

# “TAKING THE ‘D’ OUT OF ‘DEPRESSION’”:

## *The Promise of Tourism in British Columbia, 1935–1939<sup>1</sup>*

---

MICHAEL DAWSON

### INTRODUCTION

**M**ANY PEOPLE, when asked to offer a representative symbol of Canadian life during the late 1940s and 1950s, might well propose the image of a crowded car hurtling along a newly paved road en route to a family vacation. A similar request for the 1930s would likely elicit very different responses. Images of “Bennett buggies” or “hobo” tourists of the box-car variety might well be proposed, but few people would point to tourism, as it is regularly understood, as having much connection with the Great Depression. There is a tendency in the existing scholarship on tourism in British Columbia, for example, to concentrate primarily on the development of tourism in the post-Second World War era.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in many historical accounts of leisure and tourism, the 1930s represent an era of economic restraint and sacrifice (a decade of “conspicuous under-consumption,” one might say) that ushered in an era of conspicuous consumption in the postwar years.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Gidney, Todd McCallum, and Ian McKay for their comments on earlier drafts of this project as well as to the *BC Studies* reviewers. An earlier draft of this article was presented at the November 1999 BC Studies Conference in Vancouver.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Peter E. Murphy, “Tourism: Canada’s Other Resource Industry,” in Murphy, ed., *Tourism in Canada: Selected Issues and Options* (Victoria: Department of Geography, University of Victoria, 1983): 3–23; and Peter E. Murphy, *Tourism: A Community Approach* (New York: Routledge, 1991 [1985]).

<sup>3</sup> According to John A. Jakle, for instance, “Pent-up buying power and increased leisure time after World War II served to flood North American highways with vacationers.” See John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 185. On the pent-up demand for tourism in British Columbia, see John Douglas Belshaw and David J. Mitchell, “The Economy Since the Great War,” in Hugh Johnston, ed., *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas

Such conclusions overlook the extent to which the interwar years witnessed important developments in the tourist industry in both Britain and North America. In Britain the 1930s marked an era of transition, as small-scale “pioneer” holiday camps gave way to larger, commercial camps that employed large-scale investment and corporate organization to respond to the growing demand from the British public for holiday centres.<sup>4</sup> Tourism’s increasingly prominent role in the British economy was acknowledged by the economist F.W. Ogilvie in his 1933 survey of the tourist industry when he boldly concluded that “the nation of shopkeepers is already in large measure a nation of innkeepers.”<sup>5</sup> In North America during the interwar years, tourism was transformed from an industry intimately connected with railways and hotels to one in which the automobile assumed central importance. The popularity of automobile touring led to the proliferation of roadside auto camps in the 1920s, which, in turn, gave way to a dramatic expansion of roadside motels during the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, recent North American scholarship has begun to chip away at the assumption that the 1930s were primarily an era of abstinence that contributed to a postwar tourist boom.<sup>7</sup> Indeed,

---

and McIntyre, 1996) 330. Mitchell and Belshaw suggest that the expansion of tourism after the Second World War was based on rising incomes, increased leisure time, and improved modes of transportation. Such an interpretation limits our understanding of the expansion of tourism in two ways. First, it overlooks the role that tourism promoters played in creating consumer demand for tourism. Second, by not acknowledging the widespread continuation of tourism during the Depression, it sets up a false dichotomy between the pre- and postwar eras.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Ward and Dennis Hardy, *Goodnight Campers! The History of the British Holiday Camp* (London: Mansell, 1986), 23, 51.

<sup>5</sup> F.W. Ogilvie, *The Tourist Movement: An Economic Study* (London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1933), viii.

<sup>6</sup> The proliferation of auto camps in the Pacific Northwest is detailed in Norman Hayner, “Auto Camps in the Evergreen Playground,” *Social Forces* 9 (December 1930): 256–66. On the shift from autocamps to motels, see Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> In her study of vacations in the Northeastern United States, for example, Cindy Aron reveals that vacations “remained a prevalent and popular American institution throughout the 1930s.” In fact, while vacationing declined briefly in the early part of the decade it expanded rapidly after 1935 when paid vacations were extended to a majority of industrial workers in the United States. Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 238. Karen Dubinsky’s examination of tourism at Niagara Falls, Ontario suggests that the Depression had a much more severe impact upon the city’s industrial sector than it did on its tourist trade. Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 1999), 140. One type of recreational tourism that saw its popularity expand exponentially in the western United States during the 1930s was downhill skiing. Hal Rothman attributes this surge in skiing’s popularity to the 1932 Lake Placid Olympics. Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 186.

statistics on tourism during the 1930s gathered by the Vancouver Tourist Association (VTA) suggest that a good deal of tourist travel occurred throughout the decade.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the 1930s were, in fact, a crucial decade for the development of organized tourism promotion in British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada. After years of campaigning, British Columbia tourism promoters – like their counterparts across the country – were finally succeeding in getting governments to take the possibility of a tourist “industry” seriously. The spring of 1934 witnessed the inauguration of the Senate’s Special Committee on Tourist Traffic – a committee that would give birth to the Canadian Travel Bureau (CTB) in 1935.<sup>9</sup> Two years later the Pattullo government created the British Columbia Government Travel Bureau (BCGTB).<sup>10</sup> These nascent organizations indicated that governments were beginning to recognize that tourism was, in fact, “big business.”<sup>11</sup>

This article is part of a larger research project focusing upon the development of the tourist industry in twentieth-century British Columbia and the ways in which tourism promoters were central to the creation of consumer demand for tourism. My aim is to chart a more thorough and balanced understanding of the roots of the fully fledged consumer society that emerged in Canada after the Second World War – one that emphasizes the fact that consumers “are made,

<sup>8</sup> The number of US tourists arriving at border crossings en route to Vancouver ebbed and flowed according to the ups and downs of the economy, but the recorded statistics also reveal a consistent demand for tourist travel to the province’s largest city. According to figures forwarded to the VTA by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics 50,000 more American visitors journeyed to Vancouver in 1930 (397,169) than in 1929 (347,185). While the darkest years of the decade, 1933 and 1934, saw a roughly forty-five per cent reduction in visitors (to 193,895 and 199,708 respectively), within a few years the number of tourists visiting the city had returned almost to 1929 levels. Between 1937 and 1939, in fact, an average of 309,584 US visitors travelled to Vancouver. See City of Vancouver Archives, Add MSS 633, series B, vol 4, file 20, Greater Vancouver Publicity Bureau, *Annual Reports 1929-39*.

<sup>9</sup> See Senate of Canada, *Report and Proceedings of the Special Committee on Tourist Traffic* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1934). For a detailed examination of the special committee as well as a discussion of the prominent role tourism came to play in the Maritimes in the 1920s and 1930s, see Shelley Kyte, “‘V-8 or Make and Break’ – An Investigation of the Development of Tourism in Canada: A Case Study of Nova Scotia” (MA thesis, Department of History, Queen’s University, 1997). See also Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 33-35.

