

# “A Palace for the Public”: Housing Reform and the 1946 Occupation of the Old Hotel Vancouver\*

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On 26 January 1946 thirty veterans led by a Canadian Legion sergeant-at-arms occupied the old Hotel Vancouver to protest against the acute housing problem in Vancouver. The incident climaxed two years of popular agitation over the city's increasingly serious accommodation shortages. In the end, this lengthy, militant campaign achieved some concrete housing reforms for Vancouver's tenants. The struggle and its results provide an excellent case study by which to examine the interaction between protest and housing reform in mid-twentieth century urban Canada.

In the past, historians of Canadian housing have not concerned themselves with the interrelations of protest and reform. Rather, some have concentrated upon specific instances of improvements in housing: the activities of the Toronto Housing Company and the Toronto Public Housing Commission between 1900 and 1923; the distinctive urban landscape of homes and gardens in pre-1929 Vancouver; the establishment of the St. John's Housing Corporation in the forties; the reconstruction of Richmond following the 1917 Halifax explosion; and the array of federal programs undertaken between 1935 and 1971.<sup>1</sup> Other historians have

\* I would like to thank Douglas Cruikshank, Robin Fisher, Logan Hovis and Allen Seager for their helpful comments during this paper's preparation.

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Campbell Spragge, "The Provision of Workingmen's Housing: Attempts in Toronto, 1904-1920" (M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1974); *idem*, "A Confluence of Interests: Housing Reform in Toronto, 1900-1920," in *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City*, eds. Alan F. J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, Carleton Library, no. 119 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada in Association with the Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1979), pp. 247-67; Lorna F. Hurl, "The Toronto Housing Company, 1912-1923: The Pitfalls of Painless Philanthropy," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (March 1984): 28-53; Deryck William Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver: The Emergence of a West Coast Urban Landscape, 1886-1929" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1981); *idem*, "House and Home in Vancouver: Images of West Coast Urbanism, 1886-1929," in *The Canadian City*, eds. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise, Carleton Library, no. 109 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada in Association with the Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1979), pp. 186-211; Jane Lewis and Mark Shrimpton, "Policy-Making in New-

emphasized more negative aspects of housing reform and living conditions: the inequalities of capitalist society that assign the least satisfactory accommodation to low-income people; the control of the reform process by an interconnected state and business community; and the residual role of the federal government in residential construction.<sup>2</sup> Still others have explored the relationship of class structure to home ownership and tenancy.<sup>3</sup> But, despite recent British and American attempts to link working class agitation and state intervention in housing, Canadian historians have not investigated the impact of popular protest upon the implementation of federal housing programs.<sup>4</sup>

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foundland during the 1940s: The Case of the St. John's Housing Corporation," *Canadian Historical Review* 65 (June 1984): 209-39; John Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921," *Plan Canada* 16 (March 1976): 36-47; and David G. Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, vol. 1 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press for the Human Resources Research Council of Alberta, 1975).

- <sup>2</sup> Allan Moscovitch, "Housing: Who Pays? Who Profits?" in *Inequality: Essays on the Political Economy of Social Welfare*, eds. Allan Moscovitch and Glenn Drover (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 314-47; Alvin Finkel, "The Construction Industry," in *Business and Social Reform in the Thirties* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979), pp. 100-16; Terry Copp, "Housing Conditions," in *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 70-87; Michael J. Piva, "Public Health and Housing," in *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921*, Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Université d'Ottawa, no. 9 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 125-42; Marc H. Choko, *Crises du logement à Montréal (1860-1939)* (Montréal: Editions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, 1980); John T. Saywell, "The Search for a Solution, 1914-1974," in *Housing Canadians: Essays on the History of Residential Construction in Canada*, ed. John T. Saywell, Discussion Paper, no. 24 (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1975), pp. 150-216; Albert Rose, *Canadian Housing Policies (1935-1980)* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980); and John C. Bacher, "The Origins of a Non-Policy: The Development of the Assumption of a Housing Responsibility by the Canadian Federal Government" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1980).
- <sup>3</sup> Michael J. Doucet, "Working Class Housing in a Small Nineteenth Century Canadian City: Hamilton, Ontario, 1852-1881," in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, eds. Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 83-105; R. Harris, G. Levine and B. S. Osborne, "Housing Tenure and Social Classes in Kingston, Ontario, 1881-1901," *Journal of Historical Geography* 7 (July 1981): 271-89; A. Gordon Darroch, "Occupational Structure, Assessed Wealth and Homeowning during Toronto's Early Industrialization, 1861-1899," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 16 (November 1983): 381-410; Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet and Mark J. Stern, "Property: Use Value and Exchange Value," in *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 131-57.
- <sup>4</sup> Seán Damer, "State, Class, and Housing: Glasgow, 1885-1919," in *Housing, Social Policy, and the State*, ed. Joseph Melling (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 73-112; Joseph Melling, "Clydeside Housing and the Evolution of State Rent Control, 1900-1939," in *Housing, Social Policy, and the State*, pp. 139-67; Manuel Castells,

This case study, which examines the background, the actors, the ferment and the reforms associated with Vancouver's mid-forties shelter problem, asserts that on occasion protest has succeeded in bringing about measures to improve the accommodation of the Canadian people. As well, the study raises and answers a number of questions about the interaction between protest and housing reform. Were the changes substantial and lasting, or remedial and temporary? Did all protest groups share a commitment to fundamental reform? How responsive were governments to popular demands? And, finally, did the housing protests represent a struggle between the working class and the state and capital?

Vancouver's wartime and post-war housing question was a local manifestation of a larger problem affecting much of urban Canada. By 1940, supply shortages, insufficient replacement of substandard housing and overcrowding associated with the depression had created an enormous unsatisfied need for accommodation across the country. These difficulties exacerbated pre-depression urban blight in the older cities. Wartime conditions heightened the problem: the migration of workers and their families to industrial areas; the federal government controls on materials and manpower; the demobilization of 620,000 armed forces personnel between June 1945 and June 1946; and the arrival of some 43,000 war brides.<sup>5</sup> In 1944 an Advisory Committee on Reconstruction report on housing and planning (the Curtis report) calculated that the actual accumulated urban housing demand in 1944-45 would amount to

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"The Industrial City and the Working Class: The Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915," in *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 27-37. In Canada, Marc H. Choko has written "Le Mouvement des squatters à Montréal, 1946-1947," *Cahiers d'Histoire* 2 (Printemps 1982): 27-39. Unfortunately, Choko has not conclusively demonstrated a connection between the squatters' movement and the introduction of federal programs. For the squatters' movement, see also Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream: Canadian Communists, the Spy Trials, and the Cold War* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983), pp. 179-80.

<sup>5</sup> Canada, Department of Reconstruction and Supply, *Manpower and Material Requirements for a Housing Program in Canada*, by O. J. Firestone (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1946), p. 15; and O. J. Firestone, *Residential Real Estate in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), p. 437. For a summary of the 1940s housing problem in Canada and of federal government reaction, see Catherine Jill Wade, "Wartime Housing Limited, 1941-1947: Canadian Housing Policy at the Crossroads" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984); and *idem*, *Wartime Housing Limited, 1941-1947: An Overview and Evaluation of Canada's First National Housing Corporation*, U.B.C. Planning Papers, Canadian Planning Issues, no. 13 (Vancouver: School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia, 1984).

