

THE REVEREND  
AND THE TRAMP,  
VANCOUVER, 1931:

Andrew Roddan's *God in the Jungles*<sup>1</sup>

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TODD MCCALLUM

THE POLITICIZED PREACHER is something of a stereotypical character in histories of the 1930s: William Aberhart, Robert Connell, Tommy Douglas, A.E. Smith, and J.S. Woodsworth all left their mark on the decade, undermining the foundations of laissez-faire liberalism through their advocacy of the redistribution of wealth and the principles of economic justice. In Depression-era Vancouver the best known radical religious figure was undoubtedly the Reverend Andrew Roddan of First United Church, whose work with the unemployed earned him the title, "Apostle to the Poor." A 1935 tribute from fellow clergyman Andrew Turner perfectly captured the devotion many felt for Roddan: "Those of us who have stood closely beside him can testify that no man and no minister of this Church ever put up a greater fight for his Lord and Master. Mr. Roddan's name has been suggested for Parliament and for Mayor but his choice has been rather that of a voice speaking for his Master."<sup>2</sup>

Roddan is best known for *God in the Jungles*, a book documenting the "flesh and blood" stories of the homeless men who built several makeshift settlements – known as "jungles" – in Vancouver. According to Vancouver archivist Major J.S. Matthews, the appearance of the jungles in the spring and summer of 1931 and their destruction in early

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<sup>2</sup> Vancouver School of Theology (VST), United Church Archives, First United Church (Institutional Mission) Papers (hereafter cited as First United Church), box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1935, A.B. Turner, Session Report, 1.

September marked the beginning of the Depression in the public consciousness, a process that focused much attention on First United's mission to serve 50,000 meals to homeless transients.<sup>3</sup> Appearing in December 1931 and selling more than 2,000 copies in its first month, *God in the Jungles* came to occupy a special place in the public memory as the authoritative account of transient life on Canada's west coast, and, in many respects, it continues to do so.<sup>4</sup> Combining to varying degrees the ideas of the Christian evangelist and the Marxist muckraker, the American sociologist and the itinerant intellectual, *God in the Jungles* was an insightful, at times caustic, critique of the failures of capitalist "materialism." To demonstrate the mass devastation wrought by greed, Roddan used the figure of the transient, a man forced to live in a morally and physically degrading environment and yet still fundamentally human and capable of redemption. Their stories, collected and made public by First United, symbolized the spiritual crisis that plagued the Western world.<sup>5</sup>

As a historian of the 1930s, I am fascinated by the utopian impulses expressed by Roddan in the opening pages of his study.<sup>6</sup> In places, the book's dialectical analysis is indistinguishable from that offered by local leftists in the early 1930s, the author even complimenting the Communists for the "spirit of missionary zeal which is burning so strong in the[ir] heart."<sup>7</sup> Just as important, Roddan's text provides a glimpse, however brief, of what he calls the "spirit of comradeship" – the collectivist practices and values that sustained these homeless communities.<sup>8</sup> He counterposes this moral economy of jungle life with the acquisitive "greed" that spurred the laissez-faire capitalist economy. Most of all, Roddan preaches that universal salvation is possible: even the tramp could be saved. Yet, what began as a book about the "flesh and blood" experiences of hoboes would not end as one, and I am intrigued by the ways in which the contradictions of Roddan's social gospel mission compromised these radical elements. As the readers delved further into the book, they left the world of "comradeship" and entered that of

<sup>3</sup> J.S. Matthews, *Early Vancouver: Narratives of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC*. Vol. 3 (Vancouver: Vancouver City Archives, 1959), 405. This passage dates from 1933 or 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Information on the book's publication can be found in the *Vancouver Sun*, 12 December 1931 and 9 January 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all references to *God in the Jungles* are taken from the Subway Books edition. See Andrew Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes* (Vancouver: Subway Books, 2005), 15.

<sup>6</sup> My understanding of "utopian" is drawn from Frederic Jameson's work. See his *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); and *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

“sin,” encountering images of “rummy stiff[s],” bleeding derelicts, and wolfish predators in desperate need of Christian salvation.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, the political meaning of *God in the Jungles* circulates around and returns to its title: this is primarily a story of Roddan’s mission and its message of reform. In this scenario individual hoboes could be saved but the hobo life could not. Roddan speaks eloquently regarding how a spiritual transformation of society would end the wasteful state of idleness. This Christian renewal, however, could be brought about only through the eradication of transient workers (and the jungle communities to which they gave birth) and their assimilation into productive life. In this sense, *God in the Jungles* is an obituary for the hobo way of life.