<sup>10</sup> On the emergence of the BCGTB, see Meg Stanley, “Creating Beautiful British Columbia: Pattullo’s Promotion of Tourism,” paper presented to the BC Studies Conference, October 1994. Many thanks to Meg Stanley for making this paper available to me.

<sup>11</sup> This point was made at the time by prominent Vancouver Tourist Association member E.H. Adams. See BCARS, Add MSS. 9, Gerry McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 9 September 1937, E.H. Adams, “Tourist Trade,” Address to Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Vancouver.

not born.”<sup>12</sup> Tourism promoters, I argue, remained active throughout the Depression and the Second World War and were instrumental in creating postwar consumer demand for tourism.

This article has a narrower focus: it examines the promoters’ motives and ideals in order to demonstrate two key points. First, these tourism promoters drew upon a broader range of ideas and addressed a much more expansive realm of concerns than are often identified with businesspeople during the Depression. Second, those who turned to tourism as a solution to the Depression saw in it not simply an opportunity to counter Canada’s flagging export sector, but also a solution to a more general crisis of Western civilization. Tourism, for these men, offered a business-oriented solution to the multitude of problems faced by Canadian society during the 1930s. While some observers hoped to see domestic tourism contribute to a policy of isolationism that might shield British Columbia from the most deleterious effects of the Depression, these men championed tourism’s potential to revive human progress, restore international peace, and defend democracy. The promise of tourism in British Columbia thus had both an economic and a cultural dimension. The tourism promoters’ pronouncements, however, belied their own economic position. Not everyone embraced tourism as a panacea to the problems of the Depression; in fact, in June 1938 unemployed protesters in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island denounced the promise of tourism as both decadent and unethical. Their response further illustrates tourism’s emergence as an important economic and social issue during the 1930s.

#### TOURISM PROMOTERS

The existing literature on business activities and motivations during the Depression is sparse. Alvin Finkel, in what remains the most in-depth study of Canadian business during the Depression, has convincingly demonstrated that businesspeople successfully argued for state intervention in the economy in the hope of saving capitalism from itself and a growing socialist threat.<sup>13</sup> Michael Bliss, supporting

<sup>12</sup> Karen Dubinsky makes this point with explicit reference to tourists. See “Everybody likes Canadians’: Canadians, Americans and the Post-World II Travel Boom,” in Shelley Baronowski and Ellen Furlough, eds., *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Consumer Culture, and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 322.

<sup>13</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Business and Social Reform in the Thirties* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1979).

a very different understanding of the causes of the Depression, also emphasizes the willingness of businesses to encourage government intervention in the form of price controls and increased government spending.<sup>14</sup> Coexisting with this call for government intervention, however, was another increasingly popular business strategy: cooperation.

According to Bliss, collectivism among businesses was “endorsed in one form or another by almost all boards of trade, chambers of commerce, and trade associations in the country.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, supermarket chains, and the Canadian securities industry, among others, all sought government regulation in the hope of limiting harmful competition and halting declining prices. Their demands were supported by both the Canadian Manufacturers Association and the Retail Merchants Association.<sup>16</sup>

Yet cooperation and the demand for government intervention in the economy do not tell the whole story. In particular, these strategies do not tell us much about the motivations behind tourism promotion or the ideological outlook of BC tourism promoters. Unlike either the heads of large corporations or small shopkeepers, tourism promoters did not stand to benefit directly from their endeavours.<sup>17</sup> The promoters under examination here were not hotel owners, campground operators, or tour guides who profited directly from tourist expenditures. They were, instead, civic-minded politicians and business leaders who held either voluntary positions in tourist associations or salaried positions in government travel bureaux.

Moreover, while tourism promoters sought government assistance in developing the tourist trade, their demands were limited to increased monetary grants and the formation of government tourist

<sup>14</sup> Bliss suggests that the roots of the Depression can be found both in the dislocation caused by the First World War and in the protectionist policies pursued by various governments. See Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 412.

<sup>15</sup> Bliss, *Northern Enterprise*, 425.

<sup>16</sup> Finkel, *Business and Social Reform*, 31–35. A similar collectivist ideal among British Columbia's tourism promoters seems to reflect a transitory position between the ideology of laissez-faire and a new liberal ideology that gained currency among the province's tourism promoters during the 1950s. On the precepts of new liberalism, and its Canadian adherents in the early part of the twentieth century, see Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890–1925* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), esp. chap. 10.

<sup>17</sup> On the activities and ideological outlook of small shopkeepers during the Depression, see David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), esp. chap. 7.

bureaux rather than widespread state intervention in the economy. Tourism itself, they proposed, rather than government monetary policy or social programs, would provide a lasting solution to current economic, social, and cultural problems. British Columbia's tourism promoters advocated, in many ways, a free enterprise solution to the Depression.

The prominent civic leaders and tourism promoters discussed here are, on the surface, a rather diverse group of characters. E.H. Adams, for instance, was the vice-president and comptroller of the BC Electric Railway Company. He served as a director of the VTA throughout the 1930s and was the association's president in 1934 and 1935. Gerry McGeer was a lawyer and former BC MLA who, from 1935 to 1936, served as mayor of Vancouver. Wilber Philpott was a journalist and former director of marketing research for a publishing company who had since become a publisher himself in Toronto. Leo Dolan was a former newspaper reporter and journalist from New Brunswick who became the first chief of the CTB in 1935. While these men came from different backgrounds and, indeed, held quite different occupations, they shared the belief that tourism offered perhaps the most promising route out of the economic malaise of the 1930s. Most important, they were all centrally involved in the campaign to have tourism's possibilities recognized. Dolan and Adams are representative of their community-minded brethren who were involved directly in tourism promotion organizations. McGeer and Philpott, in their capacities as politician and publisher, respectively, reflect the growing appeal of tourism's possibilities. All four men shared a conception of community service that balanced a commitment to both individualism and idealism – a conception that reflected a desire to retain older laissez-faire beliefs while recognizing the important role that the state could play in serving the larger community.<sup>18</sup>

As early as 1932, the BC government was encouraged to consider tourism seriously as a key component in any economic recovery program. In February of that year Premier S.F. Tolmie received a letter from a Conservative party supporter hoping to sell him on the idea of a massive publicity campaign by suggesting, somewhat cryptically, that a sustained tourism promotion campaign would “allow you and British Columbia to take the ‘D’ out of depression.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> On attitudes towards government intervention during the interwar era, see Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> UBC Archives, Tolmie Papers, box 7, file 7-7, 19 February 1932, E.V. Finland to Tolmie.