500,000 dwelling units and maintained that low-income tenants experienced the greatest need.<sup>6</sup>

The federal government reacted to the wartime problem with unprecedented direct intervention in the housing field. In 1941 it created a crown company, Wartime Housing Limited (WHL), to build war workers' housing. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) instituted rent controls and housing registries in heavily congested urban centres. The Board and other agencies also regulated prices, materials, labour, and permits in the construction industry. The National Housing Administration of the Department of Finance introduced a Home Conversion Plan to renovate and to sublet rental accommodation. After 1944 WHL and the Veterans Land Act Administration (VLA) constructed veterans' rental housing. The WPTB set up an Emergency Shelter Administration that mainly converted vacant buildings into temporary accommodation.

As well, Ottawa first reduced and then reasserted its market-oriented, indirectly interventionist pre-war programs. In order to conserve the materials and manpower supply, the government initially curtailed its mortgage-financing function under the 1938 National Housing Act (NHA) and eliminated the 1936 Home Improvement Plan (HIP). But, in 1944, a new NHA once again increased opportunities for home ownership and provided financial aid to limited dividend companies for medium-cost rental housing construction. An Interdepartmental Housing Committee attempted to co-ordinate the various federal activities until, following its establishment in 1946, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) gradually consolidated under its control all the direct and indirect programs excepting VLA operations.

In Vancouver, the mid-forties housing situation developed more from wartime than from pre-war conditions. The city experienced a less acute problem during the depression than other Canadian urban centres. Housing stock expansion before the Great War and during the 1920s diminished the effects of the depression's construction lag.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, while doubling up and overcrowding increased between 1931 and 1941, particularly in the downtown area, they were not as extensive as in other principal cities. (Table 1) The physical condition of Vancouver's housing

<sup>6</sup> Canada, Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Subcommittee on Housing and Community Planning [chaired by C. A. Curtis], *Final Report of the Subcommittee, March 24, 1944* [hereafter referred to as *Curtis Report*] (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1946), pp. 137-43.

<sup>7</sup> Wade, "Wartime Housing Limited: Canadian Housing Policy at the Crossroads," pp. 25, 28.

TABLE 1  
*Housing Conditions in Selected Larger Canadian Cities,  
 1941 (by Percentage)*

<i>Selected larger cities (1)</i>	<i>Doubled-up households (2)</i>	<i>Overcrowded households (3)</i>	<i>Substandard dwellings (4)</i>	<i>Owner-occupied dwellings (5)</i>
Halifax	17.2 (9.2)	26.1	43	36.5 (35.2)
Montreal	7.5 (6.4)	24.4	27	11.5 (14.9)
Toronto	19.1 (8.4)	12.4	29	43.8 (46.5)
Hamilton	12.4 (7.8)	10.7	28	44.0 (48.0)
Winnipeg	15.1 (7.3)	19.0	36	43.9 (47.0)
Regina	10.0 (4.5)	24.0	43	38.7 (50.3)
Calgary	12.1 (5.2)	18.5	38	44.6 (51.7)
Edmonton	7.6 (4.3)	22.2	46	46.3 (53.0)
Vancouver	8.5 (5.1)	13.2	27	50.1 (51.0)
Victoria	10.5 (4.9)	11.1	26	45.8 (46.8)

*Sources:* Column 2: Canada, Department of Munitions and Supply, "Preliminary Report on the Housing Situation in Canada and Suggestions for Its Improvement," by Lesslie R. Thomson (Ottawa, 1942), p. 56B, table 5. 1931 percentages are in parentheses.

Column 3: Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941*, vol. 9: *Housing* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1949), p. 182, table 36.

Column 4: Canada, Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, Subcommittee on Housing and Community Planning [chaired by C. A. Curtis], *Final Report of the Subcommittee, March 24, 1944* [hereafter referred to as *Curtis Report*], p. 105, table 24. Substandard dwellings were in need of external repairs and lacking or with shared use of toilets and bathing facilities.

Column 5: *Curtis Report*, p. 244, table 57. 1931 percentages are in parentheses.

ranked about the same as, or better than, that of other major centres: the highest incidence of deteriorated and insanitary accommodation occurred in the overcrowded downtown area.<sup>8</sup> (Table 1) The percentage of owner-occupied dwellings remained about the same between 1931 and 1941 while it generally dropped elsewhere. (Table 1) Moreover, the 1931 Canadian census confirmed Deryck Holdsworth's characterization of Vancouver as an urban landscape of homes and gardens contrasting

<sup>8</sup> Burrard Inlet, Burrard Street, Clark Drive, and 6th Avenue bordered the downtown area; see Vancouver, Building, Civic Planning, and Parks Committee, [A Survey of the Housing Situation in Vancouver], (Vancouver, 1937), City of Vancouver Archives [CVA], PD 447; and Vancouver Housing Association, "Housing Vancouver: A Survey of the Housing Position in Vancouver" (Vancouver, 1946), pp. 1-4.

with older industrial cities in Europe and North America:<sup>9</sup> 80 percent of Vancouver's population lived in single houses.<sup>10</sup> By 1941, 75.2 percent of all housing types still consisted of detached dwellings.<sup>11</sup>

The city's problem in the forties resulted mainly from a huge population increase amounting to 44,000 people between 1939 and 1944.<sup>12</sup> This growth may be attributed to a heavy inward movement of workers and their families attracted by the expansion of wartime shipbuilding and aircraft industries, to an influx of armed forces dependents, and to an uninterrupted migration from the prairie provinces. Later, in 1945-46, demobilization greatly affected the housing situation. As federal officials expected, significantly more discharged personnel than the city's 30,000 enlistments settled in the area.<sup>13</sup> In August 1945 they calculated that 8,500 veterans were already in the city.<sup>14</sup> Service men and women continued to return well into 1946, with several hundred frequently arriving on the same day.<sup>15</sup> In addition, 240 British war brides had reached Vancouver by June 1945, and officials expected another 2,400 before the year's end.<sup>16</sup>

Housing statistics for the early 1940s revealed serious congestion. In 1942 the vacancy rate for all types of accommodation dropped below

<sup>9</sup> Holdsworth, "House and Home in Vancouver: Emergence of a West Coast Urban Landscape," xi, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: The Housing Accommodation of the Canadian People* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1935), chart 5, p. 19, and table 10, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Vancouver Housing Atlas* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1944), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> "A Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in the Vancouver-New Westminster Area Prepared by the Emergency Shelter Administration, Vancouver, B.C.," 1 May 1945, Department of Finance Records, RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa [PAC]; see also chapter 4 in Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer and National Museum of Man, National Museums of Canada, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> "Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in Vancouver," p. 1, RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, PAC. In 1951 veterans headed 24 percent of British Columbia households, a higher percentage than in any other province; see Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Ninth Census of Canada, 1951*, vol. 10 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1953), p. 425, table XVII.

<sup>14</sup> L. F. Stevenson to D. Gordon, 31 July 1945, p. 3, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation Records, RG 56, vol. 17, file 105-10, PAC.

