token payment for relief advanced. This policy was a source of continual trouble to the city. When public works on a large scale were finished in 1932, recipients were required to perform more menial tasks, such as cutting wood or clearing snow. As the city demanded work from recipients, recipients began to petition for wages for their work, for cash payment rather than relief allowances. They argued that they were performing tasks usually undertaken by civic employees, and therefore deserved proper remuneration. The City Council refused to concede this point, claiming that if such work were not done by relief recipients it would not be done at all. The plea for "work and wages," however, continued to be heard in Prince Albert throughout the whole decade and climaxed in a strike in 1936.

The necessary corollary of demanding work from able-bodied relief recipients was that anyone who refused to work was cut off relief. Such a policy meant close co-ordination between relief and employment services. On July 10, 1933, it was resolved that the civic Relief Officer should give a list of all unemployed persons to the Provincial Employment Officer in Prince Albert. The latter was to notify the Relief Officer immediately of any persons refusing jobs, so they might be "struck off the relief list".¹⁰ Moreover, all

10 Health and Relief Committee Minutes, July 10, 1933.

men on relief were required to register at the Provincial Employment Office and had to report regularly, to try to find jobs.¹¹ These rules were rigorously enforced.

Both the relief committees functioned in close association with the two key figures in relief administration, the Relief Officer and the Medical Officer of Health. Throughout the depression the former was R. Gilbert and the latter Dr. D.P. Miller. Experience proved that continuity of personnel had both advantages and disadvantages. At best it made for consistency and uniformity in the administration of relief. Gilbert had a fortunately long memory, which served both to embarrass relief officials in Regina and save Prince Albert money. In 1936, while he was absent from the city, his deputy had agreed to accept responsibility for a certain relief family. On his return Gilbert dispatched a very forthright letter to the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare disclaiming this responsibility by referring to litigation which had occurred in 1932 over the same family, and which had freed Prince Albert from such responsibility.¹² Since numerous people were on and off relief throughout the 1930s, a great deal of time was saved by the fact that Gilbert could quickly refresh his memory of a certain case history, and determine the validity

11 Ibid., July 14, 1933.

12 Prince Albert Relief Records.

of the latest appeal. He became an expert in distinguishing cases of genuine hardship and need from those of indolence and false pretences. Similarly, Miller's long experience of relief medical work enabled him to separate the genuine from the sham.

However, the fact that relief administration and medical work was so dependent on these two persons brought its problems. Relief recipients, who fared ill at the hands of either man naturally allowed their resentment to become personal. One disgruntled recipient complained to Commissioner Molloy in 1935:

There has been some talk of there being a Dictator in this country. There is certainly one in the relief office in the City of Prince Albert and it is almost time there was an investigation in the administration of relief in this city.¹³

Such accusations were hardly taken seriously. However, there was a steady stream of complaints. Frequently, local lawyers wrote to the provincial departments on behalf of indigents. One such lawyer has estimated that over fifty per cent of all his work in this period was concerned with relief cases. He received no payment for these services.¹⁴

There was a real danger that overexposure to relief problems could make for a harshness of response on the part

13 L.P.W., roll 34, file 41, letter Mr. C. to Molloy September 7, 1935.

14 Interview with J.J.F. MacIsaac, May 15, 1968.

of administrators. An article written for the Saskatoon Star Phoenix in April, 1937, referred in colourful language to the plight of one of the notorious Prince Albert relief recipients: "The Unemployed of Prince Albert are living at a point of semi-starvation, treated more like cattle than as human beings."¹⁵ The recipient himself then wrote letters of complaint, to which Junius Jonsson, the superintendent of utilities and clothing relief, took exception. Jonsson threatened to put the trouble-maker off relief unless he apologized. The complainant was reinstated only after the intervention of a local lawyer, who defended his right to "freedom of speech". Gilbert periodically became incensed at certain persistent relief applicants. Occasional victimisations, however, can be understood if the position and actions of the civic relief officer are more closely analysed.

Throughout the decade the task of administering relief to all classes of relief recipients in the city fell on the Relief Officer. The main idea behind using the same unit of administration was to ensure that relief given within the city limits was of a universal standard. Gilbert applied the same rules to transient cases as he did to bona-fide residents, and the need for economy was a priority in both. Unfortunately, there was a limit to the equalization of

¹⁵ L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

benefits which he tried to impose. In 1934 the Prince Albert relief office made arrangements to supply garden seed for families on relief, and vacant city property was made available for garden purposes. Gilbert asked Molloy if the Government would furnish seeds for transient families.¹⁶ Molloy refused. The aim of the Government was to make such persons self-sustaining and employed as soon as possible, not "to encourage them to remain in Prince Albert and put in gardens."¹⁷

Gilbert was nominally in charge of direct relief administration. However, because the Provincial Government was contributing towards the cost he constantly needed permission before certain aspects of relief could be granted. The Government's response was unpredictable. Usually regulations were strongly enforced. Occasionally, they would be relaxed. One Government case, receiving relief in Prince Albert wanted thirty-five dollars to provide lumber for floors, roof, doors and windows so that she could repair a cabin at Witchikin Lake. Then she hoped to live there on her eight dollars a month mother's allowance, and no longer be a relief burden. Her request was refused by the Department of Railways, Labour and Industries since direct relief shelter allowances could be given only for the payment of rent. A similar narrow application of rules occurred when a request was made on behalf of another Government responsibility for

16 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41, Gilbert to Molloy April 16, 1934.

17 Ibid., Molloy to Gilbert, April 18, 1934.

a set of false teeth. Gilbert was informed: "Our regulations do not permit of us buying false teeth and regret that nothing can be done towards supplying her with a new set."¹⁸ Apparently money was available for shelter and food, but contributions to materials which were the prerequisites for these were forbidden. In contrast to this apparent harshness, however, were cases in which the provincial department readily agreed to pay fifty per cent of the cost of transporting persons to their home countries.

The civic relief office was the medium through which the effects of the different relief policies and agreements between the Dominion, the Province and the Municipality were passed on to the relief recipient. The locality felt the full force of any changes, major or minor, in such agreements. An illustration of the grave consequences of an apparently slight change in federal policy can be seen in certain events of 1936. In that year the Liberal Government closed the relief camps and arranged for the men relieved therein to be given railway construction employment. Prince Albert had much difficulty getting men to work on this scheme. There was a constant stream of complaints about working conditions and wages. One Prince Albertan saw the closing of the camps as a means of "placing the railroads on relief. The closing down of Bennett's relief camps is to be used as

¹⁸ L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

an excuse for making another subsidy to the C.P.R."¹⁹

Similarly when the Federal Government introduced the grant-in-aid in 1934 it had repercussions in the city. The Dominion made the provinces responsible for the care of the single homeless unemployed at this time. Saskatchewan gave the charge to the cities. In Prince Albert, from the early years of the decade until November, 1934, such persons had been looked after in the Immigration Hall. Costs had been paid by the federal and provincial authorities. On November 15, the Hall was scheduled to close. Mayor Fraser wrote to Molloy asking what was to be done with the physically unfit persons living there. He was told that Prince Albert was to be responsible for their care, since the individuals concerned had obtained residence qualifications in the city.²⁰ Events such as these could augment municipal relief burdens to a considerable extent.

Added burdens such as these were alleviated by the voluntary help which the relief office received from local organizations. The Social Service Bureau was the central agency around which voluntary efforts revolved in Prince Albert. This was responsible for raising money for Christmas extras for relief recipients, and distributing milk and clothes to the needy throughout the year. The Bureau was

19 Prince Albert Daily Herald, March 14, 1936, extract from a letter from "Musty".

20 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41, Molloy to Fraser, November 6, 1934.

kept going by the Elks' Christmas Fund, Rotary Club Apple Days and the Kiwanis Old Clothes Drive.²¹

One of the interesting features of the depression is that distress seems to have led to neighbourliness rather than niggardliness within the community. The less one had, the less there was to lose in sharing it. In a time of poverty there was a greater need for communities to pool their resources and efforts. Thus in October, 1930, the Daily Herald carried this advertisement:

"Buy Prince Albert Products
And Give Employment to Local Workmen."²²

This appeal for patronage of local industry was a manifestation of a common phenomenon during the depression. In 1931 an advertisement urged readers to buy Prince Albert, Canadian and British Empire Products in that order of importance. Foreign goods were to be purchased only as a last resort. The idea behind this was to contribute to the prosperity of "your city, nation and the British Empire, at the same time as you provide for your daily wants."²³

From a consideration of the impact of the depression on local policy and attitudes, attention must now be focused on its consequences for the city, both financial and demographical.

21 Prince Albert Daily Herald, November 24, 1934.

22 Ibid., October 13, 1930.

23 Ibid., July 28, 1931.

The population of Prince Albert increased by approximately 23 per cent during the decade. In 1931 there were 9,905 inhabitants in the city. This figure increased to 10,000 in 1932, 11,050 in 1936, and 12,290 in 1941.²⁴ of this population it was calculated in the early years of the depression that 11.82 per cent were on relief.²⁵ In the later years, on the average, between ten and fourteen per cent were receiving aid, actual numbers varying according to season. These people were relieved by the two methods already referred to; public works schemes and direct relief.

Initially the city favoured public works as the most constructive methods of alleviating unemployment distress. Between 1930 and 1931 a sum of seventy thousand dollars was expended for this purpose, Prince Albert paying fifty per cent of this and the Dominion and the Province contributing twenty-five per cent each.²⁶ In 1931-32 a total of \$89,985.45 was spent on public works. The Dominion this time paid fifty per cent, the Province fifteen per cent and the city thirty-five per cent.²⁷ Under the latter agreement sixty per cent of the appropriation was to be spent on labour, and the remainder on materials. The scope of the work was therefore limited. The main works undertaken were sewer and water extensions

24 City Prospectus, August 20, 1954, prepared by City Commissioner, J.W. Oliver.

25 R.L.I. Third Annual Report, 1931-32.

26 R.L.I. Fourth Annual Report, 1932, 12 and 58.

27 Ibid., 45.

and street improvements. A paving project was begun employing two hundred and fifty men, but the work stopped after three weeks, when the government grants had been spent.²⁸ With the abandonment of public works relief by the Dominion in 1932, direct relief was resorted to in Prince Albert on an ever-increasing scale, as the statistics in Table 6 illustrate.

From Table 6 it can be seen that there was a major increase in direct relief costs between 1931 and 1932. In 1932 relief was almost six times the amount it had been in 1931. Between 1932 and 1933 there was another substantial increase; costs nearly doubled. In 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936 relief expenditure remained fairly constant. However, in 1937 and 1938, the worst years of drought in the Province's history, relief costs once again mounted, increasing by approximately one-third. From 1938 onwards there was a gradual return to normal. The coming of war in 1939 helped to clear the relief rolls, since many unemployed young men enlisted. This is a very brief analysis of the pattern of relief costs in the depression decade. In addition to alterations in the degree of relief from year to year, there were considerable fluctuations in relief costs and the numbers of recipients from month to month. Table 7 indicates relief and administration costs, and the numbers assisted for two consecutive years, 1936 and 1937.

²⁸ Prince Albert Daily Herald, September 30 and October 22, 1931.

Table 6. Annual Cost of Unemployment Relief in Prince Albert, 1929-45

(Source: Financial Statements of Prince Albert, 1929-45)

Year	General Unemployment Relief	Transients' Wages	Total Cost	Share borne by Dominion & Prov- incial Governments	Share borne by Prince Albert	Debentures issued to finance Prince Albert share
1929	\$ 3,600.57	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3,600.57	\$ -
1930	5,063.39	-	-	-	-	-
1931	7,054.50	-	-	-	-	-
1932	41,581.35	-	41,581.35	27,504.04	14,077.21	-
1933	79,852.93	-	80,870.46	53,344.72	27,525.74	19,000.00
1934	84,679.06	-	84,679.06	55,202.01	29,477.05	24,000.00
1935	86,730.71	-	86,730.71	56,334.93	30,395.78	23,000.00
1936	77,809.08	12,433.35	90,242.43	70,139.43	20,102.79	12,000.00
1937	117,935.26	8,910.65	126,845.91	99,539.11	27,306.80	19,000.00
1938	128,476.41	6,412.80	134,889.21	107,737.90	27,151.31	18,500.00
1939	112,549.23	6,037.85	118,587.08	94,711.08	23,876.00	16,000.00
1940	102,357.28	6,265.70	108,622.98	86,341.20	22,281.78	-
1941	52,924.49	2,757.60	55,682.09	41,990.02	13,692.07	-
1942	-	-	25,459.52	16,737.68	8,721.84	-
1943	-	-	17,967.43	9,507.81	8,459.62	-
1944	-	-	15,974.89	7,751.46	8,223.43	-
1945	-	-	21,898.22	-	-	-

Table 7. Relief and Administration Costs in Prince Albert, 1936 and 1937

(Source: L.P.R., Roll 36, file 41)

Date	Total Fide Residents - Direct Relief	Numbers Assisted	100% Transient Families -		Numbers Assisted	Single Transients -		Numbers Assisted	Transient Administration
			Direct Relief	Transients -		Direct Relief	Transients -		
1936									
January	7,494.17	1,232	\$ 315.02		141	\$ 33.50		-	\$ -
February	7,361.27	1,265	1,003.40		199	92.25		5	49.00
March	6,860.21	1,234	764.98		169	97.00		5	37.75
April	6,001.05	1,197	708.60		169	103.50		5	39.30
May	6,865.84	1,148	757.06		148	63.00		5	31.25
June	4,283.46	580	475.68		124	63.00		6	35.75
July	3,019.08	654	459.44		99	45.00		4	27.25
August	2,663.70	347	339.93		81	45.00		3	23.50
September	2,680.30	544	308.95		70	45.00		3	18.50
October	2,893.07	430	511.64		97	58.93		3	24.75
November	4,374.67	672	699.99		120	45.00		3	34.75
December	6,111.14	889	1,158.07		163	45.00		3	46.00
1937									
January	7,328.97	1,267	1,349.15		211	37.50		3	63.00
February	7,612.97	1,140	1,543.11		220	30.00		2	59.00
March	8,021.71	1,259	1,542.93		210	30.00		2	61.00
April	8,076.63	1,291	1,383.50		207	17.50		2	60.25
May	8,022.22	1,199	1,372.82		208	15.00		1	57.00
June	6,807.19	1,050	1,345.87		216	15.00		1	60.75
July	5,480.39	985	1,072.60		209	15.00		1	55.75
August	5,596.81	990	1,268.08		217	7.50		1	57.00
September	5,993.17	1,020	1,229.99		212	-		-	56.00
October	5,735.02	1,024	2,081.57		252	24.00		1	65.75
November	7,214.05	1,001	1,944.52		285	24.00		1	76.75
December	8,461.61	1,174	2,122.71		326	24.00		1	93.25

The annual pattern, which emerges from an examination of these statistics is that relief costs and the numbers of recipients were at their highest in January, February, March and April, gradually reducing to their lowest point in August or September, and then slowly increasing again. The decreased numbers in the summer months were attributable to the unemployed finding work on farms or in the city. Decreased costs were due both to reduced numbers and the fact that no fuel allowances were given in the warmer months. The difference in relief costs for these two years illustrates the impact of drought upon an urban centre. A comparison of the monthly totals for the first six months in 1936 and 1937 shows a slight increase in direct relief costs for bona-fide residents, and a considerable increase for transient families. For the second half of the year, when the results of severe drought were fully felt, the disparity between the two sets of figures is proportionately greater. It is, however, important to realize that increased costs did not merely indicate increased numbers. The actual per capita cost of relief could also increase. It was estimated that relief costs increased \$12,385.61 during the first six months of 1937, in comparison with the corresponding period of 1936. If the numbers of persons relieved in these two periods are considered, it is evident that increased costs were not

primarily attributable to increased numbers. The per capita cost of relief must have altered. It was, in fact, calculated that the average monthly increase in the numbers of relief recipients in the 1937 period was 8.6%, while the monthly average increase in relief costs was 28.8%.²⁹

Direct relief costs were shared among the Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments. Prior to December, 1935, Prince Albert paid one-third of these costs. After that date, until the end of the decade the city contributed only twenty per cent. Direct relief, as defined by the senior governments included only the provision of food, fuel, clothing and shelter. The city bore administration, medical, hospital and dental expenses for its bona-fide relief charges. Prince Albert's share of direct relief was always greater than the third or fifth laid down in the agreements. In May, 1933, Mayor Sibbald complained to H. McConnell, Minister of Municipal Affairs, that the city was contributing forty-five per cent of relief costs while the other governments paid only twenty-seven and a half per cent each. The Mayor blamed this disparity on the hospitalization and administration expenses which the city had to pay.³⁰ The council constantly urged that the city assume a smaller percentage of relief costs. This plea went unanswered. Municipal finances could

29 Prince Albert Daily Herald, July 27, 1937.

30 Department of Municipal Affairs, Administration Branch, Municipal Corporation Files, Prince Albert.

not cope with the increased burdens, and so borrowing was resorted to on a large scale.