If it meant anything, taking “the ‘D’ out of depression” meant finding a way to produce an economic recovery. But it was not through tourism’s traditional economic role that this recovery would be achieved. During the 1920s tourism promoters in British Columbia had followed the lead of successful Pacific Coast cities such as Los Angeles in championing tourism as a means to an end.<sup>20</sup> It was during this decade that tourism became widely recognized as the most efficient and successful means of advertising industrial and agricultural opportunities. The British Columbia government’s Bureau of Provincial Information (created in 1900) and a variety of civic publicity bureaus, including the Tourist Association of Victoria and the VTA (both formed in 1902), printed promotional pamphlets and organized newspaper campaigns in a concerted attempt to convince potential industrialists and agriculturalists to visit British Columbia, confident in the assumption that once these visitors saw the economic opportunities available in manufacturing, mining, or farming they would settle in the province and bring with them their investment capital and entrepreneurial know-how.<sup>21</sup> Victoria’s promotional literature, for example, encouraged potential visitors to “Follow the Birds to Victoria” to take advantage of its climate and recreational possibilities in the hope that the experience would induce entrepreneurs to settle in the city.<sup>22</sup>

By the mid-1930s, however, this approach to tourism was being abandoned. Faced with the economic dislocation of the Depression, tourism took on increased importance not as a means to further industry but as an industry in itself. For cities such as Victoria, the

<sup>20</sup> By 1926 the Vancouver Tourist Association had joined with tourism promoters in Victoria in attempting to emulate the achievements of Los Angeles. The experience of Los Angeles, the VTA Board of Directors suggested, was “probably the most outstanding example of successful development. Los Angeles spends no money at all in advertising for industries. They have proven that the best way to secure industrial development is to invite the people to come and see their city and district on a vacation trip.” See CVA, Add MSS 633, ser. B, vol. 4, file 20, Greater Vancouver Publicity Bureau, *Report of the Board of Directors for the Year 1926*, 17–18.

<sup>21</sup> On the activities of the Provincial Bureau of Information, see R. Ross Nelson, “The Presentation of Landscape: Rhetorical Conventions and the Promotion of Tourism in British Columbia, 1900–1990” (PhD diss., Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, 1994), 201–18.

<sup>22</sup> Agricultural and industrial opportunities, for example, are highlighted in the 1922 edition of the Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau’s pamphlet, “*Follow the Birds to Victoria B.C.*” The 1928 version of this same pamphlet trumpeted the fact that “Victoria Welcomes New Industries,” while noting that Victoria city council was willing to offer industrial sites, taxation inducements, and cheap water in an effort to lure new industries. See BCARS, Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau, “*Follow the Birds to Victoria B.C.* (Victoria: 1922); VIPB, “*Follow the Birds to Victoria B.C.* (Victoria: 1928).

hope of building up industrial infrastructure had faded. By 1934, Victoria's mayor, David Leeming, was moved to comment that tourism was the "one live endeavor" that Victoria "has been successful in during the past few years." It was, he explained, the city's only way out of the Depression.<sup>23</sup> The Victoria Chamber of Commerce agreed. A more active approach to tourism was needed but not in the hope of obtaining industry; from the mid-1930s on, tourism would be measured almost entirely by the amount of direct expenditure Victoria and other BC cities received from visitors.

By the latter half of the decade, interest in tourism's economic role was growing even among people not directly involved in the trade. "The tourist business has skyrocketed to top place among our exportable commodities," reported Wilber Philpott in a 1938 editorial for his Toronto-based *Liberty* magazine. "King Wheat, traditional mainstay of our export trade, has toppled from his throne," he boasted. On the whole, with logic that would have impressed even the staunchest opponents of government expenditures, he explained that "tourist expenditures last year were greater than our national expenditures for national education, old-age and army pensions. No other single source of revenue has contributed so much and so constantly to Canada's prosperity parade during recent years."<sup>24</sup> In Philpott's understanding, tourist spending, rather than government expenditures, offered the real solution to the nation's economic ills.

In his September 1937 address to the annual meeting of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Vancouver, E.H. Adams reiterated that it was only very recently that governments and business leaders had opened their eyes to the possibilities of tourism in Canada. Their hesitancy in recognizing tourism as Canada's largest industry had persisted, he surmised, "because we are not dealing in commodities, or in the development of natural resources, or in visible exchanges." Tourism's impact on the economy was easily overshadowed by the impact of more tangible goods such as lumber and wheat.

However, in recognizing the "universal desire to travel," Adams explained, more and more businesses were recognizing that "travel today is 'big business.'" To develop the tourist industry, he argued, two things were necessary. His first concern was to secure the advertising dollars necessary to inform potential tourists of what

<sup>23</sup> Victoria City Archives, Victoria Chamber of Commerce fonds, 32A1, 6 November 1934, Board of Directors Meeting. Leeming was a long-time tourism booster.

<sup>24</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 5, 28 May 1938, *Liberty* vol. 15, no. 22, editorial by Associate Publisher Wilber M. Philpott.



Canada had to offer. The federal government had “made a start” by appropriating approximately \$250,000 annually to the recently created CTB, but, he insisted, this amount was “pitifully small” in comparison to US advertising initiatives. The annual grants by the states of Oregon and Washington alone, in fact, combined to equal the federal appropriation to the CTB. The answer, for Adams, was to “put our tourist business on a merchandising basis, with a more intensive and liberal policy of advertising.”

The second, but equally important requirement, Adams argued, was a dramatic improvement in road conditions. Here Adams was less comfortable in suggesting the government take the lead, but he suppressed his *laissez faire* impulses long enough to suggest that, while “I am not one of those who believes in Government paternalism or in the entry of Government into commercial business ... I can see no other agency through which we can accomplish desirable and necessary road improvement.” The government’s efforts in this realm would be handsomely repaid, he argued, through the distribution of tourist dollars to merchants and a resulting increase in tax revenues.

A joint federal-provincial commission on highway development would allow “much of the money now necessarily spent in unemployment relief and for much of which no work is done” to be transferred to the more productive realm of highway construction, which would “provide employment of a productive nature at reasonable wages.”<sup>25</sup> In his desire to see the unemployed performing “productive” tasks, Adams was joined by former Vancouver mayor Gerry McGeer. “Idleness in this depression,” McGeer proclaimed, “is costing us hundreds of millions of dollars every year.” If only Canadians would put the unemployed to work as part of a nationwide tourist trade program, McGeer explained, many hundreds of millions of dollars could be obtained.<sup>26</sup> One specific remedy for Canada’s tourist industry that Adams favoured was improved roads allowing greater access to what he considered Canada’s greatest tourist asset: its national parks.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> McGeer papers, box 14, file 6, 9 September 1937, E. H. Adams, “Tourist Trade”, Address to Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Vancouver

<sup>26</sup> McGeer stressed beautification as perhaps the most productive form of work that the unemployed could perform. “In the beautification of city and countryside,” he opined, “there are far more jobs than are necessary to put all the unemployed to work.” McGeer Papers, box 14, file 5, CBO radio broadcast, Ottawa, n.d., c. 1937.

<sup>27</sup> On the important role relief workers played in augmenting the existing infrastructure in the National Park system, see Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915–1945* (Calgary, Fifth House, 1995), chaps. 2 and 3.

Here Adams's thought reflected a curious distinction: while government funding of a tangible resource such as roads was in many ways a bitter pill to swallow, no such qualms surrounded the government's underwriting of the tourist advertising campaign. While tourism lost out in public support because it lacked "visible exchanges," a similar invisibility allowed its practitioners to gloss over the potential ideological inconsistencies in soliciting government funds to finance a free enterprise pursuit.