<sup>15</sup> For example, 800 Seaforth Highlanders were released on a single day; see *Vancouver Sun*, 9 October 1945, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> [Wartime Housing Limited Report to 2nd Interdepartmental Housing Committee Meeting, 6 June 1945] "Re: Vancouver #2-100 Houses," RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, [unclassified document no. 13], PAC.

.257 percent; in mid-1945, it reached .004 percent.<sup>17</sup> The local WPTB housing registry statistics also indicated the critical situation. In 1943, when it handled an average 1,600 requests per month, the registry failed to house 10,500 of its 19,709 applicants.<sup>18</sup> In December 1945 it sought to accommodate an all-time high of 4,143 families, of which 3,483 belonged to service personnel.<sup>19</sup> In mid-1945 federal officials estimated the housing demand until December 1946 at 25,000 units.<sup>20</sup>

Federal initiatives somewhat alleviated Vancouver's housing situation in the early 1940s. The 1938 NHA and HIP stimulated residential construction and renovations and repairs until 1941, and the Home Conversion Plan prompted some additional alterations activity after 1943.<sup>21</sup> Still, although Vancouverites benefited from a WPTB registry, from rent controls, and from a local emergency shelter administration, the Board's materials and manpower regulations depressed new construction between 1942 and 1945.<sup>22</sup> Before 1944 WHL built 750 units in North Vancouver and about 300 in Richmond but none in Vancouver itself.<sup>23</sup> VLA did not initiate its veterans' housing program until V-E Day. Thus increasing congestion and insufficient federal response combined to produce an acute need for accommodation.

Early in 1944 the threat of mass evictions in a period of serious accommodation shortages ignited public agitation about Canada's (and Vancouver's) housing problem. According to the October 1943 WPTB rental regulations,<sup>24</sup> landlords could give notices-to-vacate to their tenants only between April 30 and September 30; the Board banned winter evictions. Consequently, large numbers of notices accumulated for 1 May 1944.

<sup>17</sup> Canada, Department of Munitions and Supply, "Preliminary Report on the Housing Situation in Canada, p. 64B, table 6; and Vancouver Housing Association, "Housing Vancouver," p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Sun*, 11 April 1944, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 December 1945, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> "Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in Vancouver," p. 3, RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, PAC.

<sup>21</sup> Annual Summaries of the Building Reports, 1938-1946, Building Reports, Building Department, Department of Permits and Licences, Vancouver, vol. 125-A-1, files 2 and 3, CVA.

<sup>22</sup> Operated by two paid staff members and many volunteers, the Vancouver registry assisted tenants between 1942 and 1946; see *Sun*, 7 October 1942, p. 17, 19 October 1942, p. 17, and 19 December 1942, p. 3; and *Vancouver Daily Province*, 7 October 1942, p. 11. For the decline in new construction, see Annual Summaries of the Building Reports, 1942-1945.

<sup>23</sup> Wade, *Wartime Housing Limited: Overview and Evaluation*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Canada, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Canadian War Orders and Regulations*, vol. 3 (1943), order no. 294.

Given the low vacancy rates in cities across Canada, tenants faced with eviction could not find alternative shelter. In addition, many of the tenants were the dependents of servicemen fighting overseas. MPs in the House of Commons brought the problem to the government's attention beginning in February.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in May, the federal government responded to the evictions situation not by altering the rental regulations but by expanding the WHL operations to furnish housing for soldiers' families.<sup>26</sup>

In Vancouver the evictions issue marked the beginning of two years of active protest. A variety of groups pressed the federal government to act on the housing problem. No formal organization united them, although their membership often overlapped, and some groups were even bitter opponents in the broader political context. The objectives of the organizations differentiated them. On the one hand, the veterans' associations and the Citizens' Rehabilitation Council of Greater Vancouver sought an immediate remedy for the servicemen's and veterans' housing emergency; they were temporarily reform-minded. On the other hand, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the Labor Progressive Party (LPP) and the Vancouver Housing Association (VHA) wanted a comprehensive program to solve the long- and short-range aspects of the housing problem.

Veterans' organizations, such as the provincial command and the local branches of the Canadian Legion, the Army and Navy Veterans of Canada, the Canadian Corps Association, the War Amputations Association, and the co-ordinating Vancouver Veterans' Council, supported by women's auxiliaries to various regiments, urged quick resolution of the housing emergency. In August 1944 a delegation representing these groups made several recommendations to city council: imposition of an evictions freeze for soldiers' dependents; use of vacant dwellings for temporary accommodation; provision of more WHL houses; construction of government-assisted housing developments by limited dividend companies; and conversion of the old Hotel Vancouver to a veterans' hostel.<sup>27</sup> Within a year, veterans' organizations had adopted other demands: a

<sup>25</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Debates*, vol. 1 (1944): 561-63, vol. 2 (1944): 1865-66, and vol. 3 (1944): 2130.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes, Meeting of WHL Board of Directors, 10 May 1944, p. 10, Defence Construction Ltd. Records, RG 83, vol. 70, Minutes: vol. 1, PAC. See also "Report for Interdepartmental Housing Committee by Mr. Jas. A. Hall Representing War-time Housing Limited," Privy Council Office Records, RG 2, ser. 18, vol. 9, file H-13, PAC.

<sup>27</sup> *Sun*, 4 August 1944, p. 17.

federal housing ministry; a low-income housing program; new controls and priorities on building materials; a ceiling on real estate prices; and training of skilled building tradesmen.<sup>28</sup>

Veterans held the just belief that the rehabilitation of discharged service personnel required government assistance in housing as well as in employment, health care and education. Canadians (including elected members of government and government officials) generally shared this view. To some extent the leaders of veterans' organizations used the morality issue to arouse ex-service men and women to act on the evictions issue.<sup>29</sup> As well, some veterans took advantage of the housing controversy for their own political purposes. Jack Henderson, the president of the Canadian Legion's provincial command, ran as a Non-Partisan Association-endorsed candidate for school board in the 1944 civic elections and as a Liberal candidate in Vancouver East in the 1945 federal general election.<sup>30</sup> James Sinclair was known as the Liberal "soldier M.P." for North Vancouver.<sup>31</sup> Many LPP members also participated in veterans' organizations to pursue their party's political objectives.<sup>32</sup>

The Citizens' Rehabilitation Council of Greater Vancouver concerned itself with the immediate problem of re-establishing demobilized armed forces personnel. It represented a diversity of interests in the city—business, professional, social welfare, labour, government, veterans and church.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, membership sometimes overlapped with other groups like the veterans' organizations. In June 1944 a local housing registry official explained the veterans' shelter problem to the Council, whose members quickly set up a housing committee chaired by former Conservative cabinet minister H. H. Stevens.<sup>34</sup> The Council endorsed rehabilitation not only out of "a sense of gratitu[de]" to veterans but "because Canada's future stability and progress depend[ed] upon the

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 March 1946, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> "Veterans Picket Line Planned for Evictions" [unidentified newspaper clipping], 25 August 1944, Newspaper Clippings, M4289-3, CVA.

<sup>30</sup> *Sun*, 22 November 1944, p. 10, and 27 October 1944, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> "Housing Set-Up Scored," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 28 July 1944, Newspaper Clippings, M4289-3, CVA.