As the numbers of relief recipients increased, tax arrears mounted.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Tax Arrears</u>
1932	\$ 56,212.21
1933	99,041.31
1934	86,068.65
1935	90,817.83
1936	106,353.31
1937	213,049.71
1938	143,812.27
1939	123,696.52
1940	116,180.30 31

Borrowing was therefore the only means of meeting current expenses. Relief was financed by debenture issues. From Table 6 it can be seen that approximately seventy-five per cent of the city's share of relief was financed in this way. The procedure for debenture issues was fairly straightforward. A Bylaw would be passed allowing the city to raise or borrow money on "the credit and security of the city at large for the purpose of assisting in defraying a portion of the cost of direct relief."³²

Initially, debentures were issued for a five year period at six and a half per cent interest rate. However, in the middle and later years of the depression the length of time to pay back these loans was increased to ten and

31 City Prospectus, August 20, 1954.

32 Department of Municipal Affairs, Municipal Corporation Files, Prince Albert Bylaw No. 5, March 26, 1934.

twenty year periods.³³ In the nine year period ending in 1938, it was estimated that the city had spent \$357,000 on unemployment relief. It had borrowed \$96,500 from the electric light trust fund to meet these costs, and had a debt with the bank of \$136,000.³⁴ The need to find credit sources was only one of the financial problems to beset the city during this decade.

On several occasions during this period the council had found itself without money to meet weekly relief needs. The constant time-lag between submitting accounts to Regina and Ottawa, and receiving payment in return, was a real problem for local officials. In July and August, 1934, telegrams were dispatched to Molloy asking for immediate payment of outstanding accounts.³⁵ On December 30, 1937, City Clerk L.W. Andrew, had to resort to this tactic again. In April, 1938, the city was still waiting to be reimbursed for the relief costs of November, 1937.³⁶ This constant shortage of money meant that relief was of necessity given in small units. Food had to be administered on a weekly or two weekly basis, when it would have been more economical for the trustworthy recipient to buy in quantity once per month.

33 Ibid.

34 G. Abrams, op. cit., 330, Prince Albert City Clerk's Papers; 1946 Debt Negotiations, Report of the Local Government Board.

35 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

36 Ibid.

The number of transients who came to the city was a far greater problem to local relief organizers. As early as November, 1930, the city was troubled. It would appear that the Provincial Government had advertised "throughout the length and breadth of the province" its plans to set up camps, including one at the Prince Albert National Park, in which the unemployed men could be gainfully occupied. Hundreds of persons therefore flocked to Prince Albert in anticipation of the opening of these camps. By November, 1930, seven hundred unemployed men had registered in the city, only two hundred and ten of whom had resided there for more than six months.³⁷ This percentage in proportion to the population of the city was higher than at any other point in the Province.³⁸

The Health and Relief Committee of the council disclaimed all responsibility for their relief. To discourage further invasions they issued a warning notice which was placed in Post Offices, Railway Stations, Employment Offices and published in the Saskatoon Star Phoenix, the Regina Daily Star and the Leader Post:

It has come to our notice that a great number of unemployed are under the impression that work is available in this part of the Province, with the result that an influx of transient unemployed

37 Prince Albert Daily Herald, November 20, 1930.

38 Ibid.

to Prince Albert has taken place away beyond possibility of placement. Consequently, suffering and hardship is being experienced by these men. The City cannot take care of these transients and, therefore, any addition to those already here will only increase the suffering.³⁹

Although this early invasion was one of the most severe in the decade, the transient problem remained. The transient population varied considerably. From the statistics contained in Table 7 it would appear that there were on the average between one hundred twenty-five to one hundred fifty individuals each month in 1936, and approximately two hundred per month in 1937. For the period after 1937 information is lacking.

In the early years of the depression, Prince Albert had to pay the cost of the administration and medical services given to transients. However, in 1933 the Provincial Government agreed to pay transients' doctors' bills at half the price of the regular fee, and also hospital expenses, provided that official permission had been granted prior to treatment.⁴⁰ In 1935, a similar advance was made for administration costs. One dollar and twenty-five cents per family per month could be charged for each transient family, in excess of ten, given relief through the municipal office. This provision was backdated to September 1, 1934.⁴¹

39 Health and Relief Committee Minutes, November 27, 1930.

40 L.P.W., roll 39, file 40.

41 Ibid., roll 36, file 41.

Administration costs recorded for 1936 and 1937 indicate that the city received between twenty and ninety dollars a month from this source. (See statistics Table 7.)

These modifications did help to alleviate the burden of transients upon the city in a financial sense, but their very presence was a source of constant irritation to the relief officer and tax-paying residents. Many of the transient families were the responsibility of other municipalities. Unfortunately, their councils were not prepared to accept them as relief responsibilities. One of the most difficult problems confronting the provincial relief administration was to devise a method whereby municipalities could be prevented from "unloading their relief problems by encouraging the migration of indigents to the nearest urban municipality."⁴²

Prince Albert seemed particularly susceptible to invasions from Batoche. In 1936, Relief Officer Gilbert commented: "From relief registrations made recently it appears that practically half of Batoche now live in the City of Prince Albert."⁴³ The infiltration process was gradual. A family would sell or sublet their land in Batoche, move to Prince Albert, support themselves for the necessary one year to become bona-fide residents, and then

⁴² L.P.W., roll 39, file 40, Molloy to T.C. Davies, M.L.A. for Prince Albert, June 11, 1933.

⁴³ Ibid., roll 39, file 41, Gilbert to Molloy, January 30, 1936.

apply for relief. Friends and relatives would be encouraged to come and enjoy life on relief in Prince Albert, and the whole process mushroomed.

At the end of 1936, it was alleged that one family of fourteen persons had moved into the city with gasoline provided by the government inspector in their area. This particular incident, whether true or false, aroused the anger of the local newspaper. "Why should Prince Albert be made the goat for surrounding municipalities who pack off their jobless to the city?"⁴⁴ In March, 1936, it was estimated that forty-four per cent of relief recipients had arrived in the city since 1930.⁴⁵ It was contended that if only bona-fide residents had needed relief, "the problem would have been a simple one."⁴⁶ The influx was resented for more than financial reasons. The newcomers were often agitators and trouble-makers, or so many officials believed. The transient problem was related to the other major difficulty experienced by the city in this period--disputes between relief recipients and the council.

As early as April, 1931, this identification was being made by the local newspaper. The Herald noted with alarm that "men of all ages and nationalities" were coming

⁴⁴ Prince Albert Daily Herald, December 30, 1936.

⁴⁵ Ibid., March 28, 1936.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

into the city by the box car route and commented:

It is understood that the agitation now going on is part of a general Dominion wide movement to cause unrest. The rumoured or alleged "Red" activities reported (here) are the first to rear their heads here, at least this winter.⁴⁷

During the first half of the 1930s there was a steady stream of criticism of Prince Albert relief administration and policies by recipients. Some charged that the council was draining the provincial and federal treasuries to provide work for the unemployed,⁴⁸ while others demanded increases in the hourly rates of pay to relief workers.⁴⁹

Events climaxed in a strike in 1936. Discontent gathered momentum in the early months of that year. In January the local branch of the Saskatchewan Union of the Unemployed had petitioned the Provincial Government to assume responsibility for the administration of relief and clothing in the city. The origins of the strike lay in two major interrelated causes. The relief recipients objected on principle to the council's policy of making the able-bodied work for their relief, and they found the conditions under which they had to work intolerable.

On February 11 one hundred members of the local union of the unemployed asked the city council for payment of relief

47 Ibid., April 21, 1931.

48 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

49 Health and Relief Committee Minutes, November 6, 1933.
Petition from the Prince Albert Unemployed Married Men's Association October 30, 1933.

without work, when temperatures dropped below minus twenty degrees, and for the payment of relief wages to any member of a worker's family.⁵⁰ This latter request was to enable relief families to obtain their food money more quickly. Under the regulations set up in April, 1935, the worker himself had to collect his wages at the end of each day's work. If he was working out of the city, the relief office would be closed by the time of his return and his families would go hungry. The council granted these two requests. However, one month later trouble flared up once again. On March 10 W.E.Halliday, the president of the local union, accused the council of breaking its agreement. A week later he further charged the city with misappropriation of funds contributed by the Federal and Provincial Governments. The city had allegedly used this money for its own works projects and had used cheap rate relief workers, putting regular workers out of a job. One member of the council responded to Halliday's charges by ordering an investigation into the cost of his relief to the city. It was calculated that between 1931-36 a total of \$2,195.55 had been spent on direct relief, hospitalization, clothing and employment granted to this man and his family.⁵¹ It was hardly surprising that tax-payers became angry when relief recipients complained.

50 Prince Albert Daily Herald, February 12, 1936.

51 Ibid., March 17, 1936.

Halliday's accusations were only the first of many. A group of two hundred and fifty relief recipients presented their demands to a council meeting on March 23, and threatened that failure to meet them would precipitate a walkout. They wanted the abolition of the present relief system, and a work and wages programme of forty cents an hour established in its place. If this was not financially possible, then they were prepared to accept relief without work, such as was available to indigents in Regina.⁵² This was antithetical to the council's "no relief without work" policy. Mayor Fraser informed the gathering that the city could not meet such demands. A central reason given for this refusal was the infiltration of outside families, who had swollen the civic relief burden

It is the influx of families from outside who desired to qualify for relief in the city that has made the burden an intolerable one, as far as the city's taxpayers are concerned.⁵³

A strike was scheduled for March 30.

While preparing for the strike, the local Union of Unemployed exhausted various channels to try to set negotiations in motion. They were reluctant strikers from the outset. C. Stewart, Secretary of the Prince Albert Branch of the Union, wrote to Commissioner Molloy urging him to come as negotiator, since "the council was being accused of

52 Ibid., March 24, 1936.

53 Ibid., March 28, 1936.

misappropriation of eighty per cent of relief moneys contributed by the governments".⁵⁴ Relief workers, it was contended, were being employed on sewer projects, which should have been done by city workers. This amounted to 'forced labour'. Such work should be done for a decent hourly wage and not as a prerequisite to relief. Molloy immediately consulted the council on this matter, and was informed that, if the work referred to had not been done by relief recipients, it would not have been done at all. This answer satisfied Molloy, and he informed the Prince Albert complainants that he could not intervene.

Plans for the strike continued when this attempt to bring about arbitration failed. A meeting of three hundred persons was held in the Labour Temple on March 29, with Lorne Lynn, secretary of the Saskatoon branch of the Saskatchewan Union of Unemployed, as the main speaker. Lynn declared that relief conditions in Prince Albert were the worst in the Province. On the following morning only fourteen of the thirty-nine men booked for work turned up, and of these only ten actually went out. A strike was declared to have begun.⁵⁵

The strike lasted from March 30 until April 8. It was at its strongest at the very beginning. There was a

⁵⁴ L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

⁵⁵ Prince Albert Daily Herald, March 30, 1936.

steady trickle of men back to work. On April 1, twenty-one out of twenty-four scheduled to work went out, on April 3, thirty-one out of thirty-six, on April 6, thirty-six out of forty-four and on the last day, sixty out of sixty-six.⁵⁶ The organizers of the strike tried to generate enthusiasm by holding meetings and listing 'scabs' on a blackboard outside the Labour Temple. However, "the strike was doomed to failure by the very system against which the workers had rebelled: without work there would be no relief and families would suffer."⁵⁷ When a delegation of wives of strikers appealed to the city for food and fuel on April 2, they were told that these would only be given in exchange for work.⁵⁸ The families of the strikers became the most effective strike-breaking weapon.

Apparently many of those on relief were not convinced that the strike was justified. One relief worker, believing the city's policy to be fair, wrote to the Daily Herald:

The present strife in Prince Albert is being worked up by outside agitators, who are evidently supplied with funds to travel around the country, and five or six local agitators, working upon the feelings of men and women who in most instances through no fault of their own have been reduced to the necessity of seeking public aid, which I know had been granted by the city to all those in need that could qualify and who are willing to play the game.⁵⁹

56 Ibid., April 1, 3, 6, 7, 1936.

57 G. Abrams, op. cit., 324.

58 Prince Albert Daily Herald, April 3, 1936.

59 Ibid., April 4, 1936.

The Herald took up this attitude in its editorial of April 7, pointing out that J. Anderson, one of the instigators of the strike, was originally from Rosetown and was an ardent member of the C.C.F. More significantly, the Herald noted that M.J. Coldwell, the C.C.F. federal representative for the Rosetown-Biggar constituency, had recently asked Prime Minister W.L.M. King if he was aware of the "serious condition in Prince Albert affecting people on relief".⁶⁰ The Liberal Herald therefore saw the strike in political rather than economic terms.

The strikers, while initially receiving sympathy and donations of food and fuel from their fellow citizens, alienated some of this good will by violence. On April 4, one of the striking pickets struck a relief worker, who promptly laid a charge of assault.

The strike collapsed because of lack of support, and the refusal of the city council to be intimidated. The bitterness aroused by these events did not quickly fade. In the early summer and the following year unrest among the unemployed reappeared.

Once again this disenchantment seemed to be linked with the transient problem. On June 5 the Daily Herald echoed a Regina report which suggested that proof existed "that the unexplained gatherings of steadily growing groups

⁶⁰ Ibid., April 7, 1936.

of transient unemployed men in the major cities of the province is a deliberately planned attempt to embarrass the government." Agitators were thought to be urging transients to go from rural areas into the cities, and to be telling men on the railway construction projects to halt work and join city forces. The agitators enjoyed some success. It was estimated that one hundred and fifty transients had appeared in Prince Albert, two hundred and fifty in Saskatoon and eighty-five in Regina.⁶¹

On June 8, three groups went before the city council in Prince Albert to lay their grievances. The single transient relief recipients, working on a ditch at the expense of the Provincial Government demanded extra days of work to enable them to earn money for clothes. All but thirty cents of their \$6.30 weekly allowance was needed for board. Resident single unemployed asked for a work project to be given to them such as that provided for their transient counterparts, while married men refused to work outside the city on railway projects, because of inadequate remuneration.⁶² Those with work were unsatisfied with conditions, those without it wanted jobs. On June 15 the same three groups came again before the city council with more grievances. Once again the council refused to change the system of relief administration, and threatened to go out of the relief business

61 Ibid., June 5, 1936.

62 Ibid., June 9, 1936.

altogether, if co-operation was not forthcoming from those being provided with work. Irked by the persistent demands of non-naturalized residents for relief, one alderman suggested that legislation be enacted that all such persons be deported to their country of origin.⁶³ It was hoped that trouble makers would thereby be removed.

The unemployment situation began to ease in the fall of 1936, when several works projects were begun in the city including the construction of a rock filled dam near the airport designed to raise the level of water at the seaplane base above it.⁶⁴ By October two hundred and fifty men were at work on these projects. However, 1937 proved a difficult year, and the gravity of the economic situation led to a recurrence of discontent. In May transient single unemployed agitation again reached crisis point under the leadership of a certain Maynard Woollard. Weeks of effort crystallized in a parade to the Mayor's Office on the morning of May 15.⁶⁵ The men were told that their relief was the responsibility of the Provincial Government, and the city was in no way to blame for their dissatisfaction. As with the strike of 1936, it would appear that there were political overtones to the demonstration. When questioned, Woollard admitted, "I am an organizer for the Communist Party, but

63 Ibid., June 16, 1936

64 Ibid., September 12, 1936.

65 Ibid., May 15, 1937.

I am not a paid organizer."⁶⁶

It would seem justifiable to conclude that a substantial part of the discontent which arose against Prince Albert relief administration was fermented by outside and political agitators. In the voluminous correspondence and records which have been preserved from this period there appear to have been few complaints from bona-fide residents. From their silence it can be inferred that they were satisfied with relief conditions or at least had no complaints. This is not to suggest that some of the complaints registered against relief policy and administration in the city were not genuine or justified, but to view matters merely from the perspective of the unemployed is to distort the picture. The predicament of the city must be fully appreciated.