Adams's determination to develop the tourist industry was rooted in his observation that society itself had recently undergone significant changes that augured well for the tourist industry. Leisure time had increased by a third in the past ten years, he argued, as shorter business hours, the five-day week, and other measures had "greatly increased the leisure time of the average person." This increased leisure time, combined with widespread automobile ownership, meant that "our new found leisure and mobility has urged us to go places." Travel, Adams suggested, had become "universal," and it was now necessary for the Canadian tourist industry to cater to the increasing need for "economical travel." Emphasis on expensive hotels, he explained, should be decreased in favour of "inexpensive, hospitable bungalow camps."

Adams also advocated closer collaboration between chambers of commerce, boards of trade, and tourist bureaux throughout the country. Simple cooperative activities such as following the Mexican government's lead and inviting prominent representatives of US travel agencies to Canada to view its attractions, he suggested, would help to develop the nation's tourist industry. It was an industry, he suggested, that was still in its "infancy" but that was "being allowed to grow up by itself."<sup>28</sup> In reality, however, the BC government, along with federal and civic governments, would contribute significantly to the raising of this child.

"SEE BC FIRST":

#### BOOSTERISM AND ISOLATIONISM

While virtually all of British Columbia's tourism promoters advocated greater cooperation among British Columbians, some took this aim a step further and advocated enhanced isolationism. Both solutions were clearly visible in the "See B.C. First" campaigns of the late 1930s.

<sup>28</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 9 September 1937, E.H. Adams, "Tourist Trade," Address to Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Vancouver.

In tourism promotion circles, the ethos of cooperation extended, to a certain extent, beyond the business community. In fact, there existed a social contract of sorts in which businesspeople were encouraged to do what they could to ameliorate the suffering of others during the Depression. In return, however, the public was expected to lend its voice to a chorus promoting business opportunities and to avoid, at all costs, endangering what remained of a positive business climate.

One writer in an issue of *Island Motorist*, for example, urged storekeepers to keep their premises tidy and attractive in an effort to lure visitors to their businesses, adding that there was also an “urgent need for giving a few days work to those who would appreciate it.” “Everyone can do a little,” the author suggested, and readers were challenged to “see what you can do individually.”<sup>29</sup> That same year the *Island Motorist* also explained what was expected of the citizenry: boosterism.

The ethos of boosterism was summarized rather rhythmically by one *Island Motorist* writer who penned the following advice, entitled “If You Can’t Boost, Don’t Knock”:

Put the hammer in the locker,  
Hide the sounding board likewise.  
Anyone can be a knocker,  
Anyone can criticize.  
Cultivate a manner winning  
Though it hurts your face to smile,  
And seems awkward in beginning  
Be a Booster for a while.  
Let the blacksmith do the pounding,  
That’s the way he draws his pay,  
You don’t get a cent for hounding  
Saint and sinner night and day  
Just for solid satisfaction  
Drop a kind word in the slot  
And I warrant you’ll get action  
On your effort on the spot.<sup>30</sup>

Readers of this travel magazine were thus presented with a forthright explanation of what was needed to augment the welfare of the community: cooperation and good publicity.

<sup>29</sup> Tolmie Papers, box 3, file 3-29, 26 April 1932, Henry B. Thomson, Chairman, Liquor Control Board, to Tolmie.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Increased local enthusiasm for tourism was met occasionally by a similar enthusiasm on the part of visiting representatives from other centres. In April 1932, for example, Winnipeg's mayor, Colonel Ralph Webb, addressed the Victoria Chamber of Commerce on the importance of tourism and publicity. Webb urged his audience to work towards "greater co-operation between the provinces of Western Canada," and his most concrete suggestion involved a proposal that the western provinces "approach the Federal Government with a proposal for matching dollar for dollar in creating a fund for advertising the Dominion." Webb's suggestion aimed not only at overcoming a lack of cooperation between competing jurisdictions, but it was also informed by a more general concern with the "depressing" impact of media reports surrounding the Depression. Webb was of the opinion that "the depression should not be referred to as much as it had been in the past," and he suggested that "the newspapers were moulding the public opinion along wrong lines." "Boards of trade, and advertisers in particular," he advised, "should endeavor to prevail upon the newspapers to publish only constructive material."<sup>31</sup>

Along with his desire to limit negative publicity, Webb also hoped to convince Canadians to help insulate the country from the Depression by minimizing the expenditure of tourist dollars outside the country. Webb had chosen Victoria as his holiday destination, he informed the chamber, in an attempt to lead by example and to encourage Canadians to learn more about their own country instead of opting for Honolulu or California.<sup>32</sup>

Webb's suggestion that Canadians restrict their travel to destinations within their own country was a variation on a common theme during the Depression. Protectionism, of course, had been the basis of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's election promises in 1930, as he championed the ability of tariffs to solve the economic crisis.<sup>33</sup> Some tourism boosters offered their own twist on this policy while remaining intently focused upon selling the importance of tourism to both governments and the business community. By convincing British Columbians to limit their vacations to destinations within the province, they hoped to keep a larger share

<sup>31</sup> VCA, Victoria Chamber of Commerce fonds, 32A1, 4 April 1932, Joint Meeting Victoria Chamber of Commerce and the Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 47. On Bennett's plan to use the tariff to "blast" Canada's way into foreign markets, see Bliss, *Northern Enterprise*, 415.

of the population's travel expenditures circulating within British Columbia.

One popular method for boosting tourism was the caravan. Frequently tourism promoters and politicians, either anxious to spread the word about the opening of a new transportation route or determined to renew or improve trade between economic centres, would drive a line of vehicles from one point to another, stopping frequently for publicity rallies in communities along the way. The Vancouver Junior Board of Trade sponsored one such caravan in 1937. Participants took part in a twelve-day trip that covered 1,600 miles. They began in Vancouver and ventured into the Kootenays, following along the border with Washington State, and then returned by way of Washington State itself. Dubbed the "See B.C. First Caravan," the trip was a publicity stunt designed to improve economic relations between the Lower Mainland and the province's Interior and, most important, to encourage British Columbians to limit their vacation travels to destinations within the province.<sup>34</sup> According to Don Finlayson, one of the caravanners, the event was a great success that had done much to "build the foundations of better understanding and co-operation between the coast and the interior."<sup>35</sup>

But for Finlayson the poor quality of the roads on the BC portion of the trip (not to mention the fact that the caravan returned to Vancouver through Washington State!) highlighted one of the province's nagging problems: an underdeveloped infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> Finlayson was also very discouraged by the relatively isolated nature of the region. "Truly we have a wonderland in British Columbia," Finlayson wrote, "and what a pity it is we cannot induce more of our visitors to go adventuring into that matchless country." Yet visitors were not alone in ignoring the province's attractions, he explained: "Our own people do not go to discover their own Province because of the reputation of our roads. Our road system, which is no system,

<sup>34</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Add. MSS. 426, Harold Merilees fonds, vol. 3, file 1, Harold Merilees, "The 'See B.C. First' Caravan Trip in Review," *Forward, Official Publication of the Vancouver Junior Board of Trade*, (September 1937), 2.