<sup>32</sup> *Sun*, 31 December 1945, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Meeting of the Rehabilitation Section of the Co-ordinating Council for War Work and Civilian Services, 22 February 1944, Frank E. Buck Papers, box 11, file 13, Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library. See also "The Citizens Rehabilitation Council of Greater Vancouver: Summary of Activities, 1940-1948," Buck Papers, box 11, file 15.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Wilbur, *H. H. Stevens, 1878-1973* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. 213.

combined effort of government and people in removing causes of dissatisfaction and unrest.”<sup>35</sup> Its role was conciliatory and cautionary. It assisted in the resolution of differences over legal agreements between Vancouver City Council and WHL, and it warned the prime minister and others of the potential danger for social unrest in the city’s housing situation.<sup>36</sup>

The 1944 Curtis report and the 1944 report of the British Columbia Post-War Rehabilitation Council influenced organizations that sought a comprehensive housing policy. The Curtis report recommended a national housing and planning program to provide for town planning, home ownership, home improvement, slum clearance, low-rental projects and co-operative and rural housing.<sup>37</sup> This program would require two separate Dominion housing and planning administrations, federal financial assistance, municipal and provincial administrations, sensitivity to community concerns, and public, private and co-operative ownership of housing. In particular, it would recognize the accommodation needs of low- and moderate-income Canadians. The section of the Post-War Rehabilitation Council report dedicated to planning and housing<sup>38</sup> called for a provincial planning and housing authority, enabling legislation for regional planning and housing authorities, federal subsidies or loans for municipal housing schemes, and adjustments to NHA to subsidize low-rental projects. Both the LPP and the CCF used the Curtis report and the provincial post-war rehabilitation report to press for resolution of the long-term housing problem.<sup>39</sup>

The LPP advocated policies on housing not very much different from those of the CCF.<sup>40</sup> In particular, it supported low-rental housing projects assisted by federal funding, local housing authorities, slum clearance

<sup>35</sup> A. W. Cowley to W. L. M. King, 22 June 1945, RG 2, ser. 18, vol. 9, file H-13, PAC.

<sup>36</sup> “City Ready to Back Housing Plan: Seeks Better Terms,” [unidentified newspaper clipping], 1 August 1944, Newspaper Clippings, M4289-3, CVA.

<sup>37</sup> Curtis Report, pp. 9-22.

<sup>38</sup> British Columbia, Post-War Rehabilitation Council, *Reports of the Post-War Rehabilitation Council; The Interim Report (1943) and Supplementary Report (1944)* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1945), p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> For the CCF, see *CCF News*, 13 April 1944, p. 2, 24 August 1944, p. 3, and 30 September 1945, p. 3. CCF MLAs C. G. MacNeil, D. G. Steeves and H. E. Winch sat on the British Columbia Post-War Rehabilitation Council. For the LPP, see *Pacific Advocate*, 13 October 1945, pp. 12-13, and 25 January 1946, housing supplement, passim.

<sup>40</sup> Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), pp. 103, 135, 176, 273. After it was made illegal in 1940, the Communist Party regrouped as the LPP.

and a federal housing ministry.<sup>41</sup> But, unlike the CCF, the LPP employed more aggressive and militant tactics, especially at the local level. In 1944 and 1945 party members like John McPeake and Elgin Ruddell were instrumental in forming the "5000 Homes Now" Committee and the Citizens' Emergency Housing Committee.<sup>42</sup> Both groups took a spirited offensive on the housing issue, and Ruddell was later active in the VHA.<sup>43</sup> The LPP initiated public rallies and picket lines at homes of soon-to-be-evicted tenants. As well, LPP members had gained the leadership of major British Columbia unions and the Vancouver Labor Council during the early 1940s.<sup>44</sup> All of these organizations agitated for improvements in housing conditions.<sup>45</sup> Some union leaders, including McPeake of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers and Harold Pritchett of the International Woodworkers of America, also led protest activities.<sup>46</sup>

At its provincial and national conventions, in its election manifestos, and in its publications, the CCF committed itself to a comprehensive, planned and need-oriented program very much like the one recommended by the Curtis report.<sup>47</sup> This program recognized the relationship between housing and planning, called for dominion, provincial and municipal housing authorities, required federal funding, advocated low-rental

<sup>41</sup> *Pacific Advocate*, 25 November 1944, p. 4, and 18 January 1946, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>42</sup> The "5000 Homes Now" Committee emerged from the Consumers' Council in March 1944 but was disbanded the following September; see *Sun*, 1 March 1944, p. 13, and 20 September 1944, p. 15. The Citizens' Emergency Housing Committee formed the next summer; see *ibid.*, 15 June 1945, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1946, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 80, 177-78.

<sup>45</sup> For example, see *Sun*, 26 July 1944, p. 13, and 27 June 1945, p. 13; *Main Deck*, 11 August 1943, p. 4; '756' *Review*, November 1944, p. 1, February 1945, p. 4, and June 1945, p. 3; Minutes, Building, Civic Planning, and Parks Committee, Vancouver City Council, 26 A, vol. 9, 22 May 1944, p. 337, 5 June 1944, p. 339, and 9 April 1945, p. 382, and vol. 10, 9 July 1945, p. 3, CVA; M. A. Knight, Britannia Mine and Mill Workers' Union, to W. L. M. King, 13 June 1945, and telegram, E. Leary, Vancouver Labor Council, to W. L. M. King, 13 July 1945, RG 19, vol. 716, file 203-17, PAC; and G. W. Caron, Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders' Union, to W. L. M. King, 6 July, RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4018, PAC.

<sup>46</sup> "Friends Assist Evictee," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 19 August 1944, Newspaper Clippings, M4289-3, CVA.

<sup>47</sup> The League for Social Reconstruction developed a housing program proposal preliminary to both the CCF's policy and the Curtis report; see League for Social Reconstruction, Research Committee, *Social Planning for Canada*, introd. F. R. Scott et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 451-63; and Humphrey Carver, *Compassionate Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 51.

housing and slum clearance, supported private home ownership and co-operative housing, and proposed research into new materials and methods of construction.<sup>48</sup>

Unlike the LPP, the CCF relied less upon militant tactics and more upon its elected members at all three government levels to advance its housing program — Helena Gutteridge in Vancouver, Dorothy Steeves, Laura Jamieson, Grace MacInnis and Grant MacNeil in Victoria, and Angus MacInnis in Ottawa. CCF women most vigorously promoted improvements in housing.<sup>49</sup> Gutteridge generated a storm of housing reform activity while a city council member between 1937 and 1939.<sup>50</sup> As chairperson of the city's special committee on housing, she helped to prepare the 1937 survey of Vancouver's housing conditions and attempted to attract support from community, housing and labour organizations for low-rental housing under the 1938 NHA.<sup>51</sup> Beginning in the mid-1930s, Steeves continually raised the housing issue in the provincial legislature and later served as a member of the British Columbia Post-War Rehabilitation Council.<sup>52</sup> Jamieson established co-operative houses for single working women during the war.<sup>53</sup> Grace MacInnis presented the party's housing policy in her writings and in speeches to public meetings, to CCF-sponsored eviction rallies, and to the Legislature.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the similarity of LPP and CCF solutions to the housing problem, the two political parties could not act together on the issue. At the

<sup>48</sup> *Federationist*, 25 March 1943, p. 4, and 22 April 1943, p. 4; *CCF News*, 18 January 1945, p. 4, 16 May 1945, p. 3, 30 September 1945, p. 3, and 22 August 1946, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Women played active roles in most European and North American housing reform movements; see Eugenie Ladner Birch and Deborah S. Gardiner, "The Seven-Percent Solution: A Review of Philanthropic Housing, 1870-1910," *Journal of Urban History* 7 (August 1981): 406, 412-14, 429-31; Spragge, "Confluence of Interests," pp. 247, 255-56; and Damer, "State, Class, and Housing," pp. 103-04.