The greatest problem would appear to have been the transient invasions. The sudden and unexpected appearance of a few hundred persons would create problems for civic administration today. How much more so then in the 1930s when the city had neither the money, nor the facilities, with which to look after them. As the Mayor of Prince Albert pointed out: "There is no city in Canada, or elsewhere, which can meet a situation that in forty-eight hours brings an additional three or four hundred persons knocking

⁶⁶ Ibid., May 15, 1937.

at the city coffers asking for aid."⁶⁷ Some individuals constantly objected to the civic policy of demanding work for relief from the able-bodied. Other recipients found this a source of satisfaction. The fact that they had to work took away a part of the stigma of being public charity burdens.

In 1936 a pamphlet was circulated on the subject of; "Some of the Demoralizing, Devitalizing and Degrading Features and Facts of Prince Albert's Relief Policy." This charged among other things that the city's subsistence allowance was the lowest of all provincial cities and that there was a "complete absence of business methods in the handling of relief."⁶⁸ The evidence which remains substantiates none of these accusations. Relief administration and policies under the guidance of Gilbert appear to have been conducted with justice and efficiency. The percentage of population on relief in the city was below the provincial average throughout the decade. Moreover, the city continued to expand during the period, a noteworthy achievement since both Saskatoon and Shaunavon suffered depopulation. The City Directory was able to boast in the mid-1930s that, "Despite prevailing economic conditions which since 1930 have not been conducive to expansion, Prince Albert is able to produce evidence in abundance that the march of progress has continued

67 Ibid.

68 L.P.W., roll 36, file 41.

throughout this period."⁶⁹ Unfortunately the Directory does not indicate exactly what this evidence consisted of. It would appear that few, if any, businesses closed down in the city because of the depression; the meat packing plant, the creameries, the flour mills and wholesale firms continued to exist if not to flourish. All this is not to suggest that there was no suffering in Prince Albert during the 1930s. It is merely to put the picture of relief in the city into perspective, so that the severity of the impact of the depression can be measured in relation to the other urban centres under study.

69 Hendersons Prince Albert Directory, 1934, 1936, 1938 and 1941, 21.

CHAPTER 4. SASKATOON

During the 1920s the city of Saskatoon enjoyed a period of prosperity unparalleled in its early history. This prosperity was reflected in the number of buildings erected during the decade, the rapidly increasing population and substantial commercial activity. October, 1929, however, saw the beginnings of a reversal in the fortunes of the city. In that month the council resolved to put a warning notice in the Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Brandon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Regina and local newspapers telling unemployed persons not to come to Saskatoon since no work was available and relief would only be given to bona-fide citizens.¹ This notice marked the beginning of ten years of suffering for the inhabitants and administration of Saskatoon. Mass unemployment tested the resources of both, and relief became a major concern of all. A study of relief in Saskatoon is of special importance since the city was the second largest urban centre in the province. The population of Saskatoon in this period was four times that of Prince Albert and thirty times that of Shaunavon. The greater numbers requiring relief occasioned certain policy experiments which were unnecessary in the smaller centres. The need for economy was substantially increased when relief

1 Saskatoon Council Minutes, October 14, 1929.

rolls consisted of thousands of persons, rather than hundreds. Moreover, complaints and crises came in greater numbers, as did transients and rural dwellers seeking better living conditions.

The depression came as a sudden blow to the city and it took the council some months to organize a satisfactory and efficient system of administering relief. Initially relief was directly controlled by the city council, working through the relief department, which consisted of a Relief Officer, assistants and investigators. From the outset the council's policy was to provide only the basic necessities to relief recipients. The Provincial Government maxim that no one would starve was upheld, but, the council refused to succumb to what it considered outrageous demands, and adopted a firm policy with all demonstrations of dissatisfaction. Delegations of the unemployed could present their requests to council meetings in an orderly manner, but there were to be no unruly crowds.²

As the depression deepened and the numbers on relief increased, it became impractical for the council to superintend relief administration so closely. In the first half of 1932 it was estimated that at least fifty per cent of all council meetings had been taken up with the consideration of relief problems. Moreover, the number of meetings had

2 Ibid., June 8, 1931.

increased dramatically in this period. To the end of June, 1932, there had been fifty-four meetings compared with thirty-five for a similar period in 1931. Two standing committees, appointed to look after relief matters had been meeting continuously.³ Consequently in October, 1932, the council decided to appoint a separate body, the Civic Relief Board, to superintend the administration of relief and investigate any complaints. The board consisted of eight persons; seven citizens and the mayor. They were appointed by the resolution of the council, and had to submit a monthly report on the relief situation in the city to the council. The initial life of the board extended until June, 1934, after which date a new board was to be appointed annually.⁴

In the first few months of its existence the Civic Relief Board was allowed to determine various aspects of relief policy in Saskatoon. One of the primary concerns of the board was to keep relief expenditure to the minimum. In an early meeting it endorsed a policy of requiring relief recipients to repay the city for any assistance given, whether in kind or cash.⁵ A little later the board asked the Star Phoenix to insert a news item requesting all citizens who had any information concerning families who should not be on relief to pass it along to the board for

3 Ibid., July 18, 1932.

4 Ibid., October 3, 1932, Bylaw No. 2277.

5 Civic Relief Board Minutes, October 12, 1932.

investigation.⁶ The board organized itself into a series of special committees, each one responsible for an aspect of relief policy. One of the most important of these committees was the one in charge of the relief store which the city operated. On the recommendations of this committee changes were made in the commodities sold in the store. The board functioned in close association with the Relief Officer, who made a weekly report at meetings.

Relief administration under the Civic Relief Board, however, engendered dissatisfaction and unrest among recipients. The tax payers on the board naturally adopted a parsimonious attitude towards relief. Their main concern was to keep costs down. Their penchant for thriftiness manifested itself when they decided that eggs and lard were to be supplied at the butcher's shop which the city operated instead of at the relief store, and charged on the recipient's meat voucher. On this occasion the value of grocery vouchers decreased while there was no appropriate increase in the value of the meat voucher.⁷ A month after this innovation the Star Phoenix commented that "there was a 'feeling' between the Board and the unemployed which should not exist."⁸ In October, 1933, the council took stronger control of relief

6 Ibid., November 14, 1932.

7 Ibid., February 27, 1933.

8 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, March 16, 1933.

affairs when it passed a resolution enabling it to lay down policies which the relief board was forced to implement.⁹

Ill feeling, however, persisted. Consequently when the question of the appointment of a new board for June, 1934, came up, it was decided that the board should be discontinued. The council once again took a direct charge of relief administration. It would appear that the decision to abolish the relief board caused bitterness among council members. Mayor J.S. Mills published a very strong criticism of the council's action in the Star Phoenix:

City Council last night by a vote of six to five took the strange position of agreeing to abolish the relief board, which the council itself created, without putting anything in its place. No arguments were brought out in the discussion as to why the board should be abolished. It seemed that a few members of council were trying to get something off their chests that did not agree with them. It appears that their better judgment was submerged by their personal feelings in the matter. The general aims of the taxpayers were not considered.

It is evident to an observer that the city council does not desire a strong board capable of making decisions. They prefer a rubber stamp to carry out their wishes.¹⁰

Although control of direct relief reverted to the council, a Relief Appeal Board was created to lighten the burden of relief at council meetings. This board was to consist of the Mayor and City Commissioner serving in an advisory capacity, and two members of the council, serving on a

9 Saskatoon Council Minutes, October 17, 1933.

10 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, January 30, 1934. The Mayor's action seems unusual. Unfortunately no further information clarifying his motives has been found.

rotating basis for three months each. The board was to meet every two weeks to hear the appeals of relief recipients who had complaints.¹¹ By 1935 the numbers of complaints necessitated weekly meetings.

As an appeal tribunal the board could not hear delegations. This was a perpetual source of annoyance to the local associations of the unemployed with which Saskatoon abounded, since these could not represent their members. The most frequent appeal coming before the board was for reinstatement on relief. The appeal had to be made in writing forty-eight hours before the scheduled board meeting. This was to enable the Relief Officer to refresh his memory of a certain case history, so that he could make a verbal report to the board to enable it to judge the validity of the appeal. In many respects, the Relief Officer became the most important person at meetings, since it was invariably his department which had cut the appellant off relief. He was usually able to provide adequate justification for his action. Consequently few appeals appear to have succeeded.

Saskatoon was one of the few cities to have an appeal board. Its advantages were appreciated by T.M. Molloy, who described the board as follows to a complainant:

The Appeal Board has among its members the Mayor, some aldermen, all persons not only capable of weighing all the facts in connection with such

¹¹ Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 5, 1934, Bylaw No. 2396.

case, but who are interested in seeing that the relief costs of Saskatoon are kept to the minimum, and that persons on relief shall not suffer for want of assistance.

I was informed, therefore, that when a case has run the gauntlet of the Relief officials, and has been reviewed by the Appeal Board, we may rest assured that no undue hardship will be caused any family by reason of the policy which has been adopted by the City.¹²

In actual fact the advantages of the appeal board were largely illusory. The unemployed could air their grievances to an official body, but few succeeded in reversing the original decision of the relief department. Throughout the later 1930s the unemployed associations asked that relief recipients be allowed to appeal their case before relief was discontinued, so that unnecessary hardship would be avoided. One such organization was advised that its request could not be acceded to as it was "impracticable to carry it out."¹³

It was inevitable that there would be complaints about relief. It was impossible to satisfy everyone. However, conditions in Saskatoon must have been particularly bad or the unemployed extremely well organized to account for the numerous associations of unemployed which grew up there in the 1930s. In 1936 there were nine such organizations in existence; the Ex-Service Men's Welfare Association, the Fraternal and Protective Association of Saskatoon, the Single Men's Association for the physically unfit, the

12 L.P.W. roll 38, file 41, Molloy to F. Eliason, Secretary of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatoon Section, May 27, 1935.

13 Relief Appeal Board Minutes, June 21, 1937, reply to request of the Central Association of Unemployed and Welfare Associations of June 14, 1937.

Single Workers' Union, the Married Transient Relief Association, the Transient Relief Association, the Disabled Veterans' Association, the Transient Emergency Association and the National Transient Union.¹⁴ Unrest and organized associations on a substantial scale were to be expected in a large city. Saskatoon certainly experienced troubles in relief administration, most of which were concentrated round the person of the Relief Officer.

Both F.G. Rowlands, Relief Officer until 1933, and G.W. Parker, his successor, appear to have been unpopular figures. This was perhaps to be expected since the Relief Officer had wide powers, especially relating to the giving of relief on an emergency basis, and to newly weds or the partners of a common law marriage.¹⁵ Rowlands and Parker were both ex-army officers, who were occasionally lacking in "the milk of human kindness,"¹⁶ although they were excellent administrators and organizers.

As early as December, 1930, relief recipients were urging that Rowlands be replaced. The Saskatoon Unemployed Association appeared before the council complaining that light and water had been cut off from the unemployed and suggesting that: "In so far as the Mayor has continually stated that no one in Saskatoon should be permitted to go

14 L.P.W., roll 38, file 41.

15 Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 18, 1932. It was the official policy of the city not to give relief to persons who had been married for less than one year.

16 Saskatchewan Relief Commission, Roll A, file 4, T. Bunting, investigator for the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, report on relief conditions in Saskatoon, March 13, 1933.

hungry, then we ask that Mr. Rowlands be replaced by a relief officer who will carry out the Mayor's wish."¹⁷ The council refused to comply with this request at this stage. Dissatisfaction with Rowlands continued throughout the early years of relief administration, and gradually became official. The situation reached crisis point in June, 1933, when the Civic Relief Board discussed the lack of harmony between the various branches of the relief department, particularly the investigating department, and the Relief Officer. It was decided that three members of the board should interview Rowlands and request that he apply for two months leave of absence with pay, after which he was expected to resign.¹⁸

Rowlands lost no time over this. On June 2 the Star Phoenix contained a small article on the resignation of the relief officer after fourteen years of service with the city. No reasons were given, but it was understood that there had been "disagreement with the Civic Relief Board on matters of policy."¹⁹ Rowlands' resignation was met by many protests and the council was inundated with demands from citizens and relief recipients for a judicial inquiry. From this it must be inferred that the Officer had been satisfying numerous relief recipients and applicants. However, he

17 Saskatoon Council Minutes, December 8, 1930.

18 Civic Relief Board Minutes, June 1, 1933.

19 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, June 2, 1933.

was not reinstated. G.W. Parker who had started work in the relief office only the previous February, was appointed as his successor. Parker held the position of Relief Officer throughout the remainder of the 1930s.

Ironically, Parker seems to have been the cause of more troubles than his predecessor. Apparently he was an extremely vigilant Relief Officer who liked to initiate and control every action in his department. From the vast amount of correspondence and cases he dealt with, he was obviously dedicated to his job. However, he tended to apply relief rules and regulations with the precision of an army officer, rather than the understanding of a welfare officer. As one observer pointed out to the provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs: "Mr. Parker may be very efficient but he is also very severe and the constant complaint is that he refuses to see people."²⁰

Recipients were cut off relief with insufficient warning and not allowed to discuss their case with the Relief Officer. One recipient complained that he had been working part time with the approval of Parker to supplement his relief allowance. One day he went for his relief order and was informed that his relief had been discontinued. He naturally objected to the lack of adequate warning. Of all persons relief recipients were the least likely to have any extras

²⁰ L.P.W., roll 37, file 41, J.W. Estey to P.M. Parker, January 7, 1936.

stored up for times of hardship. The appeal board met only once a week. As the angry complainant pointed out, "five or six days were a long time to starve."²¹ Fortunately the board reinstated this man on relief. Parker's action therefore, appears doubly reprehensible.

As his experience in relief administration increased Parker seems to have become overconfident. From 1936 onwards the Provincial Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare had great difficulty in stopping the Saskatoon Relief Officer from challenging their rulings. Molloy wrote to the City Clerk, L.W. Leslie, in early April pointing out that one cause of much trouble and inconvenience lay in the fact that Parker refused to take cognizance of the 1934 relief agreement which gave the Bureau the right to determine government relief cases, and stated that such cases were to be kept on relief until instructions were given to the contrary. No decision was made until after investigation, and this rested to a large extent on the facts supplied by the Relief Officer. In this respect Parker rendered splendid service, his investigations and reports were thorough and prompt. However, the Bureau reserved the right to interpret and apply regulations.²² Parker had apparently been telling people to return to certain

21 Ibid., Mr. D. to Premier W. Patterson, March 23, 1935.

22 Ibid., Molloy to Leslie, April 1, 1936.

municipalities, when he had received instructions from Molloy allowing them relief in Saskatoon as transients.

The Relief Officer failed to distinguish between the individual recipient and the municipality responsible for his welfare. Parker preferred to punish the relief recipient by refusing him relief, rather than granting assistance and recovering expenditure from the municipality concerned. In spite of numerous suggestions and warnings from the provincial relief department, Parker continued to pursue what he himself considered to be the right policies, even though they contravened the official ones. In October, 1937, a memorandum sent to W. Dawson, Director of Relief, indicated that difficulties were still being experienced with the Saskatoon Relief Officer:

A terrific lot of correspondence could be avoided if Mr. Parker would give us the same co-operation as the relief officers of other cities are giving. Mr. Parker never considers a letter answered until it is answered in the way in which he himself wants it answered.²³

Occasionally Parker became incensed at one particular individual, and concentrated his anger and annoyance on that object. One trouble-maker was Frank Eliason, the secretary of the United Farmers of Canada in Saskatoon, who wrote frequent letters to Regina complaining about Parker's action in certain cases and asking for information. Invariably

²³ L.P.W., roll 38, file 41, P.J. Boeckler to Dawson, October 21, 1937.

the Provincial Government referred these enquiries to Parker, who resented Eliason's constant intervention and tactics. Eliason was regarded by Parker as "nothing but an agitator, a trouble-maker" who apparently had "no idea of common courtesy with regard to minding his own business."²⁴ The fact remains, if relief had been administered with less severity, there would have been fewer complaints.