<sup>35</sup> CVA, Add. MSS. 426, Harold Merilees fonds, vol. 3, file 1, Don Finlayson, "The Impressions of a Caravanner", *Forward, Official Publication of the Vancouver Junior Board of Trade* (September 1937), 3.

<sup>36</sup> The lack of navigable roads in British Columbia was due primarily to the difficulties involved in imposing an efficient road network on the province's mountainous physical geography. On the underdeveloped nature of the province's road system at this time, see Cole Harris, "Moving Amid the Mountains, 1870-1930," *BC Studies* 58 (Summer 1983): 27-30; and "The Struggle With Distance," in Harris, ed., *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 172-74.

is a system of building roads for political reasons, beginning everywhere and ending nowhere." These roads, he lamented, "discourage all but the seasoned traveller."

The problem was not simply one of wooing the Lower Mainland population into the Interior but of servicing the communities of the southern Kootenays as well. "Southern British Columbia, where two thirds of the population of the Province dwell," Finlayson suggested, "offers, apart from tourist possibilities, untold wealth in merchandising, a salesman's paradise, with its prosperous cities and communities, with the fruit growing, packing houses, canneries, mines and mills all operated by a prosperous, hard working people, who both live and spend well." For Finlayson, the tragedy of the present situation was that, because they lacked a direct route to Victoria and Vancouver, these British Columbians "spen[t] their money across the line." As a result, he claimed, "Spokane has become to southern British Columbia what Bellingham and Seattle are to the coast cities." A "sensible and comprehensive road building system," Finlayson urged, including the "completion and hard surfacing of the Hope-Princeton road and the trans-Canada highway," would allow British Columbians to holiday within their own province more easily and thus greatly increase trade within the province.<sup>37</sup>

Finlayson's solution was thus a variation on a common theme during the Depression. By expanding the infrastructure and thereby increasing the desire of British Columbians to keep their vacation expenditures within their own province, residents of British Columbia might insulate themselves to a certain extent from the international economic downturn. The cooperation of businesspeople, Finlayson and others hoped, would secure a greater proportion of the tourist trade for British Columbia by limiting the travel of British Columbians to the United States. This response was understandable but not widely held. Finlayson's isolationist position was not one that was widely subscribed to among tourism's most enthusiastic and influential supporters. Theirs was a more idealist consideration of tourism's possibilities.

<sup>37</sup> Finlayson, "Impressions of a Caravanner," 3.

## PROGRESS

Tourism's appeal was not limited to those involved in the tourist trade itself; tourism was also capturing the imagination of those not directly connected to the industry and, in the case of Gerry McGeer, those who had already gained a reputation for radical and idealistic solutions to the Depression. Nowhere was the idealism of tourism promotion given more force or colour in British Columbia in the late 1930s than in the speeches of the former Vancouver mayor. By the mid-1930s, McGeer had gained a reputation as an ardent defender of British Columbia's interests within Confederation, and, with the onset of the Depression, he had embarked upon a sustained campaign for monetary reform. His interest in promoting the virtues of the tourist industry, which left economic recovery very much in the hands of consumers, reflected a far less dramatic rethinking of the state's role in the economy than that proposed in his earlier speeches and published works.<sup>38</sup>

McGeer, like many others, sought increased government recognition for tourism, and he outlined what he considered to be the main purposes behind the tourist trade in a January 1937 memorandum to his successor as mayor, George Miller. While earlier explanations of tourism's importance often emphasized the close relationship between tourist travel, settlement, and industrial development, McGeer's rationale was very different, focusing chiefly on tourist expenditures.

To solicit expenditures, he suggested, one needed to spend money as well. He called upon Miller to help secure the cooperation of other BC cities as well as the provincial and federal governments in order to develop a national tourist development program. Cooperation, he argued, must also be secured from the transportation companies that held a significant interest in the city's tourist trade. Moreover, the citizens of Vancouver must recognize the importance of contributing to the development of other cities in the province. For McGeer, the tourist trade was more than "a civic activity, it [was] both Provincial and National in its scope and importance."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> On McGeer's proposals for monetary reform, see David Ricardo Williams, *Mayor Gerry: The Remarkable Gerald Grattan McGeer* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1986), esp. chap. 7. McGeer's own lengthy tome on the subject was published in 1935. See G.G. McGeer, *The Conquest of Poverty or Money, Humanity and Christianity* (Hawthorne, CA: Omni, 1967 [1935]).

<sup>39</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 8 January 1937, "Memorandum Re Development of Tourist Trade," McGeer to Mayor George Miller.

Yet government support for tourism promotion would not simply alleviate the current economic dislocation, McGeer argued, for it would also help to put Canada back on the road to progress. Tourism, McGeer suggested in a 1937 radio broadcast, possessed both “moral as well as economic virtues.” To buttress his argument, McGeer drew upon the observation of the great early nineteenth-century Whig historian, T.B. Macaulay. For McGeer, Lord Macaulay had foreseen what governments were only too slow to discover: that improvements in transportation produced both material and intellectual benefits. Such developments, as Macaulay had announced in the second volume of his *History of England*, held the possibility of removing “national and provincial antipathies and ... join[ing] together all branches of the great human family.” When Gerry McGeer surveyed the Canadian landscape in 1937, he saw a good deal of evidence to support Macaulay’s supposition. “Our greatest cultural joy is found in travel,” he announced, “and there is every indication that during the next 100 years travel will become the common privilege of every citizen in the land.”

Having invited his audience to join him on the one-way tourist road to progress, McGeer turned his attention to the immediate problems at hand. The tourist industry in Canada, he argued, “was 25 years behind the opportunities that the automobile has created.” To advance tourism from its present doldrums, he explained, Canadians must demand action from their federal government. Foremost among these problems were Canada’s roads. According to McGeer, Canada’s already abundant revenue from American tourists arrived in Canada “notwithstanding the fact that countless thousands of Americans travelled to our boundary lines, looked at our dirt and dust highways and turned back in disappointment.” The poor quality of Canada’s roads, combined with a lack of tourist accommodation, he suggested, meant that “Canada [was] losing annually more than enough to finance a tourist trade development programme that would eliminate unemployment in every section of our Dominion.”