<sup>50</sup> See Susan Wade, "Helena Gutteridge: Votes for Women and Trade Unions," in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, eds. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), pp. 187-203.

<sup>51</sup> Vancouver, Building, Civic Planning, and Parks Committee, [Survey of the Housing Situation]. The 1938 NHA Part II made available but never actually advanced loans to limited dividend companies and to municipal housing authorities for low-rental housing programs.

<sup>52</sup> *Province*, 18 March 1936, p. 6; *Sun*, 2 November 1938, p. 3; and British Columbia, Post-War Rehabilitation Council, *Reports*, pp. 166, 199.

<sup>53</sup> Laura E. Jamieson, "Co-op Living in Vancouver," *Canadian Forum* 23 (April 1943): 18-19; and *Federationist*, 1 July 1943, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *CCF News*, 17 February 1944, p. 1, 16 March 1944, p. 5, 22 February 1945, p. 1, 12 April 1945, p. 3, 7 February 1946, p. 6, 5 September 1946, p. 3, and 22 May 1947, p. 2; and *Sun*, 11 March 1944, p. 5, and 11 July 1945, p. 13.

national level, the LPP wished to form a popular left-wing front with the CCF, but the social democrats rejected such a coalition. Bitter feelings extended from the national struggle into the local housing controversy. For example, CCF member E. S. Scanlon withdrew from the "5000 Homes Now" Committee because the LPP had infiltrated the organization and made it "a political football," while McPeake denied Scanlon's charges and asserted that the group was "broadly representative" of the public; in addition, Angus MacInnis refused to participate in the "5000 Homes Now" meetings.<sup>55</sup>

Like the two left-wing political parties, the VHA directed its efforts toward resolving the long-term housing problem. It was the local wing of the Housing and Planning Association of Canada, which represented Canada's national low-rental housing and slum clearance lobby. Upon its formation in 1937, the Vancouver group began a survey of the city's housing conditions, but the war postponed completion of the study until 1946.<sup>56</sup> Although influenced by the Curtis report, the VHA emphasized low-rental housing and slum clearance more than the rest of the comprehensive housing program.<sup>57</sup> It demanded the consolidation of all housing and planning activities in one federal ministry and the creation of local authorities for the construction and the administration of low-rental projects. As well, it advocated that, if the dominion government refused to take the initiative, the municipalities should approach provincial governments to request federal financial assistance.<sup>58</sup> Although, on the whole, concerns about low-rental housing needs motivated the VHA membership, the participation of some individual members furthered their professional or political interests. For politicians like Helena Gutteridge, Grace MacInnis and Elgin Ruddell, the VHA complemented and reinforced CCF and LPP positions on housing.<sup>59</sup> In addition, the VHA incidentally advanced the professional careers and concerns of some of its members like Frank Buck, a faculty member at the University of British Columbia and a member of the Town Planning Commission, Jocelyn Davidson, a local CMHC officer, and later Leonard Marsh, the

<sup>55</sup> *Sun*, 31 March 1944, p. 15, and 13 April 1944, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1946, p. 27; and *Vancouver News-Herald*, 11 December 1937, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> Vancouver Housing Association, "Housing Vancouver," pp. 51-56.

<sup>58</sup> The VHA waited until 1947 to launch a campaign urging city council to ask Ottawa for funds and legislation to create a local housing authority for a low-rental project; see *Sun*, 25 March 1947, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> *News-Herald*, 11 December 1937, p. 2; and *Province*, 31 January 1947, p. 5.

research adviser for the Curtis report and a University of British Columbia professor after the war.<sup>60</sup>

A great many community groups supported the drive for action led by the veterans, the Rehabilitation Council, the LPP, the CCF and the VHA. Most prominent were women's organizations, churches, professional groups, social welfare associations and service clubs.<sup>61</sup> Frequently these groups also participated in the housing campaign through their representatives on the Rehabilitation Council or the VHA.<sup>62</sup>

Newspapers and journals brought the housing issue to public attention and demanded and offered solutions. The *Sun*, the *Daily Province* and the *News-Herald* in Vancouver published stories, editorials and articles on all aspects of the housing situation. Similarly, articles in popular magazines like *Maclean's* and *Saturday Night*, professional and business journals like *Canadian Business* and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada *Journal*, and political and labour publications like the *CCF News*, the *Pacific Advocate (Tribune)* and the Trades and Labor Congress *Journal* covered housing conditions and very often suggested answers to difficulties.<sup>63</sup> Some government officials blamed the 1944-45 agitation over evictions on inflammatory press coverage.<sup>64</sup> In fact the local press and popular and serious journals together increased public awareness of the housing problem and generated constructive responses to it.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Bliss, Preface to *Report on Social Security for Canada*, by Leonard Marsh (Ottawa, King's Printer, 1943; reprint ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), ix-x; and Michael Horn, "Leonard Marsh and the Coming of a Welfare State in Canada," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 9 (May 1976): 197-204.

<sup>61</sup> These community groups included First United Church, Local Council of Women, University Women's Club of Vancouver, Women's Voluntary Services, Lions' Ladies Club, Women's Christian Temperance Union, Vancouver Council of Jewish Women, Canadian Daughters League, B'nai B'rith Women, Vancouver Business and Professional Women's Club, Catholic Women's League of Canada, B.C. Mainland Canadian Association of Social Workers, Family Welfare Bureau, Kinsmen Club of Vancouver, and Soroptimist Club. See the representatives from these groups in RG 19, vol. 716, file 203-17, PAC, and in minutes, Building, Civic Planning, and Parks Committee, 26 A, vol. 9, 6 March 1945, pp. 375-76, and vol. 10, 20 May 1946, p. 73, 11 June 1946, p. 78, and 10 June 1947, p. 189.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, Meeting of the Rehabilitation Section of the Co-ordinating Council for War Work and Civilian Services, 22 February 1944, Buck Papers, box 11, file 13.

<sup>63</sup> See J. David Hulchanski, *Canadian Town Planning and Housing, 1940-1950: A Historical Bibliography* (Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1979); and Allan Moscovitch with Theresa Jennisson and Peter Findlay, *The Welfare State in Canada: A Selected Bibliography, 1840 to 1978* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983).

<sup>64</sup> "Responsibility for Shelter," memorandum from D. Gordon, 7 December 1944, Wartime Prices and Trade Board Records, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 708, file 25-14-17-1, PAC.