As the Second World War approached Parker adopted a very superior attitude towards aliens on relief. One Austrian on relief who wanted to return to his homeland applied to the Saskatoon relief office for assistance. Considerable difficulty was experienced in assessing this case, especially as the applicant's English was poor. At one stage Parker dismissed the man as a foreigner and a liar and wrote to Molloy: "I certainly have no intention while I am in this position to have any unnaturalized Austrian defy the regulations of this office."²⁵ This type of prejudice again manifested itself in a later case. One Austrian complained to the Provincial Government about Parker's attitude towards aliens. Parker defended himself as follows:

I somewhat resent from an Austrian the inference that I have not a right to express my opinion. In fact, as no doubt you are aware, I have not hesitated, nor do I intend to hesitate to express my opinion with reference to such people as Mr. (X).²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., Parker to Molloy, December 10, 1936.

²⁵ Ibid., Parker to Molloy, April 8, 1936.

²⁶ Ibid., Parker to Dawson, August 12, 1938.

However, although the Relief Officer was entitled to express his own opinions, he was essentially the servant of the city council and for the most part he had to implement its policies.

Parker's anti-alien streak was really only the negative aspect of Saskatoon's policy of favouring British subjects or those in process of naturalization when recruiting men for employment in public works schemes. A resolution was passed to this effect at a council meeting in June, 1930.²⁷ Public works relief separated the long period of direct relief in Saskatoon.

In the summer of 1930 as an initial response to the depression, the city embarked on a programme of sewer and water construction and sidewalk and lane paving. This relieved the unemployment situation considerably and hopes were expressed that the problem had been surmounted.²⁸ Fall, however, brought increases to the relief rolls, and it was estimated that one thousand five hundred persons would need assistance. Consequently the city made an agreement with the Provincial and Federal Governments, whereby a new subway was built and a system of storm sewers completed between October, 1930 and June, 1931.

In 1931 the city sought permission to build a bridge as a relief measure at an estimated cost of eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The Dominion agreed

27 Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 16, 1930.

28 Ibid., June 23, 1930.

to pay three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the Province one hundred and forty thousand and the city the remainder.²⁹ The Broadway Bridge should have been completed by May 1, 1932. Extensions were granted until August 15, 1933.³⁰ After this date there were no Federal Government sponsored public works schemes in the city until 1939, when the Liberal Government initiated a scheme whereby the Federal and Provincial Governments paid for labour costs and the city paid for materials. Saskatoon devised a scheme involving practically no material expenditure other than the purchasing of tools and equipment. The project consisted of recovering stones from the river bed, and grading and ditching underdeveloped streets.³¹ Once again the preference for naturalized citizens was apparent, with a resolution passed by council giving them first preference in the work.³²

For the greater part of the 1930s relief in Saskatoon consisted of direct aid, as it did in Prince Albert. The conditions under which this was granted, however, differed substantially from those in the northern city. Initially the city of Saskatoon adopted the policy of making relief recipients sign an undertaking to repay relief advanced to them. This was abandoned in November, 1933.³³ Thereafter relief

29 Ibid., November 9, 1931.

30 Ibid., December 19, 1932.

31 Ibid., July 3, 1939.

32 Ibid., August 14, 1939.

33 Ibid., November 16, 1933.

recipients on the whole had neither to work for nor repay relief. The only recipients who had to perform any regular labour were those who had insufficient casual earnings to pay their own electric light and water bills. These cases were credited with forty cents an hour for work done, which usually consisted of wood cutting, and the city then paid their bills. In December, 1936, approximately three hundred men were working eight hours each month to pay off their bills.³⁴ The only time the city demanded work from certain relief recipients was as a punishment for breaking regulations or making false declarations.³⁵

Direct relief consisted of the provision of food, fuel, clothing, shelter and medical care, although these were not necessarily given to all relief recipients. Each case was judged individually and relief given according to need. There were three main classes of relief recipients in Saskatoon throughout the 1930s; bona-fide residents, transients and families receiving relief at the expense of other municipalities through the civic relief office. The major groups were the government cases and the residents. Although financial responsibility for their relief lay in different hands, both groups were served by the same relief administration. Ideally there was to be no discrimination of treatment between transient and resident unemployed.³⁶

34 L.P.W., roll 38, file 41.

35 Ibid., Saskatoon's reply to L.P.W. circular letter 151, February 17, 1936.

36 L.P.W. roll 37, file 41, Molloy to Mr. E. January 29, 1936.

Because of the scale on which relief was required in the city, the major preoccupation of the council was that costs should be kept to a minimum and that administration should be efficient. An early problem was to find a satisfactory method of providing food since most relief recipients needed this form of relief. Until 1932 the town used the relief system which had existed since 1921. By this, recipients were given food vouchers specifying certain goods. These were exchangeable at any local store. Unfortunately the system was open to abuses. Some merchants in order to procure and keep trade allowed recipients to purchase commodities other than those specified, and made a profit by overcharging the unemployed for this privilege.³⁷ Moreover, there was the detailed work of issuing relief orders, receiving and approving accounts and keeping extensive records in the City Treasurer's Department. In the 1920s when relief had been a minor concern in the city this scheme had worked well. In the 1930s it was inadequate, cumbersome and costly. Consequently the council seized on the idea of operating its own relief store at which all relief recipients would be required to deal. The city would keep costs to a minimum by being able to purchase goods wholesale. Corruption would similarly be reduced. The idea of establishing a relief store was discussed frequently at council meetings in 1931 and a committee set up to study the details.

37 Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 8, 1931.

Inevitably there was considerable opposition to the idea from both relief recipients and local merchants. The local Grocers' and Butchers' Retail Merchants Association claimed that it was unfair to their bona-fide, tax paying members for the city to set up in competition and monopolize the relief trade, which was becoming a major part of their livelihood. Moreover, it was an added injustice to merchants who had extended credit to relief recipients. If the city operated its own store, they would never be repaid. Petitions were presented to the council indicating that the establishment of a civic relief store would throw merchants on relief too.³⁸ The relief recipients feared that the store would prevent them from buying their goods at the cheapest price, and would eliminate the small element of choice which the open voucher system had given them. The Saskatoon Unemployed Association suggested that cash relief or "face cash value" cards negotiable at any store would be more satisfactory to their members.³⁹ The council was prepared to try this. As a result from November 13, 1931 onwards, grocery orders were issued to any store requested by the recipient and stated merely the total value of the order, allowing more freedom in the selection of food.⁴⁰

38 Ibid., April 11, 1932.

39 Ibid., November 9, 1931.

40 Ibid., November 10, 1931.

However, the innovation did not work to the satisfaction of the council. After further discussion and investigation it decided to establish a civic relief store, opening on June 1, 1932.⁴¹ The council reverted from the food quotas on a cash basis to a commodity basis once more. In determining the list of foods and quantities, regard was had to the size of the family on relief and the ages of any children. Food was classified on a unit basis, with a maximum of sixteen units allowed to any one family. In terms of food three units covered five quarts of milk, fifty cents worth of meat and ten loaves of bread. A man and his wife were allowed eight units and would use the remaining five to purchase tea, sugar, vegetables, fruit, soap and matches.⁴² Throughout the history of the store continual changes were made in the lists of available commodities and numerous attempts made by the Civic Relief Board to ensure that diets were properly balanced.

All modifications did little to alter the simple fact that relief recipients and local merchants did not like the store. The former complained of the lack of choice, the high prices and poor quality of goods sold. Moreover, there was no delivery system. In the cold winter months recipients from all over the city had to trudge to the store for their groceries, instead of being able to go to their nearest shop.

41 Ibid., May 19, 1932.

42 Ibid., May 19, 1932.

One alderman asked if free street railway transportation passes might be given to families taking the larger orders to enable them to make their journey home more easily.⁴³ The request was refused.⁴⁴ Between May, 1932 and October, 1934, when the store was abolished, the council received regular delegations from relief recipients and local merchants asking for the abolition of the store. It was described as having been established "on a straight pattern from Soviet Russia."⁴⁵ This accusation marked a reversal of roles on the part of the administration and the unemployed. The former was accused of Soviet tactics instead of the latter. This was the antithesis of events in Prince Albert and Shaunavon. The Fraternal and Protective Association declared that Saskatoon was the only city in North America where the unemployed were subjected to such "demoralizing and degrading treatment", and contended that they were being treated "as convicts or a herd of cattle."⁴⁶ The city conceded that there was some ground for complaint. However, the store was continued because it was cheap, efficient and easily controlled. Substantial savings were made by wholesale buying. In December, 1932, the net gain was estimated to be \$1,122.54 and in January, 1933, \$1,038.75 was expected.⁴⁷

43 Ibid., June 6, 1932.

44 Ibid., August 15, 1932.

45 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, March 7, 1933, comment of M. Jorgenson

46 Ibid., January 30, 1934.

47 Civic Relief Board Minutes, December 21, 1932.

This money could be used to defray other relief expenses.

Dissatisfaction with the store reached such a peak in early 1933 that the Provincial Government decided to investigate. This decision was sparked by the activities of A.W. Wylie, a grocer of the city, who sent an outspoken letter to Premier J.T.M. Anderson alleging that the city was making a profit on the relief store and charging the Federal and Provincial Governments for this. As Wylie pointed out, "The time of depression has passed by, and in its place we have something very, very much more to be dreaded 'oppression'-- think it over."⁴⁸

Simultaneously the Government was receiving a series of protest letters and petitions about relief conditions in Saskatoon. The unemployed sent a memorandum of their grievances, which included an attack on the Civic Relief Board and its practices. There was alleged discrimination in the distribution of food from the relief store. Some recipients had to line up, others received their supplies at home. The unemployed asked for cash or open vouchers, claiming that they could purchase on average twenty to twenty-five per cent more from their allowances if this was granted. The Civic Relief Board was seen as the sole cause of all trouble and violence was threatened if reform was not forthcoming.

One of the most interesting pieces of information sent to the Government was contained in a secret

⁴⁸ Saskatchewan Relief Commission, roll A, file 3, Wylie to Anderson March 11, 1933.

supplement to a petition from the Fraternal and Protective Association of Unemployed Citizens and Taxpayers. This warned that the personnel of the relief board were a "number of the deepest died old Grits of Saskatoon, who will stop at nothing to bring discredit on the present administration."⁴⁹ The board was supposedly trying to get the unemployed to blame the Government for the poor conditions in the city. These political ramifications to the discontent may have hastened government intervention. Whatever the motivation the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, at the suggestion of Premier Anderson, organized an investigation into Saskatoon relief administration. The Reverend Thomas Bunting was appointed to go to Saskatoon on March 14, 1933, to meet the unemployed and attend a meeting of the relief board.

Bunting found conditions in Saskatoon far from satisfactory. People were not getting the proper proportions of food and many went without for one and a half days before they received their next allowance. Bunting suggested that an open voucher system for issuing food supplies might prove more satisfactory. The relief board appeared quite unconcerned about conditions and harsh in their application of relief regulations. Bunting went so far as to suggest that they be dismissed.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., roll A, file 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Bunting to the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, March 14, 1933.

This suggestion was never acted upon. The Government could not interfere so directly in civic affairs. However, it could exert more subtle pressures to make way for a policy change in respect to the relief store. In September, 1933, T.M. Molloy attended a meeting of the relief board at which he informed the members that the policies of the Federal and Provincial Governments with regard to relief in future were that "purchases should be through the regular channels of trade and that wherever possible Canadian goods should be purchased in preference to those from foreign countries."⁵¹ Eventually the council decided to allow relief recipients to purchase their groceries through regular trade channels. As of October 1, 1934, the relief store ceased to exist.

The decision to close the store had been made democratically. In September, 1934, the council held a plebiscite among the relief recipients of the city to ascertain the preferred method of obtaining food relief. There were three alternatives; the relief store, the open voucher system or cash. Three hundred and sixteen out of the three hundred and seventy-one persons voting favoured the cash system, and so the council implemented this policy. Although this undoubtedly pleased the majority of recipients, there remains the strange fact that only ten per cent of the approximately three thousand and four hundred eligible to vote in the

⁵¹ Civic Relief Board Minutes, September 21, 1933.

plebiscite, took advantage of the opportunity to register their opinions. The Star Phoenix suggested that the relatively small vote was due to effective picketing by the Saskatoon Worker's Associations. "Throughout the week every effort was put forth by the pickets to prevent the jobless from voting. 'There is a catch in it,' was the contention of more than one who took part in the boycott."⁵² This would indicate that the relationship between the unemployed and the civic authorities was far from harmonious.

The institution of a cash allowance for food relief proved permanent and gave greater satisfaction to recipients and merchants than any previous system. Initially money equivalent to the retail price of the food required was given to recipients once each week. In February, 1935, the council decided to give allowances once every two weeks to give the recipient greater purchasing power and to economize in relief administration costs.⁵³ From January, 1936, onwards Saskatoon used the Dominion Government Labor Gazette retail price index to calculate food costs, and determine increases or decreases in allowances. There were periodic manifestations of discontent as to the amount of money being given. In June, 1939, the Central Council of Unemployed and Welfare Associations requested that the food allowance be

52 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, September 24, 1934.

53 Saskatoon Council Minutes, February 4, 1935.

increased fifty per cent for a two week period on the occasion of the visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth, "to enable those on relief to properly observe this momentous occasion."⁵⁴ This request was refused. On the whole, however, the unemployed in Saskatoon found cash relief preferable to any other. Some recipients boasted about conditions in the city after October, 1934. Lorne Lynne, when addressing the Prince Albert strikers in 1936 informed them that their standard of living was forty per cent below Saskatoon's and that the Saskatoon unemployed had never struck because they were able to make the city authorities see their point of view.⁵⁵

If the city had solved the problem of food relief there still remained three other important aspects of policy to be dealt with; clothing relief, the relief of the single, homeless unemployed and the relief of non-resident families in the city. Dissatisfaction with the provisions made for clothing came from numerous relief recipients. The problems of providing adequate clothing appeared only gradually. Most relief families could manage for a while. Eventually the day would come when there were no more cast-offs and the family was forced to seek the assistance of the clothing relief bureau. Initially clothing relief in Saskatoon was organized by six service clubs. They worked on a voluntary

⁵⁴ L.P.W., roll 38, file 41.

⁵⁵ Saskatoon Star Phoenix, March 30, 1936.

basis and collected money and second hand clothes, wherever they could. As the numbers on relief increased and the need for clothing became more pressing, the clothing bureau, which the service clubs had formed, sought financial assistance from the city council. On July 1, 1931, they asked for, and received, a sum of one hundred and sixty-five dollars a month to pay the salaries of officials needed to operate the bureau on a full time basis.⁵⁶ This grant was increased to two hundred dollars per month in October of the same year.⁵⁷ In the early years of the depression the bureau had complete control of clothing relief and it appears that its administration was efficient. It evolved into a miniature relief department with a filing system to keep track of every case in the city. The bureau served as a clearing house for the good works of service clubs, women's organizations, churches and private individuals. In addition the bureau co-operated with the relief department officials and did follow up work that they had neither the time nor the resources to undertake.⁵⁸ Eventually, however, it was necessary for the council to make a regular grant to the bureau for the purchase of clothing, bedding and footwear, on a scale large enough to meet the demands of relief recipients. Greater contributions necessitated stronger central control. Consequently in

56 Saskatoon Council Minutes, July 6, 1931.

57 Ibid., October 13, 1931.

58 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, November 15, 1932.

June, 1933, the bureau was abolished and a Clothing Relief Depot established, administered by the city rather than the service clubs.