For McGeer, the answer to the economic malaise of the Depression was not to be found in new and improved labour-saving devices but, rather, in the greatest “labour creating” device ever invented: the automobile. The automobile was, for McGeer, “science’s gift to this age.” But its benefits could not be fully enjoyed without dramatic improvements in Canada’s roads. “Any bookkeeper can understand a labour saving invention,” McGeer explained, “but only people of



imagination can appreciate those inventions which create labour and offer new opportunities for greater trade and commerce." "Not all men who hold the purse strings," McGeer lamented, "have the courage to finance progress."<sup>40</sup>

Seen through McGeer's eyes in 1937, Canada's future looked bright. Canada's "future of progress," he argued, would arrive "through the application of Canadian intelligence and Canadian labour" to the development of the tourist trade. His solution belied an important division in his mind and in the minds of many civic leaders during the Depression: a division that pitted the "intelligence" of experts against the "labour" of ordinary Canadians. The conclusion of one of McGeer's radio addresses suggests that his message was clearly aimed at the ears of the former: "Clean up, paint up your own town ... and make your wishes known to the Government for there are many of us here who need your support if we are going to put our unemployed to work."<sup>41</sup> McGeer was not appealing to the unemployed; he was addressing the self-appointed community caretakers – a group of businesspeople who counted tourism promoters among their number.

According to the former mayor, a sustained effort by governments to develop the tourist trade would allow Canadians to continue on their appointed path to progress and harmony. It was a path, according to McGeer, that had been initiated in 1534 by Canada's first tourist – Jacques Cartier. And the country's history had since unfolded "as the brilliant record of romantic and venturesome tourists."<sup>42</sup> Along with the economic benefits that tourism promotion offered came the promise of a return to a linear route to progress and moral development – a route from which, in recent years, Canadians had been diverted.

<sup>40</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 5, CBO radio broadcast, Ottawa, n.d., c. 1937. According to McGeer, a concerted effort to promote tourism also benefitted from another unique characteristic of this emerging industry: its sustainability. Unlike other resources, tourist attractions could be marketed without ever having to be replaced. "We need have no fear of depression in Vancouver," McGeer surmised in a November 1937 speech to local service clubs, "if we only recognize that it is our privilege to become the merchants of the inexhaustible reserve of tourist trade attractions which make up one of the most valuable items in British Columbia's stock in trade." McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 23 November 1937, Speech to Service Clubs, Vancouver Hotel.

<sup>41</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 5, CBO radio broadcast, Ottawa, n.d. c. 1937.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

## PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

In the minds of tourism promoters there were, in fact, two key elements of Western civilization that required protection in order to ensure the progress that McGeer envisioned: peace and democracy. Tourism, they suggested, would play a fundamental role in protecting both elements from looming ideological threats. If the Depression arrived as something of a surprise to Canadians, the Second World War did not. It is clear from the writings and musings of the country's tourism promoters that, from the mid-1930s onward, the possibility of war was a pressing concern.

Such concerns were in evidence as early as 1935, when an unveiling ceremony for a marker honouring George Vancouver was attended by representatives of the Port Angeles, Washington, chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. After the ceremony, C.C. Pemberton, an active member of the Tourist Trade Development Association in Victoria, sent a warm letter to the chapter's secretary thanking her for its interest in, and support for, the project. The cooperation between the Daughters and BC citizens was particularly comforting for Pemberton given the impending "threat of war."<sup>43</sup>

As the decade progressed, tourism promoters became increasingly occupied with the possibility of war. In fact, the martial language of war pervaded some enthusiastic endorsements of the tourist trade itself. "The greatest army of conquest that the world has ever known is about to seep over the length and breadth of Canada," Wilber Philpott wrote in May 1938. "Resistance is useless! We join forces with the great invader," he continued, for "his line of march is from the United States which, year by year, leaves such a trail of friendship and well-being in its wake." Philpott, of course, was referring to the increasing number of US tourists travelling to Canada. Tourism's economic contributions, Philpott recognized, were complemented by its role in producing other "invisible exports" – a heading under which he included "those immensely important intangibles comprising good will and freedom of intercourse" between Canada and the United States.

Each year, Philpott suggested, the invading army of tourists returned to the United States "with an increasing share of Canada's thinking and good will transplanted in its native soil." Given the rising international tensions of the late 1930s, Philpott explained,

<sup>43</sup> BCARS, Add MSS 522, C.C. Pemberton Papers, 16 October 1935, Pemberton to Mrs. W.J. Lowndes, Secretary, Michael Trebert Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution of Port Angeles.

tourism had an important peacekeeping role to play. "Wars spring from hatred, and hatred springs from misunderstanding," he argued. Misunderstanding, in turn, was caused by thinking of other nations "in the abstract." The abstraction of ideologies, Philpott proposed, could be circumvented by tourism: "The peace of this continent has been attained, and will be sustained, because the tourist invasion forbids thinking in the abstract." When "John Smith, Chicago, thinks of Bill Jones, Calgary, as friend and neighbor," Philpott concluded, "the term 'foreigner' is as ill-timed as illogical." Tourists for Philpott were Canada's "biggest export customer[s]," but they also served a more philanthropic function. Tourists were ambassadors who were helping to cement "the logical alliance of the Anglo-American democracies which girdle the globe."<sup>44</sup>

Philpott was not alone in emphasizing a connection between tourist travel and cordial international relations. CTB chief Leo Dolan, for instance, explained that "Canada's tourist activities represent more than a great industry from which everybody benefits." According to Dolan, such activities provided an opportunity to create what Prime Minister Bennett had described as "that feeling of neighbourliness' which is such a vital factor in building up cordial relations within the family of nations."<sup>45</sup>

Closely related to the issue of peaceful international relations was a defence of democracy. On this topic, Leo Dolan, perhaps the most influential Canadian tourism promoter in the eyes of those supporting British Columbia's tourist trade, offered the most eloquent championing of tourism's contributions to democratic government. In May 1938, for instance, Dolan seized upon an opportunity to address a gathering of British hotelmen at New York's Waldorf Astoria Hotel not to expound upon the many specific reasons for why tourists should visit Canada but, rather, to encourage more intensive cooperation between tourism promoters in what he termed

<sup>44</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 5, 28 May 1938, *Liberty* vol. 15, no. 22, editorial by Associate Publisher Wilber M. Philpott.

<sup>45</sup> National Archives of Canada, D. Leo Dolan Papers, MG 30, E 259, vol. 1, n.d. c. 16 October 1934, "So That Our Visitors Will Be Sorry To Leave" Rt. Hon. R.B. Bennett, Prime Minister of Canada, to the Canadian Association of Tourist and Publicity Bureaus, 6 November 1934. The relationship between tourism and peace remains unclear. For a spirited celebration of tourism's potential contribution to world peace, see L.J. D'Amore, "Tourism: A Vital Force for Peace," *Futurist* 22 (May/June 1988): 23-28; and "Tourism: The World's Peace Industry," *Recreation Canada* 48, 1 (1990): 24-33. For a more guarded appraisal of tourism's possibilities, see Turgut Var, John Ap, and Carlton Van Doren, "Tourism and World Peace," in William F. Theobald, ed., *Global Tourism: The Next Decade*, (Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 1994), 27-39.

the “English and French speaking democracies.” “To all who have given thought to national and international affairs during the last few years,” he observed, “there must be manifest the importance of the idea, and ideals, of democracy.” The modern world, Dolan suggested, was making such ideals more and more difficult to attain. The world itself “is becoming smaller and smaller day by day” as “the development of modern science and its application to our systems of transportation, and to our means of communication, have annihilated time and distance.” The modern world, he continued, was beset by paradoxes: “Radio, telegraphs, telephones, trains, aeroplanes, steamships and motor vehicles have combined to bring the peoples of the world closer together than ever before; and yet this very nearness has been accompanied by an astounding tendency towards insularity and exclusiveness.”