Public protests about the housing question went to federal, provincial and municipal governments. The Prime Minister and the ministers of Finance, Munitions (Reconstruction) and Supply, National Defence, and Pensions and National Health (Veterans Affairs), the WPTB chairman, and the Interdepartmental Housing Committee received letters, resolutions, telegrams and delegations of officials from Vancouver organizations.<sup>65</sup> The same groups also sent letters and delegations to the provincial government and the city council, which in turn exerted pressure upon the dominion government.<sup>66</sup> In addition, CCF MLAs made demands upon the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, and federal ministers requested action from each other.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, internal reports went directly from the Emergency Shelter Administration and the housing registry in Vancouver to top WPTB officials.<sup>68</sup> Finally, federal officials and ministers directly confronted the local housing issue by reading critical editorials in Vancouver newspapers.<sup>69</sup> The protests ultimately reached federal Finance minister J. L. Ilsley and Munitions and Supply minister C. D. Howe for decision-making on emergency housing policy.<sup>70</sup>

Between 1944 and 1946 the agitation of many Vancouver protest groups induced the federal government to respond with an evictions freeze, with WHL housing, and with the old Hotel Vancouver hostel and the Renfrew Heights subdivision. The militant campaign for a suspension of evictions commenced in the summer of 1944 and concluded successfully a year later. At first the Rehabilitation Council, labour and veterans'

<sup>65</sup> For these representations, see RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, and vol. 2730, file 200-2, PAC. As well, see *Sun*, 29 July 1944, p. 7, 1 June 1945, p. 3, 13 June 1945, p. 1, and 25 June 1945, p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> For representations to the province, see *Sun*, 10 March 1944, p. 1, 27 June 1945, p. 1, 2 March 1946, p. 14, 19 March 1946, p. 5, and 10 April 1946, p. 2. For representations to the city, see Minutes, Building, Civic Planning, and Parks Committee, 26 A, vol. 9, 6 March 1945, pp. 375-76; and *Sun*, 10 March 1944, p. 1, 6 June 1944, p. 5, 4 August 1944, p. 17, and 1 December 1944, p. 1. For representations from province to dominion, see *Sun*, 26 July 1944, p. 13, and 10 July 1945, p. 7; and R. L. Maitland to D. Gordon, 20 July 1944, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 701, file 25-2, vol. 1, PAC.

<sup>67</sup> *Sun*, 11 March 1944, p. 5, and 18 July 1943, p. 1; and the 1944-46 correspondence between Ian Mackenzie, Veterans Affairs (Pensions and National Health) minister, and J. L. Ilsley, Finance minister, in RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, PAC.

<sup>68</sup> For housing registry reports, see RG 64, ser. 1040, box 215, file G.05.02, PAC. See also "Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in Vancouver," RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, PAC.

<sup>69</sup> For Donald Gordon's encounter with a critical *Vancouver Sun* editorial, see RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, PAC.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes, special Wartime Prices and Trade Board meeting, 23 July 1945, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 700, file 25-1-3, PAC; and *Sun*, 27 July 1945, p. 1.

organizations, and city council sent resolutions requesting a freeze to the federal government,<sup>71</sup> but as the evictions grew in number and as the government failed to react to representations, the LPP and the veterans adopted more aggressive tactics. In mid-July the LPP organized a street rally outside the home of an evicted serviceman's wife.<sup>72</sup> Shortly afterwards, picketing Legion members halted the eviction of a widow whose son was serving overseas.<sup>73</sup> When over 2,000 households received notices-to-vacate between May and October 1945, protesters used the street rally and the picket line with greater effectiveness.<sup>74</sup> Both the LPP and the CCF organized rallies frequently attended by several hundred neighbours and activists.<sup>75</sup> For two weeks in July 1945 an Anti-Evictions Committee stopped all evictions by posting eight picketers at five houses for nine or twelve hours a day.<sup>76</sup> On July 25, as social tension mounted in Vancouver and in other cities faced with the evictions problem, the WPTB issued a suspension order applicable to congested areas across Canada.<sup>77</sup> Information appended to the order noted that the Board took protest wires from Vancouver into special consideration before implementing the freeze.

In 1944 and 1945 protesters were instrumental in procuring 1,200 WHL houses for Vancouver. Fearful of social unrest, Rehabilitation Council representatives attended negotiations between city council and WHL for the construction of 200 dwellings and convinced the city to conclude two separate agreements with the crown company despite un-

<sup>71</sup> *Sun*, 26 July 1944, p. 13, 29 July 1944, p. 7, and 4 August 1944, p. 17. Under pressure from protest groups like the LPP, the provincial government urged the WPTB and J. L. Ilesley to deal with the evictions situation; see R. L. Maitland to D. Gordon, 20 July 1944, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 701, file 25-2, vol. 1; and R. L. Maitland to Ilesley, 7 September 1944, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 701, file 25-2, vol. 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Sun*, 18 August 1944, p. 1, and 19 August 1944, p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> "Veterans' Picket Line Planned for Evictions," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 25 August 1944, and "Eviction of Widow Halted by Legion," [unidentified newspaper clipping], 28 August 1944, Newspaper Clippings, M4289-3, CVA.

<sup>74</sup> "Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in Vancouver," RG 19, ser. 3, vol. 4017, PAC; and minutes, special Wartime Prices and Trade Board meeting, 23 July 1945, app. A, p. 2, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 700, file 25-1-3, PAC. 769 notices-to-vacate were issued for 1 May 1945, and 1,976 notices from May to October.

<sup>75</sup> For examples of LPP rallies, see *Sun*, 5 June 1945, p. 3, 14 July 1945, p. 3, 17 July 1945, p. 8, and 18 July 1945, p. 13. For examples of CCF rallies, see *ibid.*, 10 July 1945, p. 3, 11 July 1945, p. 13, and 13 July 1945, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 July 1945, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Canada, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, *Canadian War Orders and Regulations*, vol. 7 (1945), order no. 537. The evictions problem seriously affected Toronto (3,500 notices-to-vacate between June and October 1945) and to a lesser extent other cities like Winnipeg, Montreal and Hamilton.

favourable financial terms.<sup>78</sup> The Rehabilitation Council subsequently pressed the federal government for 5,000 government-built, low-income houses. Finally, impelled by increasingly militant eviction protests, the government offered an additional 1,000 WHL units to Vancouver's mayor on the very day of the WPTB's freeze announcement.<sup>79</sup>

During the winter months of 1945-46, agitation over the housing problem culminated in the old Hotel Vancouver controversy. The protesters recognized that the hotel would soon stand empty in the midst of severe housing shortages. In 1939 the present Hotel Vancouver had replaced the structure erected in stages since 1901 at Georgia and Granville.<sup>80</sup> A Canadian National Railway-Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) agreement applying to both buildings ordered the demolition of the original premises if it remained unsold by 1946.<sup>81</sup> But Vancouver's citizens had long regarded the hotel as "a palace for the public."<sup>82</sup> They as much as Winston Churchill, Babe Ruth, Charlie Chaplin or R. B. Bennett had used and enjoyed the Spanish Grill, the Peacock Alley shops, the Crystal Ballroom and the roof-top garden.<sup>83</sup> Before the war they tried unsuccessfully to preserve the hotel as a civic auditorium, a museum and a library, or a provincial government office building. During wartime the Department of National Defence leased the building and converted it first to a recruiting centre and later to offices and barracks. Between 1944

<sup>78</sup> For the Rehabilitation Council's participation, see *Sun*, 11 July 1944, p. 1, 4 August 1944, p. 17, 5 December 1944, p. 11, and 20 March 1945, p. 9. See also the agreements between the Corporation of the City of Vancouver, H.M. the King in right of Canada, and Wartime Housing Limited, 25 September 1944 and 1 July 1945, located in City Clerk's Department, City of Vancouver. For the city's dissatisfaction about WHL's terms, see *Sun*, 1 August 1944, p. 13.