Inadequate clothing relief was a perpetual complaint of the Saskatoon unemployed. Toward the end of the 1930s they demanded that a cash grant, equivalent to twenty-five per cent of the food allowance, be given to enable relief recipients to purchase their own clothes rather than being forced to take the offerings of the civic depot. Women especially resented the garments given to their families. The regimentation of the styles, the cheap quality of the material and the lack of variety were the standard complaints. Matters reached such a state in mid 1938 that a delegation of women appeared before the council asking for cash for clothing. They contended that the use of the clothing depot was placing a large percentage of citizens in a position of pauperism, reducing their initiative and self-respect. The most deplorable fact was that children were "growing up in this system of regimentation and general drabness" and being forced into "inferior positions" since their clothing marked them as children on relief.⁵⁹ In the following year the council sought the permission of the Provincial Government to give the desired cash for clothing.⁶⁰ The Government agreed and on April 24, 1939, the Clothing Relief Depot was abolished.⁶¹

59 Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 20, 1938.

60 L.P.W., roll 38, file 40, City Clerk M.C. Tomlinson to Minister of Municipal Affairs Parker, March 1, 1939.

61 Saskatoon Council Minutes, April 24, 1939.

The relief of single, homeless men was another problem which concerned the city for the greater part of the depression decade. Before government sponsored and operated camps were set up in 1932 to absorb the physically fit single unemployed, civic authorities were responsible for their care. In the winter of 1930 such large numbers of homeless men had gathered in Saskatoon that it was decided to establish a relief camp at the Exhibition Grounds where board and sleeping accomodation could be provided.⁶² The Provincial Government promised to pay two-thirds of the cost of relief provided in this way and in addition to furnish the camp with cooking utensils, stoves and blankets. P.J. Philpotts, an ex-army officer, was made superintendent of the camp and a local doctor was appointed to treat all the sick and to visit each day for parade inspection.⁶³

From its opening the camp was a seed bed for discontent in Saskatoon. Even after November, 1932, when control of the camp passed to the Provincial Government,⁶⁴ there were constant complaints about conditions and agitation to hasten improvements.

Philpotts threatened to resign in April, 1932, because a band of radical agitators were preventing camp order and discipline, and co-operation from the Saskatoon

⁶² Ibid., December 8, 1930, 570 men had registered with the relief department.

⁶³ Ibid., December 8, 1932.

⁶⁴ Ibid., November 7, 1932.

police force was not forthcoming.⁶⁵ In February, 1933, the situation again became acute. A certain radical leader, appropriately called Sam Scarlett, was cited as the main-spring of unrest. He had apparently just been released from jail and was inciting the camp inmates to revolt. Posters urging "Slave Camp Workers" to wake up and organize, and cartoons depicting the Saskatchewan Relief Commission as a fat man pulling the balloons of greed, incompetence, ignorance and prejudice were circulated. A report of these activities was supposed to have made the Daily Worker.⁶⁶ Discontent continued throughout March. An investigation by the Saskatchewan Relief Commission revealed that the radical element in the camp was well organized and in close contact with various groups of unemployed in the city of Saskatoon itself. In May, the inmates staged a demonstration. Fifty of them refused to go to the Prince Albert National Park Camp. In June, it was decided to transfer the men to the federal relief camp at Dundurn, and on June 30 the Saskatoon camp closed.⁶⁷ The city was thereby relieved of the headache of caring for large numbers of the physically fit single unemployed.

There remained the problem of caring for the unfit persons in this category. Initially the city paid fifty

65 Saskatchewan Relief Commission, roll A, file 2, Saskatoon Relief Camp.

66 Ibid. The Daily Worker is a communist publication.

67 Ibid.

cents per day for the board and room of such persons. In January, 1937, a request was made that this allowance be increased to sixty cents. Considerable dispute ensued as the Provincial Government refused to contribute eighty per cent of this total, since only fifty cents were allowed to the single unfit persons in Moose Jaw and Regina. Mayor R.M. Pinder pleaded the city's case for the increase by pointing out that the extra money paid helped to keep boarding house owners off relief, since recipients could afford to pay a little extra for their accommodation.⁶⁸ The Government, therefore, agreed to the increase. Later in the year recipients asked that this money might be paid in cash rather than voucher form. The council granted their request,⁶⁹ and the relief of such persons caused little further trouble to Saskatoon administrators in the 1930s.

The problem of relieving families from other municipalities and transients became particularly acute in the second half of the 1930s. In some respects these were the most serious occupational hazards with which Saskatoon relief officials had to deal. In June, 1935, the Relief Officer reported to the appeal board that the number of applications for relief from persons moving into the city from country points was increasing daily.⁷⁰ When such a

68 L.P.W., roll 38, file 41, Pinder to Molloy January 19, 1937.

69 Saskatoon Council Minutes, November 15, 1937.

70 Relief Appeal Board Minutes, June 7, 1935.

person or family applied for relief, the Relief Officer referred the case to the Provincial Government so that it could determine where responsibility lay. While investigation was carried out, relief was administered at the expense of the Government. If the enquiry revealed that the family was transient then relief was continued at the expense of the Government. If another municipality was found to be responsible then negotiations began for the return of the family. Some municipalities rather than having persons returned preferred to relieve their indigents by reimbursing the city in which they were residing. Occasionally a family would refuse to return, in which case relief might be given at the expense of the Government. Thus it was a possible, and indeed a frequent, occurrence for persons with residence qualifications in another municipality to be receiving relief in Saskatoon.

This situation was a source of perpetual annoyance to the civic officials. The reason for this was essentially financial. Outsiders were using the facilities of the city, their children were being educated there, and yet they were paying no taxes for these privileges. Moreover, such persons affected wage schedules detrimentally. The majority were prepared to accept employment at any rate. As a result local citizens were thrown out of work, wage schedules lowered and the city's relief bill increased as bona-fide residents lost their jobs. In July, 1936, the

Star Phoenix estimated that there were six hundred families from rural points on the city's relief list.⁷¹ This figure seems exaggerated since in December of 1937 official records put the total at forty-four families.⁷²

Saskatoon was also faced with the problem experienced in Prince Albert of families moving into the city from rural points, maintaining themselves for the necessary twelve months and then applying for relief. In October, 1936, approximately thirty families of this kind applied for relief and Relief Officer Parker expressed his concern to Molloy: "This is a most serious situation, and more especially due to the fact it is fast approaching our winter season."⁷³ One particular case annoyed the Relief Officer. A certain family had applied for relief twelve months previously and been refused because of the lack of residence qualification. Somehow they managed to sustain themselves in the city for one year and reapplied. There was no alternative but to grant them relief.⁷⁴ Occasionally the rural municipality from which such people came was suspected of assisting them to go to Saskatoon. In December, 1937, Parker reported to the council in regard to two families who had apparently moved in from rural areas in

71 Saskatoon Star Phoenix, July 9, 1936.

72 L.P.W., roll 38, file 41.

73 Ibid., Parker to Molloy, October 29, 1936.

74 Ibid.

order to establish themselves for relief. It was believed "in each case the rural municipalities in question not only encouraged but actually assisted the family to come into Saskatoon."⁷⁵

It must be pointed out that the corollary of objecting to the relief of outsiders in Saskatoon was to require all indigent persons, who were the responsibility of the city, to be returned there for relief. This policy was rigorously followed. No exceptions were allowed. Occasionally this could result in hardship. A woman who had been in the Prince Albert Sanatorium and whose parents lived in that city, was informed on her recovery that she must return to Saskatoon for relief.⁷⁶ The harshness of this can be understood if the costs of relief and the numbers affected are considered. Relief officials were forced to keep strictly to policies because of the scale on which relief was required.

The scale of relief expenditure can be understood from the statistics in Table 8. It must be emphasized that they represent only Saskatoon's share of relief. Direct relief costs in 1930 were exceptionally low. They increased sixty times in 1931, doubled in 1932 and doubled again between 1932 and 1934, which was the peak year of expenditure for the city. Costs decreased a little in 1935, and fell by almost one-half in 1936, with slight rises in 1937 and 1938,

⁷⁵ Saskatoon Council Minutes, December 6, 1937.

⁷⁶ L.P.W., roll 38, file 41.

Table E. Annual Cost of Relief to the City of Saskatoon, 1930-41

(Source: Financial Statements of Saskatoon 1930-41)

Year	Direct Relief	Concentration Camp	Clothing Bureau	Land Settlement Scheme	Medical & Dental	Administration	Direct Relief Capitalization, Debtenture Service Charges	Total
1930	\$ 1,202.93	\$2,486.71	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 542.27	\$ -	\$ 4,231.91
1931	68,237.65	3,992.50	-	-	-	4,194.74	-	76,424.89
1932	135,836.65	-	2,162.59	-	-	-	-	-
1933	176,016.82	-	12,317.42	14,794.86	-	-	-	-
1934	230,878.36	-	28,128.29	12,830.29	5,616.97	21,348.25	23,000.00 ^d	224,477.35
1935	205,272.55	-	28,226.89	11,920.70	11,389.44 ^b	18,202.64	50,936.56	346,593.11
1936	118,387.62	-	17,987.60	1,140.73	14,198.23 ^b	22,090.10	12,093.33	290,993.06
1937	137,465.32	-	19,008.33	2,624.29	15,800.56 ^b	18,984.99	82,818.18	253,517.35
1938	137,662.10	-	20,404.41	2,801.18	16,406.19 ^b	17,778.20	74,953.42	267,995.00
1939	110,430.66	-	16,368.23 ^a	-	13,391.46 ^b	19,799.08	88,498.95	285,571.89
1940	68,981.54	-	-	-	17,396.59 ^c	22,918.28	99,670.20	262,778.83
1941	36,903.00	-	-	-	8,518.52 ^c	22,497.79	107,399.12	216,275.04
						18,645.92	111,722.20	175,789.92

^a Includes \$9,170.27 cash clothing allowances.

^b Includes ambulance costs.

^c Includes ambulance costs and drug costs.

^d Estimated.

followed by a continuous and fairly swift decline. The reason for relief costs during the first half of the decade being more expensive to the city was that prior to December, 1936, Saskatoon paid a third of such expenditure. After that date the city financed only twenty per cent. Consequently, the total cost of direct relief in 1934 and 1937 was almost the same, approximately seven hundred thousand dollars.

However, even though civic contributions decreased in the later 1930s, the actual final cost of relief to Saskatoon remained high. This was due to the system adopted to finance relief; debenture issues on a large scale. The seventh column of figures in Table 8 indicates the interest rates alone which the city paid on debentures issued to cover its share of relief. Interest costs increased over four times between 1933 and 1940, and the burden of debt continued to trouble the city into the 1950s. Moreover, even though the city's share of actual direct relief decreased from 1935 onwards, it still had to pay total medical and administration expenses. These were substantial sums, approximately thirty thousand dollars per year. Administration expenses alone in 1939 were almost twenty times the cost of direct relief in 1930.

Saskatoon experienced the same difficulties financing relief as Prince Albert. Provincial payments were continually in arrears. In December, 1937, the Province

owed the city one hundred and ninety-six thousand dollars.⁷⁷ A constant complaint was the amount of interest which the city had to pay in order to borrow money to finance the provincial and federal shares of relief, pending payment. In 1933 the council pointed out that it had cost the city \$4,218.26 more for interest than it would have done if reimbursement had been made within two weeks of rendering Saskatoon's account.⁷⁸ Similarly in 1939 the council drew to the attention of the Provincial Government the fact that it had cost the city some seven thousand one hundred dollars for bank interest on money borrowed in 1938 to finance the province's share of unemployment. The delay in payment, apart from the expense, embarrassed the city since it endangered its ability to secure further temporary bank advances.⁷⁹

Throughout the 1930s the city council urged that the senior governments should assume larger shares of relief costs. In December, 1932, it suggested that the city's share be limited to a sum not exceeding ten per cent of the total, which should include administration and hospital costs.⁸⁰ Similarly in 1936 the council reaffirmed this plea, although it suggested that a preferable state would be for the whole burden of unemployment relief to be removed entirely from the urban municipality.⁸¹

77 Ibid.

78 Saskatoon Council Minutes, May 8, 1933.

79 Ibid., February 27, 1939.

80 Ibid., December 9, 1932.

81 L.P.W., roll 37, file 41.

Table 9. Comparative Cost of Relief in Saskatoon, 1923, 1934, 1935

(Source: Saskatoon Council Minutes, June 13, 1935)

Month	1 9 3 3				1 9 3 4				1 9 3 5			
	Families	Persons	Cost	Families	Persons	Cost	Families	Persons	Cost	Families	Persons	Cost
January	1,794	7,179	\$ 47,060.30	2,085	8,523	\$ 67,374.43	1,796	7,502	\$ 65,676.28			
February	1,942	7,740	48,172.09	2,108	8,609	61,728.86	1,807	7,578	62,475.76			
March	1,983	7,837	53,457.11	2,139	8,754	67,910.17	1,821	7,594	66,524.60			
April	2,006	7,884	48,047.03	2,077	8,621	55,593.36	-	-	-			
May	1,888	7,443	44,415.83	1,965	8,044	50,929.50	-	-	-			
June	1,732	6,906	38,308.21	1,806	7,517	46,353.28	-	-	-			
July	1,617	6,490	37,016.91	1,713	7,071	43,522.98	-	-	-			
August	1,588	6,378	36,203.46	1,661	6,888	37,590.54	-	-	-			
September	1,650	6,789	39,542.94	1,678	7,346	38,429.73	-	-	-			
October	1,767	7,293	51,366.69	1,693	7,079	48,893.49	-	-	-			
November	1,886	7,731	51,848.19	1,727	7,217	58,868.36	-	-	-			
December	1,977	8,249	65,210.77	1,743	7,344	62,732.10	-	-	-			
Average per month	21,820	87,925	\$560,649.53	22,395	93,013	\$639,936.80	5,424	22,674	\$194,676.64			
Average cost per family, 12 months	1,819	7,327	\$ 46,720.80	1,866	7,751	\$ 52,228.07	1,808	7,558	\$ 64,892.21			
Average cost per family, per month			308.22			342.95			430.72			
Average cost per person, per year			25.69			22.58			35.89			
Average cost per person, per month			76.52			82.57			103.04			
Average cost per person, per month			6.38			6.88			8.59			

As the depression deepened the actual per capita cost increased substantially from year to year as the statistics in Table 9 indicate. Between 1933 and 1934 the average cost per person per month increased by fifty cents, and it was estimated that it would increase by one dollar and seventy cents in 1935. Similarly, although in 1935 there were likely to be fewer persons on relief, total costs were expected to increase.

These statistics also indicate the numbers of persons on relief. An annual pattern emerges similar to that in Prince Albert, the heaviest months being from November to April. The population of Saskatoon decreased in the depression decade for the first time since the formation of the city:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1901	113
1906	3,011
1911	12,004
1916	21,054
1921	25,739
1926	31,234
1931	43,291
1936	41,734
1941	43,028
1946	46,028 ⁸²

By December, 1930 1,610 persons were on relief.⁸³ This represented about four and one-half per cent of the population. The low numbers were reflected in the low costs. By 1931 about two thousand five hundred persons were on

82 Municipal Manual, Saskatoon 1967, compiled by City Clerk.

Population Section XVIII, 8.
83 Saskatoon Council Minutes, 1930

relief, representing approximately seven per cent of the population.⁸⁴ In 1932 this figure had doubled.⁸⁵ During 1933 and 1934 about eighteen per cent were receiving aid, a figure substantially higher than Prince Albert's. No statistics have been found for the middle part of the period, but numbers probably remained at this level. In 1938 an estimated fourteen per cent were on relief, after which date numbers declined steadily with costs.

Saskatoon, therefore, experienced a greater degree of suffering than Prince Albert during the depression years. In the most severe periods the city was relieving over eight thousand people. In addition to the greater percentage of the population requiring aid, the city also encountered more problems in finding a satisfactory and efficient system of administering the various aspects of relief. The chief reasons for these increased burdens lay in its geographic situation and its substantial size at the beginning of the 1930s. It is interesting to notice that in Saskatoon dissatisfaction with relief provisions came from bona-fide residents as well as transients. This fact further distinguishes relief in the city from that in Prince Albert, and allies it more closely with the effects of the depression on the town of Shaunavon.