Dolan’s prescription for this situation was, of course, travel. Tourism acted as a “broadening” influence – an influence that could be intensified “the more we people of these world minded democracies mingle with one another.” A free flow of tourists between nations could counteract the narrow-minded tendencies of the modern world. “As sure as night follows day,” Dolan proclaimed, “prejudice and ill-will born of ignorance will be upon us unless we keep wide open the gateways of understanding and knowledge of each other.” The British hotelmen in the audience could play their part in defending democracy by conducting what Dolan termed “a civilizing service.” Hotelmen, Dolan argued, were “doing more than merely engaging in commercial enterprise”; they were playing an important role in establishing “peace, and concord, and goodwill among the nations of the world.” They performed this task through their courtesy and service to visitors and by impressing upon travellers a high regard for the country they were visiting. Dolan condemned isolationists weary of international commitments, advocating instead a “closer alliance between the democracies,” with tourism as a means to that end.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> As a response to the rise of fascism, Dolan turned to an unlikely antidote: nationalism. He told the audience that he believed “strongly in the principle of what we call nationalism – that is the development of one’s own national institutions, in fostering and cherishing one’s own national traditions and achievements.” For, he reasoned, “only as we are loyal and devoted citizens of our own country can we hope or expect to appreciate or sympathize with the desires and aspirations of citizens of the communities other than our own.” The real threat to world peace came not from “the mistakes of diplomats or the blunders of statesmen” but from the “false impressions which spring from prejudice in the minds of ordinary folk like us.” McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 10 May 1938, Leo Dolan, Chief, CTB, address to British Hotelmen, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City.

While McGeer had reached back to the nineteenth century writings of Macaulay for inspiration, Dolan cast his line back even further in time. He paid tribute to the “inspiration of the light of freedom” that flowed from the Magna Carta as well as the heritage of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and the American Declaration of Independence. A successful effort to increase tourism, he suggested, would help spread the virtues of Western thought and protect the world from lesser philosophies, which were, he explained, “largely responsible for international discord and discontent.” The close and friendly relations between Canada and the United States were, of course, an example to the world, and it was thus the responsibility of the citizens of North America to keep the idea of peace alive – through tourism. “There is no agency that has won more for the promotion and development of this amity among peoples of the world than the travel industry,” Dolan suggested. Travellers and tourists doubled as ambassadors. “Today we hear of this or that axis being formed,” Dolan announced, and he suggested that the existing “travel axis” between Britain, the United States, Canada, and France be expanded to include other nations.

To conclude his address, Dolan joined Philpott in turning to metaphors of war. Dolan described previous American visitors to Canada as a friendly invading army that brought “friendliness instead of desolation, leaving a trail of wealth rather than a trail of destruction.” Not content with Philpott’s metaphor of the invading army, Dolan saw tourism as the basis for an alliance. Casting aside the fourth member of his vaunted “travel axis,” he then advocated the forging of “a new weapon for the promotion of peace among the Anglo-Saxon democracies.” Tourism would be the catalyst to bring about “an even closer alliance” between the people of Britain, the United States, and Canada.<sup>47</sup>

If the pronouncements of Adams, McGeer, Philpott, and Dolan are any indication, the appeal of tourism as a solution to the economic and cultural malaise of the Depression was both deeply held and, to some extent, widely championed. But tourism, for some British Columbians, was neither a panacea nor even a benign leisure activity. Some British Columbians responded negatively and directly to the suggestion that tourism was the answer to their plight.

<sup>47</sup> McGeer Papers, box 14, file 6, 10 May 1938, Leo Dolan, Chief, CTB, address to British Hotelmen, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York City.

## DISSENTERS

British Columbia's tourism promoters, it must be said, appeared more comfortable (and perhaps more interested in) alleviating international problems and in pursuing more idealist goals such as democracy and peace than they were in addressing the social inequalities in their local communities. But if their attention often wandered from the immediate needs of local residents, it was at times refocused for them by some of British Columbia's more vociferous underprivileged residents. The extent to which tourism became embedded in the discussions and debates focusing on solutions to the Depression is indicated by the fact that some of the unemployed themselves saw tourism as a target worthy of their disdain.

Along with the direct economic impact the Depression had on potential tourists, the economic dislocation of the 1930s had an indirect impact upon tourism promotion. In June 1938, following the sit-down strikes at Vancouver's art gallery and post office, for example, the plight of the unemployed in the Lower Mainland became an immediate concern for tourism promoters on Vancouver Island.<sup>48</sup> When several hundred unemployed protesters marched on Victoria, tourism promoters quickly became staunch supporters of government relief for the unemployed. Yet their calls for relief camps made reference not to the demonstrable needs of the unemployed but, rather, to the importance of removing unemployed protesters from the sight of American tourists.

Among the concerns forwarded to Premier Pattullo by the Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau was that expressed by William Clark, the manager of the Dominion Hotel in Victoria. Clark called attention not to the plight of the unemployed but, rather, to the plight of the travelling public. The presence of unemployed protesters in Victoria, Clark maintained, was "decidedly detrimental to the traveling public." A few days earlier, he reported, vehicles boarding the ferry to Vancouver Island "were hissed and booed." Such activity, Clark bemoaned, would nullify "the good work of the Publicity Bureau."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The unemployed were protesting reduced government relief grants and a municipal ban on "collecting" on city streets. For a first-hand account of the strikes and the "Bloody Sunday" clash with authorities, see Steve Brodic, *Bloody Sunday Vancouver - 1938: Recollections of the Post-Office Sit-Down of Single Unemployed* (Vancouver: Young Communist League, 1974).

<sup>49</sup> BCARS, GR 1222, Premiers Papers, box 148, file 6, 24 June 1938, George Warren to Pattullo (22 June 1938, Wm. J. Clark, Manager, Dominion Hotel, Victoria, to Warren, v&IPB).