<sup>79</sup> For the Rehabilitation Council's drive for 5,000 houses, see *Sun*, 29 May 1945, p. 9, and 1 June 1945, p. 3. For the announcement of WHL's offer, see *ibid.*, 25 July 1945, p. 1, and 26 July 1945, p. 2; a WHL official visited Mayor J. W. Cornett on the 25th, and C. D. Howe wired the offer to Cornett the next day. For the agreement for 1,000 houses, see agreement between the Corporation of the City of Vancouver, H.M. the King in right of Canada, and Wartime Housing Limited, 1 September 1945, located in City Clerk's Department, City of Vancouver.

<sup>80</sup> For architectural descriptions of the old hotel, see "The New C.P.R. Hotel, Vancouver," *Architectural Review* 42 (August 1917): 29-40; and "The New Hotel Vancouver," *American Architect* 110 (13 September 1916): 153-58, 161. In 1945-46 the hotel remained structurally sound despite its obsolete wiring and plumbing; see A. Haggert to F. Jones, 22 October 1945, Vancouver City Clerk's Records, ser. 1, Operational Files, Special Committee Files, 28-C-1, CVA.

<sup>81</sup> P. C. 460, 5 March 1938, with appended agreement, RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, vol. 1, PAC.

<sup>82</sup> *Province*, 19 February 1901, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, magazine section, 10 February 1940, p. 3, and 21 August 1948, pp. 22-23.

and 1946 many citizens believed that the old hotel could still benefit the community as a temporary veterans' hostel.

Discussions about the hostel plan occupied federal and local government officials after March 1945, when Vancouver's Emergency Shelter administrator, Leigh F. Stevenson, formally recommended the scheme to his superiors in Ottawa.<sup>84</sup> The major federal participants included J. L. Ilsley, his parliamentary assistant and Victoria MP R. H. Mayhew and Emergency Shelter co-ordinator Eric Gold. Mayor J. W. Cornett and a special committee of three aldermen represented the City of Vancouver. The Rehabilitation Council executive and CPR president D. C. Coleman took part in the official debate to a lesser degree. Eventually Veterans Affairs minister Ian Mackenzie, who was MP for the federal riding in which the hotel stood, acted as conciliator in the final resolution of the dispute. Formal discussion covered several issues: the allocation of responsibility for leasing, refurbishing, financing and managing the hotel; the municipal property tax revenue; and the building's suitability as family accommodation.

Negotiations were unnecessarily protracted, apparently irresolvable and occasionally maladroit. City and federal officials bargained by letter and telegram and by face-to-face meetings in May, July and December.<sup>85</sup> No agreement seemed possible. According to the Finance Department, the city or some local agency should lease the old hotel from the CPR, repair, maintain and manage the premises, pay for a predetermined percentage of the operating expenses and forgo the CPR's property tax revenue. The federal government would provide furniture and equipment. The city refused to surrender its tax revenue. It also argued that it lacked the administrative machinery necessary to operate a hostel. Furthermore, no local organization was willing to assume the management responsibilities and the financial risks inherent in the venture. In addition, WHL declined the city's request to take over the hotel because it offered inadequate family housing facilities, and the federal government rejected an army-run operation. Ottawa complained about Vancouver's procrastination. The city and the Rehabilitation Council faulted the federal government for suddenly announcing the termination of its lease with the CPR while Mayhew conducted talks with them in Vancouver. Alderman H. L.

<sup>84</sup> L. F. Stevenson to D. G. Mackenzie, 16 March 1945, and "Vancouver Hotel," memorandum by Eric Gold, 14 February 1946, RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, vol. 1, PAC.

<sup>85</sup> Federal records for the negotiations are located in RG 19, vol. 716, PAC, and the city's records may be found in the Special Committee Files, 28-C-1 and 28-C-4, CVA.



*Old Hotel Vancouver, ca. 1927*



*Labor Progressive Party veterans picketing Old Hotel Vancouver, January 1946*

Corey's "flying trip"<sup>86</sup> to Ottawa and Montreal in mid-January produced no offer from the Finance Department and the CPR satisfactory to the city. As the date of the lease's termination, 1 February, approached and as no local sponsor came forth, city council prepared to drop the old Hotel Vancouver plan.<sup>87</sup>

Public agitation in support of the hotel's conversion mushroomed between May 1945 and January 1946. Community organizations, veterans' groups, trade unions, several British Columbia MPs, and, in particular, the Rehabilitation Council bombarded the federal government with representations.<sup>88</sup> Finally, at New Year's, veterans with LPP affiliation began to picket the old hotel.<sup>89</sup> A few days later, Canadian Legion member Bob McEwen, who had recently organized a successful campaign to speed up the war brides' passage to Canada and who now required a home for his own war bride, set up a campsite and an information picket on the neighbouring courthouse lawn.<sup>90</sup> On 8 January a LPP delegation to city council precipitated Corey's eastern trip.<sup>91</sup>

At last, on the afternoon of Saturday, 26 January, members of the New Veterans Branch of the Canadian Legion resolved to occupy the old Hotel Vancouver.<sup>92</sup> Led by sergeant-at-arms Bob McEwen, a "shock troop" walked into the hotel lobby and informed two lone army guards that they were taking possession of the building. They wired the news to Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The "occupying force" drew up strict house rules to govern behaviour and organized committees to handle food, billeting, recreation and hygiene. They hung a 15'x3' banner on the hotel's Granville Street wall reading "Action at Last / Veterans! Rooms for You. Come and Get Them." By Saturday evening, 100 ex-service men and women and their dependents had registered at the hotel. A "gay holiday spirit" pervaded the building as they danced to jukebox music in the Spanish Grill. By Tuesday, 1,400 people were registered,

<sup>86</sup> *Province*, 18 January 1946, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 January 1946, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>88</sup> The representations may be found in RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, PAC.

<sup>89</sup> *Sun*, 31 December 1945, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 January 1946, pp. 1-2.

<sup>91</sup> *Province*, 8 January 1946, p. 20; and minutes, Finance Committee, 8 January 1946, in Special Committee Files, 28-C-4, CVA.

<sup>92</sup> *Sun*, 26 January 1946, p. 1. For newspaper accounts of the occupation, see the *Sun*, the *Province* and the *News-Herald* from 28 January to 1 February 1946; and the *Pacific Advocate*, 1 February 1946. See also Paddy Sherman, *Bennett* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966), p. 51.

although the majority were not staying on the premises. The old Hotel Vancouver had become a veritable "palace for the public."