84 Ibid., 1931.

85 L.P.W., roll 30, file 3.

CHAPTER 5. SHAUNAVON

Fall brought another crop failure to the district; the land was dotted now with empty farmhouses, their blank windows staring out over the spreading prairie, their walls piled high with rippled banks of black dust; farmers and their families moved westward and northward to Alberta and the Peace River country. Freights were dotted with unemployed, many of them young boys who had never had jobs in their lives--'gay cats' and 'scenery hogs' who had left the East to find work in the West, or the West to find work in the East. In winter-time they worked for \$5 a month on farms, or lived in ten cent 'scratch houses and pogies' in Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg or any of the prairie cities, standing on street corners and 'dinging' passers-by for the price of a cup of coffee... The town showed the depression; houses needed paint; cars on Main Street on Saturday evenings were older models; plate glass windows were empty where businesses had left.¹

This passage might well stand as a description of the late 1930s in the town of Shaunavon and the Rural Municipality of Grassy Creek in which it was situated. The impact of the depression in this south-western corner of the Province was mild in the early years. After 1934, however, a prolonged period of drought, dust storms and grasshopper invasions combined to cause repeated crop failures and extreme suffering for the inhabitants of the Palliser Triangle. The depression was a particularly untimely blow to Shaunavon. Since its formation in November, 1914, on land owned by the Canadian Pacific Railways, the town had

1 W.O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind, 197-8.

enjoyed rapid growth and had become one of the largest distributing centres outside the cities in the Province. A substantial number of persons were employed in the C.P.R. workshops situated in the town, and the opportunities to be found in Shaunavon and its surrounding district attracted numerous settlers as the following population statistics indicate.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1916	897
1921	1,146
1926	1,459
1931	1,761 ²

This early economic and demographic boom was accompanied in the 1920s by some of the advantages of contemporary urban society; a sewage disposal system and electric lighting were installed, sidewalks were cemented and parks improved. In 1928 prosperity had enabled the inhabitants to build a swimming pool.³ The lengthening shadow of the depression, however, gradually impinged on the life of the town in the 1930s, causing unemployment, depopulation, suffering and unrest. The prosperity of the town was naturally linked closely to that of the surrounding rural area. As soon as the crops began to fail, local merchants and services suffered, unemployment became prevalent, tax arrears mounted and the town council found itself with extra liabilities and decreased revenues with which to meet them.

2 Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Saskatchewan, 1946, 178.

3 The Shaunavon Standard, Silver Jubilee Edition, September 28, 1938.

Relief became necessary on a considerable scale, and the task of administering and financing such aid fell to the town council, elected annually. Initially the council favoured public works schemes. Direct relief, however, had to be resorted to on an ever-increasing scale. It was not until October, 1930, that relief became an important issue in council meetings. Thenceforth it was a perpetual feature of council life. On October 21, after a long discussion about relief requirements, the council instructed the Town Clerk to present to the Provincial Government the town's application for assistance. Shaunavon could no longer cope with relief problems single-handed and needed Government aid for both direct relief and proposed sewer construction, on which the council was prepared to embark as a relief measure if assistance was forthcoming.⁴ In December, 1930, aid was granted, and work on these schemes commenced.⁵

In the first years of the depression relief problems were discussed at the once or twice monthly council meetings, and superintended by the General Administration Committee formed from council members. As the scale on which relief was required increased it became necessary to appoint a separate committee to deal exclusively with the

4 Shaunavon Council Minutes, October 21, 1930.

5 Ibid., December 5, 1930.

relief question. In January, 1933, an advisory relief committee was established to receive all applications for relief and report on them to the General Administration Committee.⁶ By November of that year applications had become so numerous that the advisory committee had to arrange weekly meetings.⁷ At the beginning of 1934 the council decided to appoint a separate standing committee on relief, which was in charge of relief affairs until the end of the decade. Prior to 1938 this committee consisted of two councillors and two ex-councillors who had experience in dealing with relief. After 1938 three councillors, the mayor and one ex-councillor served. The relief committee made regular reports to the council and guided its policy-making in respect of the unemployment problem. Extensive discretionary powers were granted to the committee to deal with the details of relief administration in the best interests of the town.

Membership of the council of Shaunavon throughout the 1930s was remarkably consistent. This achievement was noteworthy since the Federal and Provincial Governments were subjected to such changes in this period. It might have been expected that the more frequent municipal elections would have given the dissatisfied another chance to show their

6 Ibid., January 9, 1933.

7 The Shaunavon Standard, November 9, 1933.

discontent. The longevity in office of several council members meant that some of the personnel of the relief committee served for a few years and their experience was of value to the relief administration of the town. The two retired councillors who were members of the relief committee brought a similar asset to meetings.

The great disadvantage of allowing the same people to serve over a period of time was that the committee could give the appearance of being an oligarchy, entrenched in power. In times of acute distress this proved a focal point for criticism. In March, 1936, the local Union of the Unemployed and the Shaunavon Ratepayers' Association urged that the committee be abolished and a new one created on which representatives of their organizations would be allowed to sit. They charged that the ex-councillors on the committee were being paid for their services, and argued that these positions should be open to everyone.⁸ The council discussed the composition of the old committee at great length. A proposal for a new one resulted in a tie when put to the vote.⁹ However, later in the month when the matter was debated again and all councillors were present, the old committee was vindicated and kept in office.¹⁰ It continued to superintend relief until the end of the depression.

8 Ibid., February 27, 1936.

9 Shaunavon Council Minutes, March 2, 1936.

10 Ibid., March 16, 1936.

Although the relief committee was the official body dealing with relief in this period, it met only once each week. Two people were more closely involved with day to day relief administration, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable. The depression meant retrenchment at all levels for the local authorities. Therefore the need for economy precluded the appointment of a separate person as Relief Officer. The town council was forced to extend the functions of two existing officials to cope with the burden of relief. In January, 1932, it was decided that the Town Clerk, F.G. Horsey should take over the work of issuing and handing out relief grocery and fuel orders.¹¹ Until 1934 this was a weekly task. After September of that year relief orders were given on a two weekly basis.¹² This lessened the amount of work to be done by the clerk and increased the number of bargains relief recipients could purchase in quantities. The Clerk acted on the instructions of the relief committee and the council.

The initial function of the Chief Constable in the relief process was that of a local employment officer. In April, 1932, Constable Asel was instructed by the council to be at his office each day between the hours of two and three o'clock for the purpose of assisting in finding farm employment for local men.¹³ Asel's successor J.M. Ross was required

11 Ibid., January 4, 1934.

12 Ibid., September 20, 1934.

13 Ibid., April 4, 1932.

to continue this work. In April, 1936, the employment office continued to function and Constable Ross was reported to have found positions for twelve men on farms at a wage of twenty-five dollars a month. Only three applications for these jobs were received. All of them came from persons living outside the town limits. Some members of the council interpreted this poor response to the laziness of Shaunavon's relief recipients. One councillor, however, criticized the council's policy, claiming that it did not treat recipients fairly, and contending that there had "never been an intelligent survey of relief" in the town.¹⁴

Whatever the reasons this aspect of the constable's work would not appear to have flourished. An area in which he seems to have been more successful was that of ensuring that there were few abuses in relief administration. As early as August, 1931, the council passed a resolution opposing the granting of relief to any individuals "who habitually take part in games of chance for money or who operate automobiles for pleasure."¹⁵ Constable Asel was instructed to check up on this matter and advise the council of any individuals he discovered who violated this rule.

In 1934 when the two-weekly relief orders came into effect a difference in their transference to the

¹⁴ The Shaunavon Standard, April 23, 1936.

¹⁵ Shaunavon Council Minutes, August 17, 1934.

relief recipient was implemented, which brought the Constable more closely into relief administration. Town Clerk Horsey handed over the completed orders to Constable Ross, who by this time was also officially known as the Relief Officer. Ross required relief recipients to report any earnings during the previous two weeks before the order was given out.¹⁶ Thus Ross was relief and employment officer, investigator, local peace keeper and later in the period he became the local probation officer. His office was used as a clothing depot, where donations could be received at certain times of the day. As in the case of Prince Albert Relief and Medical Officers, long experience of relief affairs was both an asset and a handicap to Horsey and Ross. There were occasional complaints about the latter man, which perhaps was only to be expected considering the multiplicity of functions he performed. Both men appear to have performed their tasks with justice and efficiency. They were, of course, the paid officials of the town council. They did not determine policies, but merely administered them. Any real dissatisfaction, therefore, would be aimed at the council, the author of all good or ill. Before considering the complaints against certain aspects of relief in Shaunavon, however, it is only fair to examine the council's policies and predicament in some detail.

16 The Shaunavon Standard, September 20, 1934.

A continual concern throughout the 1930s was that the town should be responsible for the relief of as few persons as possible. Consequently in the early years the council favoured a policy of assisting prospective indigents to leave. As early as November, 1929, Councillor C. Jenson reported that the General Administration Committee had incurred certain expenses in getting the F family to return to the United States, "thereby avoiding the granting of relief during the coming winter."¹⁷ In June, 1931, at a special meeting the council considered the question of assisting the removal to northern Saskatchewan of certain families who were likely to become a charge upon the town. It concluded that it would be wise to grant such assistance.¹⁸ In the later 1930s when economy forced the council to be less generous in its assistance, the relief committee was pleased to report that even though all applications had been turned down, the indigents "went anyway."¹⁹

Since Shaunavon authorities were anxious to relieve as few persons as possible, it is not surprising to find that the council wanted nothing to do with transient relief. Although the transient problem was not nearly so acute as it was in the larger urban centres, it was severe enough in the early years to cause the council to forward a protest to the Provincial Government:

17 Shaunavon Council Minutes, November 18, 1929.

18 Ibid., June 8, 1931.

19 The Shaunavon Standard, November 21, 1935.

This Council does hereby protest the arrival within its limits of transient families who have applied for and are receiving relief and urges that the Government place such families under the care of the Relief Commission, relieving the Town thereof.²⁰

Shaunavon did not have to pay the actual relief of such persons, but objected to the expense incurred administering it. Statistics which remain indicate that between 1934-37, the numbers of transient and non-resident unemployed obtaining relief in Shaunavon at the expense of the Provincial and Federal Governments varied from four to forty-four persons in any one month. The average was approximately twenty-five individuals each month.²¹

The council was firm in its dealings with both non-resident unemployed and bona-fide relief recipients.

At the beginning of the depression when employment in public works was available, the town's policy was to extract labour in return for relief. With the cessation of public works in mid 1932, however, direct relief was resorted to. Relief recipients had to sign an undertaking to repay relief advances, although there is no record of action taken to recover these debts. The council did not adopt the 'no relief without work' policy of Prince Albert, but it reserved the right to recruit casual labourers from among relief recipients when necessary. In reply to a Provincial

20 Shaunavon Council Minutes, November 20, 1933.

21 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39.

Government circular of 1936 the Town Clerk pointed out that the "performance of work is in no way a condition or requirement for relief received."²² By 1937 the emphasis of this policy was gradually changing. The council then resolved that any recipient refusing to do town work when called upon "be permanently removed from" the relief list, unless a satisfactory excuse was offered.²³ In January, 1939, in an effort to obtain some tangible results from relief expenditure, the council embarked on a policy of utilizing relief labour for the manufacture and placement of concrete sidewalk blocks and curbs. For any work rendered the recipient was accredited with thirty-two cents per hour, fifty per cent of which went towards paying off tax arrears and fifty per cent towards the individual's relief debt.²⁴ All male relief recipients, except those exempted for reasons of advanced age or physical disability, were required to take part in this work. Thus relief in the 1930s in Shaunavon followed the pattern of Prince Albert and Saskatoon--a long period of direct relief, bounded at either end by public works schemes for the unemployed.

Direct relief was issued by a voucher system and until 1936 it covered only food, fuel and clothing requirements. Rents were simply not paid. Shaunavon's vouchers

22 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, Shaunavon's reply to circular letter 161, February 17, 1936.

23 Shaunavon Council Minutes, June 7, 1937.

24 The Shaunavon Standard, January 4, 1939.

were similar to those of Prince Albert. Very early in the history of government assisted direct relief the council ceased to issue orders to any particular store or merchant, adopting the plan of issuing all orders 'open' to any merchant in the town. This had a two-fold benefit: relief recipients could obtain satisfaction by shopping at the store of their choice, and local merchants were able to share relief trade in a competitive way. Some stores advertised for such trade in The Shaunavon Standard: "Bring Your Relief Orders to Us and have them filled without Delay. Big Stocks and Low Prices."²⁵

Relief orders in fact became a form of currency in the town. Consider, for example, the fate of a lignite coal slip. This would be given to the relief recipient by the Town Clerk or the Relief Officer, and passed on to the coal merchant as payment for fuel. The coal merchant in turn would use the slip to obtain grocery supplies, and the grocer would hand the slip back to local officials for reimbursement or have the amount credited against his tax arrears. Thus one relief order could pass through three or four hands before returning to the Town Clerk. Apparently the system "worked admirably for years", and gave the "relief recipients every satisfaction."²⁶ Consequently, in 1934 when the Provincial Government introduced a new series of accounting

25 Ibid., October 18, 1934.

26 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, F.G. Horsey to G. Tomsett, October 13, 1934.

forms, which threatened to disrupt the whole system of relief procedure in Shaunavon, the Town Clerk urged that the town be allowed to continue with its old method. The request was granted.

However, although the open voucher seemed to be of great benefit to both merchants and recipients, it was also open to abuses. Some merchants allowed recipients to receive part of their order in the form of cash. This was disliked since it meant that recipients could spend the money on unnecessary items, such as entertainment and drink, to the detriment of their families. Reports of this reached the Government and T.M. Molloy asked for an investigation into the matter, suggesting that a solution to this malpractice would be for the town to allow a certain amount of cash relief to men performing relief labours.²⁷ The Town Clerk explained in reply that the council's policy was to pay no cash, since it had not a secure enough line of credit.²⁸ This policy was one which applied not merely to local relief recipients. In December, 1931, the council decided to issue grocery orders or cash tickets to the fire brigade instead of wages, "on the understanding that as little money as was absolutely necessary would be paid out."²⁹

27 R.L.I., roll 40, file 5, Molloy to Horsey, April 8, 1932.

28 Ibid., Horsey to Molloy, April 15, 1932.

29 Shaunavon Council Minutes, December 7, 1931.

In addition to trying to prevent local merchants giving out cash to relief recipients, a practice which apparently continued throughout the whole period,³⁰ the council had to contend with the problem of merchants allowing relief recipients to purchase goods on credit. When relief orders were issued, they were used to pay back debts, a procedure which was "contrary to the idea of the council".³¹ The council decided to warn merchants by public notice that measures would be taken to check this practise, so that relief recipients would receive goods for their orders, and not be compelled to use part of the order to pay an old debt. Whether or not the warning had any effect cannot be determined.

The greatest problem confronting the council was not minor malpractises such as the preceding, but the securing of sufficient funds to pay for relief on the scale demanded. An examination of the following statistics will indicate how relief costs increased dramatically from 1934 onwards.³²

Year	Total Direct Relief Costs
1930	\$ 1,872.45
1931	3,180.38
1932	3,439.70
1933	5,242.06
1934	10,097.06
1935	7,083.12
1936	11,840.87
1937	14,511.74 plus \$1,512.15 for rents
1938	25,978.57
1939	28,171.61
1940	11,364.09
1941	4,988.46

30 Interview with J.F. Fennell, July 24, 1968.

31 The Shaunavon Standard, November 9, 1938.

32 Shaunavon, Annual Financial Statements, 1930-1940.

Relief costs slowly mounted from 1930-32, in 1933 they increased by two-thirds, doubled in 1934, and declined in 1935. From 1936 onwards they increased considerably until the peak year of 1939, when total costs had increased over fourteen times those of 1930. Obviously the resources of the town could not meet these enormously increased expenditures. Like Saskatoon and Prince Albert, Shaunavon appealed to the Provincial and Dominion Governments for aid. This was rendered on basis of each government paying one-third of direct relief costs prior to December, 1935, after which the senior governments paid eighty per cent and the town twenty per cent. Shaunavon differed from Prince Albert and Saskatoon in that from October 1, 1936, to March 31, 1937, and from September 1, 1937 to July 31, 1938, the town was classed as being in the Federal Drought Area. Hence in those periods nearly all relief costs were borne by the Federal Government. In between and from August, 1938 onwards, the town had to finance twenty per cent of the expenditure.

At times Shaunavon was very hard pressed to pay this percentage. Twenty per cent of the relief costs for 1939 represented approximately six thousand dollars, a sum three times the total amount spent on relief in 1930. Drought and crop failures cut both ways, increasing the numbers on relief and decreasing tax collections, and thereby the ability to finance relief. The close relationship between tax arrears and relief costs was illustrated in a statement prepared by Town Clerk Horsey, and published in the Standard in 1934.