The situation further up the Island was apparently worse. According to the manager of the Sunset Inn at Qualicum Beach, not a single guest had arrived at the inn during the previous week, while, at the same time the year before, the inn had been “doing quite a good business.” The intimidating sight of the unemployed protesters had turned potential guests away, and, the manager reported, “we amongst others have had to lay off employees and thus contribute to unemployment.”<sup>50</sup> The answer, Clark explained, was for the provincial government to feed the unemployed in relief camps until relief work projects were under way.<sup>51</sup>

E.W. Hudson, manager of the Hotel Georgia in Vancouver, voiced considerable sympathy for his brethren on the Island. The “unemployed sitdown situation” in Vancouver had garnered a great deal of attention south of the border, and he urged the Victoria and Island Publicity Bureau to call upon the provincial government to resolve the situation. Hudson related the experience of “a prominent building contractor from Los Angeles,” vacationing in Vancouver with his wife, who had been intending on visiting Victoria but who, in light of “the unemployed situation,” was now “afraid to go over” to the Island and had returned south to Seattle instead. The couple had heard rumours that the ferries to Victoria were filled with the unemployed. Hudson admitted that this was only one case that probably cost the City of Victoria in the neighbourhood of fifty dollars in tourist expenditures, but he argued that, “if this is multiplied several hundreds of times, as doubtless it will be if this situation is not cleared up, you can readily see how much tourist revenue you and we are going to lose.”<sup>52</sup> These concerns suggest that, despite all of the rhetoric that championed the widely distributed benefits of tourist expenditures, some British Columbians were unwilling to accept the suggestion that tourism operated in everyone’s interest. Some unemployed workers in British Columbia were understandably hostile towards the activities and ideology of the province’s tourism promoters.

While these unemployed protesters vented their frustrations by antagonizing tourists en route to Vancouver Island, others found a

<sup>50</sup> Premiers Papers, box 148, file 6, 24 June 1938, George Warren to Pattullo (22 June 1938, A. Playfair, Sunset Inn, Qualicum Beach, to Warren).

<sup>51</sup> Premiers Papers, box 148, file 6, 24 June 1938, George Warren to Pattullo (22 June 1938, Wm. J. Clark, Manager, Dominion Hotel, Victoria, to Warren, v&IPB).

<sup>52</sup> Premiers Papers, box 148, file 6, 24 June 1938, George Warren to Pattullo (17 June 1938, E.W. Hudson, Manager, Hotel Georgia, Vancouver, to Warren).

less direct, more literary, medium for their anger. When a writer for the radical Victoria *Jobless Journal* sought to highlight the gap between his colleagues' daily experience and that of Premier Pattullo, the language of tourism pervaded the poem:

O, if I had a plane like Pattullo  
 O'r these high mountain ranges I'd fly,  
 And I'd fly to the City of Ottawa  
 Where they say all our grievances lie.  
 But now we're in British Columbia  
 And this is our domiciled home.  
 We've all had our fill of those train rides,  
 We no longer desire to roam.  
 So we *followed the birds to Victoria*  
 To try to prevail upon Duff  
 That it's work with a wage that we're after  
 So cut out this transient stuff.<sup>53</sup>

This writer remained unconvinced that tourism offered a promising solution to the unemployment crisis.

The Communist-organized Single Unemployed Protective Association had developed its own conceptions of proper humanitarian obligations and, of course, of the necessary plans for economic recovery. Demanding a "Genuine Works Programme" to end unemployment, for example, an editorial in the *Job-Seekers Journal* asked readers for their "moral support" to work towards a "guarantee that all Canadian youth will enjoy a future worthy of a country which has such noble traditions of Democracy and which is rich in all that should make life a thing of enduring happiness and prosperity."<sup>54</sup> The inaugural issue of the *Post Office Sitdowner's Gazette* also championed the strikers' activities as being "in accordance with peace and democracy."<sup>55</sup>

These unemployed British Columbians expressed a singular dislike towards the rising popularity of tourism as an answer to the Depression and offered sarcastic versions of promotional material, mimicking local tourist organizations. A mock tourist pamphlet produced by the Single Unemployed Committee, for example, wryly

<sup>53</sup> UBC Special Collections, Alexander Maitland Stephen Papers, box 2, *British Columbia Job-Seekers Journal* vol. 1, no. 1, emphasis added. Many thanks to Todd McCallum for sharing with me his research notes on the Stephen Papers.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Papers, box 2, *British Columbia Job-Seekers Journal* vol. 1, no. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Brodie, *Bloody Sunday*, 7 (illustration).



championed some of Vancouver's less traditional tourist attractions. "We have slums," the pamphlet announced, "which have been appraised by Slum Clearance experts, who testify that they lead even London, England, for dilapidation." Visitors should also be sure to track down a "most outstanding feature attraction ... the scenes at the Post Office and Art Gallery, where the youth and workers of this glorious civilization waste away." The pamphlet also targeted the infamous quality of the province's roads. "SEE VANCOUVER FIRST[,] it offered, "Then swap your car for a Bull-Dozer and blast your way to our Natural beauties of the interior."<sup>56</sup>

The objections of the province's unemployed activists, not surprisingly, seem to have had little impact upon the activities and ideas of BC tourism promoters. The province's tourism promoters, along with many influential civic leaders, embraced tourism as a free enterprise route out of the Depression. The more far-reaching demands of these unemployed protesters thus fell victim to the increasing resonance of voices throughout the Depression supporting solutions such as increasing tourism promotion as lasting answers to the economic malaise of the 1930s.

## CONCLUSION

"Let us so treat strangers within our gates," Prime Minister R.B. Bennett proposed in November 1934, "that it will be easy for them to come, pleasant for them to stay, and difficult for them to leave."<sup>57</sup> Anyone familiar with federal immigration policies during the Depression will not be surprised to learn that the "strangers" he was referring to were tourists, not immigrants.<sup>58</sup> Bennett's comments remind us, however, that in the midst of the Depression tourism was garnering the attention of even the most powerful politician in the land.

Tourism promoters in British Columbia worked hard to make it easy for tourists to visit the province and, they hoped, difficult for them to leave. Their motivations for doing so, however, had both an economic and cultural dimension. Their pronouncements on the

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Papers, box 2, "Tourist Guide!" sheet, issued by Single Unemployed Committee.

<sup>57</sup> Rt. Hon. R.B. Bennett, Prime Minister of Canada, to the Canadian Association of Tourist and Publicity Bureaus, 6 November 1934. "So That Our Visitors Will Be Sorry to Leave."

<sup>58</sup> On the deportation of radicals and the unemployed during the Depression, see Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988), chaps. 7 and 8.

benefits and possibilities of the tourist trade reveal their concerns not only to improve economic conditions, but also to engage with, and forestall, what they perceived to be widespread and dangerous cultural threats to Western civilization. That their concern for the plight of humanity seems not to have been extended to unemployed protesters in Victoria and Vancouver is, perhaps, not surprising. Their pronouncements on the possibilities of tourism in the coming decades, however, suggest that their lack of sympathy for the unemployed stemmed not from immediate self-interest but, rather, from a broad conception of civic duty that was inextricably bound up in the desire to find a free enterprise, business-oriented solution to the economic, social, and cultural challenges of the decade. Tourism was envisioned by its proponents as an almost “cost-free” solution to the Depression. Government support for a provincial tourist bureau and advertising campaigns, after all, came at a fraction of the cost of other more wide-reaching suggestions for government intervention.

The promise of tourism in British Columbia during the Depression was twofold: an economic recovery and a rejuvenation of Western civilization. This promise was widely endorsed by politicians and other observers outside the tourist business itself; but it was also pointedly contested by those least likely to benefit from its expansion. The controversy surrounding tourism’s possibilities underscores the importance of recognizing the 1930s as an important era in the development of the tourist industry in British Columbia and elsewhere.