Federal and civic authorities made no attempt to eject the veterans from the hotel. As Ian Mackenzie pointed out to J. L. Ilsley, public opinion sided with the occupation.<sup>93</sup> MP James Sinclair told the veterans that their action was "the right thing to do."<sup>94</sup> The British Columbia Command of the Canadian Legion and the provincial CCF leader, Harold Winch, endorsed the New Veterans Branch's "sitdown." Granville Street restaurants offered free evening meals to the militants and sent in sandwiches and coffee. Vancouver newspapers sympathetically reported the "invasion" and treated lightly complaints that one occupation committee member belonged to the LPP. Three factors account for public support. First, Vancouverites believed that the veterans' wartime service should reward them with "homes as well as jobs — some would go so far as to say homes before jobs."<sup>95</sup> Secondly, the public's own experience of the worsening housing situation probably aroused a compassionate response to the veterans' predicament. Finally, since 1939 the community had wanted to find some socially useful purpose for the old hotel.

The occupation forced a quick resolution of the hostel problem. Mackenzie arrived in a snowy Vancouver on Monday morning's train and, as federal representative, began serious negotiations with the veterans, the city council, the Rehabilitation Council and the CPR. The next day he announced a hotel conversion plan. The CPR and the Rehabilitation Council signed an agreement on Thursday the 31st. All parties endorsed the settlement. The city contributed a \$24,000 annual sum and received its tax revenue from a specially created hostel maintenance fund. The federal government conceded an annual amount of \$70,000 and assured the Rehabilitation Council of a future \$30,000 grant. The Board of Trade, the city council and the government sanctioned the release of locally raised civil defence money to the hostel fund. With its financial risk minimized, the Rehabilitation Council agreed to lease the building and to operate the hostel. On 1 February the veterans vacated the old hotel.

Popular protest did bring about improvements in Vancouver's living conditions. The old Hotel Vancouver occupation created a veterans'

<sup>93</sup> Telegram, I. Mackenzie to J. L. Ilsley, 29 January 1946, RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, vol. 1, PAC.

<sup>94</sup> *Province*, 28 January 1946, p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 January 1946, p. 4.

hostel operated until 1948 by the Rehabilitation Council. The "hotel coup" also led to the Renfrew Heights subdivision. Cognizant of the city's persistent accommodation shortages, the Rehabilitation Council approached the federal government in 1946 about permanent rental housing for the hostel tenants.<sup>96</sup> Subsequently, lengthy and difficult negotiations between the Department of Reconstruction and Supply and the Vancouver city council produced a 1947 agreement making possible CMHC's construction of a 600-unit garden suburb at Boundary Road and Grandview Highway.<sup>97</sup> Many veterans and their families moved directly from the hotel to the new subdivision known as Renfrew Heights. Thus the popular pressure of 1944-46 resulted in a hostel and a rental housing development for veterans as well as an evictions freeze and 1,200 WHL houses.

How fundamental or permanent were these improvements? The measures signified a temporary, directly interventionist program distinct from the federal government's long-term housing policy of market-related, indirect participation. As C. D. Howe, the minister responsible for housing, clearly stated in 1947, the government had no intention of applying its emergency remedies on a permanent basis.<sup>98</sup> Eventually CMHC sold its WHL and Renfrew Heights houses to its tenants. The Hotel Vancouver hostel and rent controls disappeared within a few years. These temporary reforms accompanied other more lasting programs fostering home ownership, stimulating the housing market and creating employment. Indeed, the federal government had introduced its business-oriented 1944 NHA at the same time as popular agitation in Vancouver had demanded and won short-term changes.

Not all of the Vancouver protest groups were committed to fundamental reform. Veterans' organizations and the Rehabilitation Council concerned themselves with the immediate needs of returned service personnel. With wartime public opinion behind them, they forced concessions like the hostel from Ottawa. The CCF, the LPP and the VHA, which did desire more substantial change, exercised less influence on the

<sup>96</sup> *Sun*, 9 November 1946, p. 3; and "The Citizens Rehabilitation Council of Greater Vancouver: Summary of Activities, 1940-1948," Buck Papers, box 11, file 15.

<sup>97</sup> Agreement between the City of Vancouver and H.M. the King in right of Canada represented by Wartime Housing Limited, 31 December 1947, located in the Legal Department, City of Vancouver. See also newspaper clippings on Renfrew Heights, M7913, CVA.

<sup>98</sup> C. D. Howe, "Meeting Canada's Housing Needs," *Public Affairs* 10 (October 1947): 217-21.

federal government. Even in 1949, when it finally amended NHA to permit the subsidization of public housing, the government failed to develop the planned, comprehensive and need-oriented solution to the housing problem recommended by the left-wing parties and by housing associations like the VHA.

However grudging and slow their responses, the federal and the Vancouver governments did eventually react to public pressure. But what were the reasons for their reluctance in bringing about even temporary reforms? The national Finance Department's hesitancy in resolving the old Hotel Vancouver question originated in its opposition towards expanding federal participation in the direct provision of housing.<sup>99</sup> WPTB officials who refused to take "drastic action" on the evictions issue until July 1945 were satisfied with the functioning of their rent control system and preferred to shift responsibility for housing supply to other agencies like WHL.<sup>100</sup> And, while WHL exhibited a notable eagerness to build more houses, it complicated matters by offering financial terms unfavourable to Vancouver. The city council declined to shoulder the financial or administrative burden of a national housing problem. Still, in the end, active protest forced the hand of the federal and the civic governments.

The Vancouver housing protests of 1944-46 did not constitute a strictly working-class movement against state and capital.<sup>101</sup> The LPP and the CCF may have represented the interests of labour, but the Canadian Legion acted on behalf of ex-service personnel from both the working and the middle classes, and the Rehabilitation Council, which supported housing reform out of its concern for the legitimate needs of returning service men and women as well as its fears of social unrest,<sup>102</sup> spoke for business, professional, labour, veterans' and community groups. While not class-specific, the Vancouver protests of the mid-forties expressed a triumph of popular will. In this one instance, at least, popular pressure brought about measures, however temporary, to improve the accommodation of the Canadian people.

<sup>99</sup> Wade, *War-time Housing Limited: Overview and Evaluation*, pp. 25-26, 40-41.

<sup>100</sup> O. Lobley to D. Gordon, 24 August 1944, p. 1, and E. R. Gold to D. Gordon, 5 August 1944, RG 64, ser. 1030, box 701, file 25-2, vol. 1.

<sup>101</sup> By contrast, the momentous 1915 Glasgow rent strikes, which invite comparison with Vancouver, denoted a strictly class-based movement of workers in the neighbourhood and in the workplace; see Damer, "State, Class, and Housing," pp. 73-75, 101-06.

<sup>102</sup> A. W. Cowley to W. L. M. King, 22 June 1945, RG 2, ser. 18, vol. 9, file H-13, PAC; "Memorandum Respecting the Housing Situation in Vancouver," p. 8, RG 19, ser. E3, vol. 4017, PAC; telegram, I. Mackenzie to J. L. Ilesley, 19 September 1944, and J. Clark to I. Mackenzie, 21 September 1944, RG 19, vol. 716, file 203C-17, PAC.