	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934 (to end of Nov.)
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
*Relief					
Costs.....	1,872.00	5,663.18	3,439.70	5,242.06	10,402.50
Government					
Grants.....	-	2,873.07	1,433.64	2,439.68	6,028.93
Net Cost to					
Town.....	1,872.00	2,790.11	2,006.06	2,802.38	4,373.57
Tax Levies..	35,606.10	34,581.42	36,091.77	29,371.58	26,216.62
Tax Col-					
lections...	27,070.07	21,892.78	25,411.56	21,359.25	15,592.29
#Other Rev-					
enue Col-					
lections...	8,677.16	8,217.88	8,203.29	7,553.20	5,495.24

* Including drugs, medical aid and indigent families.

Including sewer service, privy fees and licenses. 33

Taken over the five year period there was a steady decline in tax collections corresponding to a proportionate increase in relief expenses. The year of 1932 broke this trend with a rise in tax collections and a corresponding drop in relief costs. The most significant figures are those for 1934 when relief costs doubled and tax arrears increased substantially.

Since the town's revenues were incapable of financing relief on the scale demanded, resort was had to borrowing, both in the form of debenture issues and bank loans. An early problem was to maintain sufficient credit sources. In 1930 the town borrowed money from the Royal Bank of Canada, promising to repay the loans from tax collections. Unfortunately the tax receipts had to be used for relief. As a result the bank cut off the town's credit. A council meeting convened to discuss ways and means of continuing relief, seized on

33 The Shaunavon Standard, December 13, 1934.

the idea of asking local merchants to give credit on relief orders.³⁴ This, however, could only be a temporary expedient. Money would eventually have to be supplied. Fortunately some government help was forthcoming. The problem of credit reappeared in May, 1932. Unlike Prince Albert and Saskatoon, which were usually able to command enough credit to finance government shares of relief temporarily, the town of Shaunavon often had difficulty obtaining loans to finance its own share. As Town Clerk Horsey explained to Molloy:

We have no further borrowing power from our Bankers, and all our tax collections are required to be paid into the bank against advances so that we have absolutely no cash for relief or anything else.³⁵

Horsey asked that the town be sent written proof that the latest inter-government relief agreement specified that two-thirds of the costs would be paid by the senior governments, since the town had promised local merchants that they would receive at least that percentage of the money owed them.³⁶ From 1932 onwards the bank demanded that the Provincial Government back loans made to the town.

Thus from the very beginning of the depression financial problems bedevilled local relief administration and made the town almost completely dependent on the Provincial and Dominion Governments. The hesitant policy pursued by these governments, the temporary arrangements and

34 Shaunavon Council Minutes, September 8, 1931.

35 R.L.I., roll 40, file 5.

36 Ibid.

monthly agreements, symptomatic of relief history in the 1930s, were a particularly cruel blow. They meant that the town could never plan ahead, and was in fact frequently caught in a vacuum between an outdated agreement and a new one in the process of discussion. The relief committee of the council was the unfortunate mediator between hungry relief recipients and the central government's policies, or lack of them. An illustration of what this could result in was seen in May, 1932. The first day of this month was the cut-off date for all Dominion assistance to public works schemes. Shaunavon's storm water drain, road grading and gravelling projects were not completed. Application was made for an extension of the agreement to enable the project to be finished. The request was initially refused, although the letter informing the council of this decision was not dispatched until June 2. Further agitation caused the government to change its decision. On June 18 official permission to continue was received, seven weeks after relief work had stopped.³⁷ Meanwhile the council had had to inform the unemployed that public works relief had been discontinued and "no assurance" could be given as to when it might be resumed. Moreover, without government assistance no direct relief could be given.³⁸

After 1934 when the monthly grant-in-aid became the chief method of financing direct relief the position of

37 Ibid.

38 Shaunavon Council Minutes, May 2, 1932.

the council was particularly vulnerable. Each month it would anxiously await official confirmation that assistance was to be continued. Occasionally warning letters such as the following would be received from the Provincial Director of Relief:

I am unable, at this time, to give you any definite advice with regard to relief issues in the month of August. I must warn you, therefore, that any relief issued by you in that month, must be on the sole responsibility of the municipality unless you have received written advice from this department that the government is contributing to the cost thereof.³⁹

Since this letter was received at the end of July, the council hardly had time to prepare in advance. The absence of long term government plans also meant that the council could not give satisfactory answers to delegations of the unemployed at their frequent appearances before council. In December, 1935, Mayor J. Cardno had to tell one such delegation that he could make them no promises since a new agreement was pending, and the government was three months in arrears with payments.⁴⁰

If the patchwork central policies were a perpetual problem to the local council, how much more distress did they cause the relief recipient. In May, 1934, the Shaunavon Unemployed Association dispatched an urgent telegram to the Prime Minister:

39 The Shaunavon Standard, July 27, 1938. W.W. Dawson to F.G. Horsey, extract from letter.

40 Shaunavon Council Minutes, December 5, 1935.

Province has shut off relief. Town has no money. People here do not know where next meal is coming from. Impossible to get work. Seventy-three families received relief last winter, few are working, majority are dependent on relief. Average relief eight cents daily each. Now nothing. What shall we do?⁴¹

Fortunately, in most instances relief was continued. But the fact remains that short term relief agreements were a constant source of fear to both relief recipients and the council. Often neither knew what the next month held in store. Life on relief was invariably precarious.

Throughout the 1930s the council tried to get the senior governments to assume total responsibility for relief finance and administration. These pleas became particularly acute from 1936 onwards as relief costs and the numbers affected increased because of the continued crop failures in the district. In August, 1936, F.G. Horsey dispatched a letter on behalf of the council drawing attention to the town's plight:

Last winter we had approximately twenty per cent of our population receiving relief in some form or another and it was with great difficulty that we succeeded in financing our twenty per cent share: as a matter of fact our doing so was at the expense of other creditors. It is not necessary for me to enlarge upon the crop failure of the district, you know all about that; but owing to that failure the indications are that during the coming winter there will be from forty to fifty per cent of our population that will have to have assistance by way of full or partial relief. Owing to the same cause the taxpaying ability of our ratepayers is curtailed to such an extent that we foresee the utmost difficulty in securing sufficient funds to pay

⁴¹ L.P.W., roll 34, file 39. Shaunavon Union of the Unemployed to the Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett, May 3, 1934.

wages and keep the ordinary services of the Town in operation without providing anything to cover the cost of Relief.⁴²

After a series of similar letters Shaunavon was admitted to the Federal Drought Area in October. It is interesting to notice that as soon as the Federal Government took over complete costs, complaints and petitions to council meetings underwent a substantial decrease. Perhaps this was a silent tribute to the advantages of central control. However, this respite from relief did not last long. At the end of March, 1937, in anticipation of a good crop in the district, the town was expelled from the federal fold. The council managed as best it could to pay its twenty per cent share of the costs. In June, however, a steady stream of letters began to Regina urging that the town could no longer finance any of the cost of relief, and asking that its share be cut to ten per cent, to be financed by the Provincial Government until the money could be found.⁴³ The plea was reiterated in July and finally in September the total burden of relief was assumed once again by the Federal Government because of the catastrophic crop failures.

Shaunavon, like Saskatoon and Prince Albert, experienced difficulties in obtaining prompt payments for the provincial and federal shares of relief. In December,

⁴² Ibid., Horsey to Molloy, August 31, 1936.

⁴³ Shaunavon Council Minutes, June 21, 1937.

1937, Horsey wrote to W. Dawson pointing out that the town was still waiting for reimbursement for the September and October relief expenditures:

The situation with us is getting serious as we now have outstanding all our orders for the four months of September to December inclusive amounting to approximately \$14,000 and we are threatened with cessation of further credit until a considerable payment is made on these back orders.⁴⁴

In spite of constant complaints, however, this financial time lag appears to have persisted throughout the whole period.

To understand fully the impact of the depression attention must be paid to the numbers of persons suffering as well as the costs of their relief. Unfortunately no complete set of statistics exist for the numbers of individuals on relief each month during the depression in Shaunavon. By piecing together various sources, however, it is possible to gain some concept of the percentage of the population on relief in the various years. The total population of the town declined during this period as did that of Saskatoon:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1931	1,761
1936	1,636
1941	1,603
1946	1,643 ⁴⁵

The increase prior to 1931 indicates the years of prosperity

⁴⁴ L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, Horsey to Dawson, December 23, 1937.

⁴⁵ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Saskatchewan, 1946, 178.

enjoyed by the town. In the first half of the 1930s the population fell by eight per cent while in the second half of the decade only a two per cent decline occurred. There emerges then the interesting fact that people seemed to leave the town in the years when the depression was mildest. A local inhabitant suggested in an interview that some of the "better" people left Shaunavon in the 1930s.⁴⁶ This early depopulation suggests that some inhabitants left while they still had the means to do so. It must also be remembered that prior to 1935 the town was assisting certain families to resettle as well. After 1936 it would appear that there was either a lack of inclination or means to move from the town.

Of the people remaining in Shaunavon the percentage of relief varied from year to year and from season to season. In October, 1930, Town Clerk Horsey wrote to the Provincial Department of Railways, Labour and Industries, asking for help since it was anticipated that at least eighteen families and twenty single men would need relief during the winter.⁴⁷ In the early months of 1931 about sixty individuals were receiving direct relief, and eighty-three were being relieved by public works.⁴⁸ This meant that about nine per cent of the population was on relief, a figure less than that of the

⁴⁶ Interview J.F. Fennell, July 24, 1968.

⁴⁷ R.L.I., roll 40, file 5, Horsey to Molloy, October 24, 1930.

⁴⁸ Ibid., file 6.

two cities in the early stages. Gradually numbers increased. In December, 1933, it was estimated that fifty-five families were on relief, a total of one hundred adults and one hundred and seventy children, at a weekly cost to the town of \$104.20.⁴⁹ These numbers represented approximately fifteen per cent of the population. In December, 1934, almost three hundred persons were on relief.⁵⁰ December, 1935, however, brought a reduction of this total by about one hundred.⁵¹ This improvement was reflected in the reduced relief costs of that year. This trend did not last long. By December, 1936, there were approximately 400 relief recipients in the town, double the number of the previous year and representing about twenty-five per cent of the population. In 1937 and 1938 the numbers continued to mount. In January of the latter year a peak was reached with four hundred and thirty-one persons receiving relief.⁵² Gradually these totals declined until in February, 1939, only three hundred and seven persons were on relief, a reduction of thirty per cent on the previous year's total.⁵³ With the outbreak of the Second World War and improved crops, relief rolls dwindled rapidly. In November, 1939, only twenty-four families were still on the relief rolls.⁵⁴

This was the pattern of relief in the decade.

49 The Shaunavon Standard, December 21, 1933.

50 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39.

51 Ibid.

52 The Shaunavon Standard, November 16, 1938.

53 Ibid., February 8, 1939.

54 Ibid., November 8, 1939.

Within each year as was seen in the studies of the other urban centres there was considerable variation in the numbers on relief. From an examination of the following statistics, an annual pattern emerges similar to that of Prince Albert and Saskatoon.

Table 10. The Monthly Cost of Relief and Numbers Relieved in Shaunavon in 1935 and 1936. 55

Date	D.R. ^a Costs (residents)	Individuals Assisted	D.R. ^a (100% Govt. Cases)	Individuals Assisted
<u>1935</u>				
Jan.	\$1,147.65	265	\$51.40	26
Feb.	960.25	275	29.40	17
Mar.	1,112.20	276	32.10	17
Apr.	950.52	264	29.00	17
May	659.25	234	34.00	17
June	349.15	147	21.60	4
July	251.40	123	21.60	4
Aug.	249.15	123	28.90	4
Sept.	260.60	116	21.60	4
Oct.	62.00	39	49.15	13
Nov.	347.40	160	70.55	26
Dec.	579.60	168	68.95	26
<u>1936</u>				
Jan.	786.14	205	113.93	27
Feb.	1,167.87	245	91.30	28
Mar.	986.45	237	120.45	29
Apr.	939.19	211	122.05	28
May	627.95	170	96.46	29
June	404.25	129	74.20	29
July	412.86	129	74.20	29
Aug.	592.73	172	89.60	32
Sept.	999.20	229	96.90	32
Oct.	3,321.17	320	384.02	37
Nov.	2,709.53	339	237.98	36
Dec.	2,541.60	353	237.90	36

a Direct Relief

Relief costs and numbers were highest from November to April, gradually decreasing in the summer months. From the preceding figures it can be seen that transient relief represented a

55 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39.

small fraction of the total which was administered, less than one-tenth in fact. Although Shaunavon did not have the transient problems of the cities, relief was not free from complaints and crises. The major problem confronting the council was to satisfy the demands of the local unemployed. This proved no easy task since they were organized into an aggressive union.

The year 1934, which saw an increase in the intensity of the depression in Shaunavon also witnessed the emergence of a local unemployed association as an important element in relief affairs. As early as January the Shaunavon Unemployed Association was holding meetings in the Town Hall. As the depression continued and deepened these meetings were to become a regular feature of life in the town. In these early stages the aims of the association were modest and understandable. The Chairman, the Reverend A.B. Stade claimed that the association was "one hundred per cent for Shaunavon and had no wish to bankrupt the town or cause trouble."⁵⁶ Its only objective was to ensure that those in unfortunate circumstances received humane treatment. Such an aim, however, was bound to cause trouble since it necessitated a constant stream of letters to the Provincial Government asking about relief regulations and certain cases in the town, who, in the opinion of the association, were not receiving their due.

56 The Shaunavon Standard, January 11, 1934.

The barrage of enquiry and complaint letters sent to Regina made problems for the Provincial Government and frequently made the town council resentful. On one occasion in 1934 it appears that the Government notified the unemployed of a new relief agreement before informing the council. The council took strong exception to this and informed the Government of its disapproval.⁵⁷ Complaints continued during the rest of the year and reached such a level by late 1934 that the Government decided to send an inspector to Shaunavon to investigate the system of relief administration in the town.

Accordingly on December 11, A.H. Bailey, Government Inspector, proceeded to Shaunavon and had conversations with the Town Clerk, the relief committee of the council and the executive of the unemployed association. Bailey's report vindicated the town's handling of relief. Contrary to the complaints of the unemployed association, relief recipients appeared to be getting enough food and fuel. Moreover, the relief committee itself seemed to Bailey to be a group of typical businessmen anxious to assist their fellow citizens, but determined not to be imposed upon "by a small group of discontented men who in most cases are not doing their utmost to obtain at least occasional employment of some kind."⁵⁸ Bailey, therefore, concluded that their complaints need not be considered too seriously, especially in view of the fact

57 Shaunavon Council Minutes, May 7, 1934.

58 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, A.H. Bailey's Report, submitted December 18, 1934.

that the Unemployed Association now had a club house in which they could read, play cards and discuss their grievances. The unemployed in Prince Albert and Saskatoon did not have this luxury.

This official and impartial investigation did not prevent further complaints from arising. In fact delegations of the unemployed became a regular event at council meetings in 1935. In January, February and March, deputations brought demands for increases in the food and clothing quotas. On March 18, a delegation brought a petition signed by one hundred and seventy persons, asking for the Government to take over the entire cost and administration of relief.⁵⁹ The council endorsed this petition and it was duly forwarded to Regina. On April 1 and 15, other delegations appeared asking the council to invite T.M. Molloy to Shaunavon to discuss their condition. Immediate action was urged, for, as the leader of the delegation pointed out: "We are needy people, and we can't wait forever for Molloy to get here. We're not agitating for something for ourselves. It's for the people."⁶⁰ The council promised to do its utmost to persuade Molloy to come.

The Commissioner, however, was extremely busy and did not get to Shaunavon until the end of August. Meanwhile bitter complaints continued to be presented to the council.

59 Shaunavon Council Minutes, March 18, 1935.

60 The Shaunavon Standard, April 18, 1935.

Town Authorities were accused of discriminating against certain persons in the handing out of relief, and of not doing their best to help relief recipients in general. Molloy's visit brought little joy to the Unemployed Association. He found that the relief schedules in Shaunavon compared favourably with those of surrounding small towns. Over the previous six months it was found that Shaunavon had spent \$3.85 on clothing per individual relief recipient in comparison with \$3.02 spent in Assiniboia. Food costs in the town were slightly less, \$11.82 per person for six months in Shaunavon compared with \$12.04 for Assiniboia inhabitants.⁶¹ Molloy, therefore, refused to interfere, affirming that his department relied on the judgement of the people's elected representatives in relief matters.

Once again, however, an official inquiry failed to convince the Shaunavon Unemployed Association that they were receiving a reasonable amount of relief. The bitter round of requests, promises, questions, answers, reproaches and accusations continued at each council meeting when a delegation of the unemployed was present. In January, 1936, demands were put before the council for more food and clothing, extra fuel allowances, the impartial distribution of relief and the appointment of a woman to assist Relief Officer Ross in his investigations.⁶² Dissatisfaction

61 Ibid., August 29, 1935.

62 Shaunavon Council Minutes, January 20, 1936.

with relief administration in the town appeared to be reaching a crisis point, with letters from the Shaunavon Ratepayers' Association as well as the Union of the Unemployed asking for a new relief committee, consisting of representatives of their organizations amongst others.⁶³ However, the council upheld the composition and conduct of the old committee.

In March and April the clothing situation continued to be acute. The Ratepayers' Association once again appeared to be on the side of the relief recipients, criticizing the council for the small amount spent on clothes during the preceding six months.⁶⁴ The complaints which had flowed to Regina during this controversy aroused concern for relief administration in the town. In early March Molloy wrote to Mayor J. Cardno suggesting that, in view of the large number of complaints, the council should enlarge the relief committee, or organize an appeal board on the lines of the one in Saskatoon, to which relief recipients might appeal when dissatisfied.⁶⁵ The Mayor's reply indicates that the council viewed the discontent in Shaunavon from a different perspective. He claimed to have evidence that people were solicited to write to the government and to keep on writing until they obtained satisfaction. To the council these complaints smacked of political agitation rather than genuine hardship.

63 Ibid., March 2, 1936.

64 The Shaunavon Standard, April 2, 1936.

65 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, Molloy to Mayor Cardno, March 2, 1936.

Mayor Cardno dismissed the disenchanted as "a bunch of reds" and after defending the activities of the relief committee concluded; "Since Mrs. G. has returned from Regina there is nothing but devilment being hatched right along, and as she is one of the C.C.F. executive all this amounts to is cheap politics."⁶⁶ Politics or not, Molloy decided to make a second visit to Shaunavon in April, 1936, to discuss the problems of relief with the council and the unemployed.

On April 14 a special council meeting with Molloy was held in the Court House. The whole problem of relief was thoroughly discussed, particularly the question of increasing the food quota and the payment of relief rents. Discussion resulted in Commissioner Molloy agreeing to recommend to his Minister that the food quota be increased by twenty per cent, and that authority be given for the town to pay rents for relief recipients where absolutely necessary, with a maximum of five dollars per month. The food increase was to be effective immediately, the rent allowance had to await authorization in writing from the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare.⁶⁷ The fact that Molloy had agreed to these increases suggests that relief recipients had been making some legitimate complaints after all.

66 Ibid., Mayor Cardno to Molloy, March 12, 1936.

67 Shaunavon Council Minutes, April 14, 1936.

This slight success, rather than satisfying the local unemployed, marked the beginning of more ambitious schemes. The presence of the unemployed at council meetings was so persistent that the local newspaper commented ironically on one occasion when they failed to appear:

Amicable and harmonious was the meeting of the town fathers gathered in regular session at the town hall Monday night. For the first time in months no delegation from the unemployed craved their attention and the routine business was gone through without delay.⁶⁸

This proved a temporary aberration. Having gained increases in the food quota, the unemployed proceeded to ask for the schedule to be raised so that it would equal that in force in the city of Regina.⁶⁹ In October, 1936, the council endorsed this plea for standardization with the capital, simultaneously forwarding a request to the Federal Government that it take over the total cost of relief in the town.⁷⁰ After some bargaining the Government agreed to allow Shaunavon to become part of the Federal Drought Area. For the next six months there were fewer complaints in the town.

In April, 1937, however, when the town became responsible for twenty per cent of relief costs, discontent once again manifested itself. The ideas of the unemployed had now progressed to a demand for a scheme of work and wages, similar to that sought by the Prince Albert Strikers

68 The Shaunavon Standard, May 21, 1936.

69 Shaunavon Council Minutes, September 21, 1936.

70 Ibid., October 5, 1936.

of 1936.⁷¹ Moreover, with the coronation of George VI imminent the Union of the Unemployed passed a resolution asking for an extra week's food allowance in order that they might be able to "celebrate the occasion of the coronation of His Majesty the King in a manner befitting Canadian citizens, and that such day be remembered by the unemployed as a day of rejoicing, free from the cares coincidental to their condition."⁷² Whether it was patriotism or enlightened self-interest which prompted this demand is a moot point. The Provincial Government refused to comply. Demands for more food and clothing continued throughout the summer months. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that delegations of women now became more frequent visitors to the council chamber, usually led by the C.C.F. executive member, Mrs. G., to whom Mayor Cardno took such exception. The unemployed held regular meetings in the labour temple, bemoaning the increased cost of living and endorsing such maxims as "in unity is strength".⁷³ However, when Shaunavon became part of the Federal Drought Area again in September, 1937, discontent seems to have largely disappeared or gone underground, since there is no mention of delegations of the discontented in the council minutes or the local paper.

Although the unemployed were the element in the

71 The Shaunavon Standard, April 8, 1937.

72 L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, Horsey to Molloy May 4, 1937.

73 The Shaunavon Standard, July 28, 1937.

town to suffer most acutely during the depression, they were not the only people with problems and complaints in the 1930s. The plight of local merchants must also be considered. As early as November, 1930, representatives from the Retail Merchants' Association appeared before the council requesting the enforcement of the transient trader's license law and a revision of the license fee upward, with a view to preventing the dumping of bankrupt stocks from outside points.⁷⁴ This desire for protection was undoubtedly a symptom of harder times. In 1936, a petition from thirty business houses in the town asked that the transient trader's license fee be raised to five hundred dollars, to protect local firms from unfair outside competition. This request was granted by the council.⁷⁵ In 1937 the situation for some small business people was especially grave. Town Clerk Horsey wrote to Dawson of a situation "not encountered before" where quite a number of small business people were unable to get along without some relief. These businesses could pay only low wages. If the town helped out they were subsidizing the employer. The alternative was the closing of these businesses, more unemployment and larger relief bills.⁷⁶

At least the town's open voucher system enabled all merchants to share in relief trade. The local newspaper

⁷⁴ Shaunavon Council Minutes, November 17, 1930.

⁷⁵ Ibid., August 3, 1936.

⁷⁶ L.P.W., roll 34, file 39, Horsey to Dawson, October 22, 1937.

made periodic pleas for a community spirit to prevail by all residents purchasing their requirements from local businessmen, rather than from mail order firms. "By so doing," the Standard urged, "your money will stay where it will help maintain local schools, churches and various benevolent organizations."⁷⁷

It would appear, moreover, that the community spirit of Shaunavon was not restricted to this plane. Local charity played an important part in relief in the town as it did in Prince Albert and Saskatoon. In the early years money and clothing were given and a Central Relief Committee was organized, whose main function was to provide extra comforts at Christmas time for relief recipients.⁷⁸ Local charity was supplemented by outside contributions in the second half of the decade. When the depression lifted in eastern Canada, boxcars of food and clothing were sent out to help the unemployed in the West. Shaunavon received several boxcars. To ensure that the contents were fairly distributed a voluntary relief committee was organized in September, 1937.⁷⁹ Apparently it functioned efficiently and justly. In October, 1937, four hundred families in Shaunavon and the surrounding area were able to share in the contents of two carloads of goods.⁸⁰

77 The Shaunavon Standard, October 19, 1933.

78 Ibid., November 23, 1933.

79 Ibid., September 22, 1937.

80 Ibid., October 20, 1937.

Thus relief in Shaunavon in the 1930s emerges as a mixture of good and bad, satisfaction and complaint, trial and error, similar to that experienced in Saskatoon and Prince Albert. Relief Officer, J.M. Ross, summed up this ambivalence in 1936, in a comment on the clothing relief situation: "In the majority of cases the people seemed satisfied and thankful for the relief being given, but in a number of cases they are very much dissatisfied."⁸¹ Perhaps this judgement of a contemporary deeply involved with relief in the town is the fairest conclusion that can be made.

⁸¹ L.P.W., roll 34, file 39.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the 1960s the depression decade in Saskatchewan is remembered as one of dust, drought and despair. This study suggests that in the urban centres of the Province life was not quite so one-sided. While the economic depression and consequent unemployment brought misery, suffering and humiliation to many, it also provided an environment in which charity and community spirit could operate. In all three urban centres the work of local service clubs and generous individuals helped to make life for those on relief a more acceptable state. In the work of finding and distributing clothing and household items, and providing Christmas treats, these clubs did invaluable work.

Statistically the numbers on relief varied between ten per cent and twenty-five per cent of the population in the urban centres under study. These percentages are representative of the Province in general. In Prince Albert between ten and fourteen per cent were on relief, in Saskatoon between fifteen and eighteen per cent and in Shaunavon between sixteen and twenty-five per cent. The impact of the depression was therefore slightly less severe in the northern part of the settled region of the Province than in the south. The relative prosperity of Prince Albert in this period was apparent in its increased population, since most urban areas in Saskatchewan underwent depopulation in the decade. The actual percentages on relief, however, are surprising.

They are perhaps not as high as might have been expected.

The main problem for the urban centres of the Province in the 1930s was not so much the depth of depression as the duration. While unemployment was considerable between 1930-1935, in all three places studied it was in the second half of the decade that suffering became most widespread and intense. The early thirties, however, had exhausted municipal finances and administration. Consequently in two of the centres studied, Prince Albert and Shaunavon, more difficulties were encountered in the second half of the decade in the form of complaints, political agitation and transient invasions. Saskatoon faced its greatest problems in the first half of the decade. After the institution of cash relief in 1934, most bona-fide residents were satisfied. However, all three urban centres experienced similar difficulties. Rural dwellers seeking assistance in the city and a lack of finances with which to cope with relief requirements were recurring phenomena.

In all three urban centres the need for relief was large enough to necessitate the creation of special

committees or positions. The key figures in relief administration were the Relief Officer and his staff, since they came into daily contact with recipients and had to enforce the various aspects of relief policy. Although the Relief Officer was essentially the paid servant of the city or town, his attitude made a great difference to the way in which relief was administered. All three Relief Officers were targets for criticism and abuse inevitable in a time of suffering. However, in the study of Saskatoon the added effects of an uncooperative Relief Officer were apparent. Various differences in the method of giving relief have also emerged. Saskatoon and Prince Albert were the most progressive since cash relief is the method favoured by the Provincial Welfare Department today.

It is interesting to relate the degree of suffering endured in each municipality studied to political events in the 1930s. Municipal politicians suffered little. Provincially it was a different matter. In Prince Albert, which economically and demographically was least affected, there was continuity in the representative returned in the three provincial elections to the Legislative Assembly. The Liberal, T.C. Davis, represented the city for almost the whole decade. In Saskatoon, where suffering was more intense, two Conservatives were returned in 1929. The 1934 and 1938 elections, however, witnessed their replacement by Liberals. In Shaunavon, initially a Conservative represented the constituency. In 1934 a Farmer-Labour candidate was

returned, while in 1938 a Liberal took the seat from the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation candidate by a majority of less than two hundred.¹ The changes experienced in Saskatoon and Shaunavon and the continuity in Prince Albert would suggest that there was a relationship between the severity of depression and political events, although these political ramifications must not be exaggerated.

In conclusion it is both necessary and enlightening to look beyond the 1930s to the consequences of the depression for Saskatchewan. Primarily there were two major inter-related consequences, one political, the other sociological, in both of which the urban centres of the Province played an important part. The suffering endured in Saskatchewan in the decade caused many people to begin questioning the political, social and economic organization of Canadian society. Gradually a new political party evolved, with socialist principle and aims, intent on supplying human needs rather than making profits. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was established with a platform designed to secure debt reduction, health services, work with wages, equal educational opportunity, increased social services and banking reform. The Saskatchewan Farm-Labour group was instrumental in the formation of this party in 1933. The C.C.F. attacked capitalism as the main cause of

1 Directory of Saskatchewan, (Regina and Saskatoon, 1954).

depression:

When private profit is the main stimulus to economic effort, our society oscillates between periods of feverish prosperity in which the main benefits go to speculators and profiteers, and of catastrophic depression, on which the common man's normal state of insecurity and hardship is accentuated--socialized economy is the only answer.²

The depression was the seed bed in which these ideas could germinate. The urban centres of the Province played an important part in this process. The following extract, from a pamphlet describing the climate in which the C.C.F. was founded, suggests this relationship:

In Canadian cities from Halifax to Vancouver, relief families huddled in cold houses, hungry and miserable. Men trampled the streets looking for work becoming cynical and hopeless as the empty days dragged by. Farmers watched the prices of their products fall to unbelievable levels, far below the cost of production, while their debts sky rocketed and their farms passed into the hands of banks and mortgage companies. Youth rode the rods or rusted at home in idleness, frustrated and conscious that it had no future. Everywhere anger was rising against the easy assertions of business men and politicians that prosperity was just around the corner, and people in large numbers began, for the first time, seriously to question the basis of our economic and social order.³

Although the party did not gain power in the 1930s, the 1944 Provincial Election witnessed a landslide victory and the beginning of twenty years of C.C.F. rule in Saskatchewan.

2 "Manifesto and Programme of C.C.F." as adopted by the First Annual Convention at Regina July 19-21, 1933.

3 "How the C.C.F. Got Started", pamphlet of the Saskatchewan C.C.F.

Socialist government occasioned certain changes in the social services of the Province. On November 2, 1944, the Department of Social Welfare was formed out of three existing branches of government--the Bureau of Child Protection, the Old Age Pensions Branch and the Direct Relief Branch. This date marked the beginning of co-ordinated planning for social services. By forming a new department the Government introduced a fresh approach to welfare problems. Social and economic security were recognized as the fundamental right of every human being. There were two major aspects of the welfare program, economic and social. Welfare became a financial, consultative and preventative service, not a matter of handing out money each week to the needy. It demanded long range planning. Consequently an efficient province-wide administration had to be created. Eight branch offices were established in the urban centres from which services could operate.

Direct relief, the main concern of this thesis, turned into a social aid programme. This was a municipal and provincial undertaking. The municipality was still in charge of relief administration and the residence laws were still operative. However, there was more central control and organization than there had been in the 1930s. Social aid manuals and schedules were printed to guide the municipality in providing for its indigents. The attitude to such persons was finally changing; "The public assistance

dollar has been one of the most important investments made in the Canadian way of life. It has enabled children to live in a large measure a normal life, with parents, home, church, school and recreation."⁴

In spite of all these innovations welfare was a municipal-provincial function in which the Federal Government played no part. This situation did not alter until March, 1956, when an agreement was reached between the Federal and Provincial Governments, by which the former was to pay forty-five per cent of social aid and the municipality twenty-five per cent. Further changes were introduced by the provincial Social Aid Act of 1959. From April 1 onwards municipalities were to be reimbursed each month by the Province for all social aid issued by them and they were to be billed annually for their per capita share of province-wide costs. "This, in effect, did away with the residence requirement inherent in the age old concept that relief of the poor was a local responsibility."⁵ The Saskatchewan equivalent to the Elizabethan Poor Laws were finally abolished.

Welfare today is indeed different from relief in the 1930s. However, the contemporary situation is the outcome of happenings in the 1930s. For Saskatchewan the consequences of the depression were great: it was the first Province to experience C.C.F. Government and the first to experiment with comprehensive social services.

⁴ Annual Report of the Department of Social Welfare, 1948-49, 47.

⁵ Department of Social Welfare, Publication, Social Welfare in Saskatchewan, 1960, 19.

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Note: Some of the material for the thesis was used confidentially. In the text and footnotes, therefore, no personal references have been made where they might cause embarrassment. Letters of the alphabet have been substituted for such names.