In seeking to understand the contradictions that undermined Roddan’s utopian claims about transient mutuality, this article begins with the economic and political context that led to the formation of jungles in Vancouver and then offers a consideration of First United’s jungle mission, taking stock of the volunteer labour central to the relief effort and the sanctification of Roddan within church circles. As a powerful example of the enduring importance of the social gospel in the interwar years, Roddan’s analysis of the economic foundations of tramping life and of the ethos of mutuality among transients is situated in relation to other radical intellectual currents in Vancouver. Ultimately, his message of redemption was undermined through his articulation of the transient question with two pre-existing intellectual traditions. First, in several places Roddan characterizes west coast transients with language that was then most often reserved to describe “inferior” races such as Asians and Aborigines. This way of thinking, in which jungles are cast as examples of a pre-civilized mode of existence, undercuts the power of his portrait of transient mutuality and encourages the belief that the “solution” to economic problems lies outside the jungles, apart from the homeless men most affected by the crisis, just as the “solution” to Chinatown or the Aboriginal reserve lies outside their borders.

Second, whatever his modern ideas about the causes of mass unemployment, Roddan is equally rooted in older traditions of thought regarding individual sin and personal responsibility. On page after page he catalogues the many moral failures (some real, some wholly imagined) of jungle residents, obliterating most of the residual traces of the “spirit of comradeship” lauded at the beginning of the book. This moralism acts much like Roddan’s racial discourse in that it shatters the authority initially

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

granted the transient. In short, the reader who diligently finishes *God in the Jungles* encounters many contradictory images of itinerant life.

Finally, I discuss Roddan's reevaluation of the utopian elements of his portrayal of transient life following the book's publication. In the wake of the collapse of the provincial labour camp system and the increase in mass demonstrations and other forms of political activity on the part of Communist-organized groups in 1932, Roddan would come to endorse harsher, more coercive measures to resolve the transient problem.

From the 1870s to the 1930s, North America was home to a highly differentiated lot of transients who drifted in and out of unskilled jobs in logging, construction, longshoring, and a host of other industries.<sup>10</sup> "If the geographic metaphor for community is the neighborhood, seasonal laboring men as a group were at once part of tens of thousands of neighborhoods and outcasts from all communities," writes American historian Frank Tobias Higbie.<sup>11</sup> Chicago was the "Main Stem" of an elaborate network of railways crisscrossing the continent, built by masses of itinerants, who used the products of their labour to travel thousands of miles in search of work, sociability, support, and community. Chicago also gave birth to influential systems of classification designed to articulate the realities of life on the road. Ben Reitman, America's self-proclaimed "King of the Hoboes" (and most famous as one of Emma Goldman's lovers), suggested a tripartite scheme. "There are three types of the genus vagrant," he explained, "the hobo, the tramp and the bum. The hobo works and wanders, the tramp dreams and wanders and the bum drinks and wanders."<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Klein, one-time president of Chicago's Hobo College, sounded a warning to those who would confuse these groups: "A hobo is one who travels in search of work, the migratory worker who must go about to find employment ... The tramp is one who travels but does not work, and a bum is a man who stays in one place and does not work. Between these grades there is a great gulf of social distinction. Don't get tramps and hobos mixed."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> An excellent recent overview of migrant workers in the United States is Todd DePastino's *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). On transients in British Columbia, see Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990); and *Rebel Life: The Life and Times of Robert Gosden, Revolutionary, Mystic, Labour Spy* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Reitman, quoted in Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1961), 87.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Klein, quoted in Tim Creswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 49.



Transient-cum-academic Nels Anderson adopted this system with few modifications in his groundbreaking sociological classic, *The Hobo*, a book that influenced Roddan's own account.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the crisis of the 1930s would shatter these categories: with mass unemployment reaching heights hitherto unknown, one's willingness to work was no guarantee against long periods of idleness. Hoboes were, in this sense, obliged to become tramps and bums.

With its archipelago of provincial and federal labour camps across the province, not to mention the Communist-led protest movements that sought their abolition, British Columbia was well known as one of the key gathering places of homeless men in North America during the 1930s. Less than a year after the Great Crash of 1929, Vancouver Relief Officer H.W. Cooper, the man in charge of municipal relief, complained that there "cannot be less than 10,000" unemployed persons in the city. A traditional stopping point for migrant workers, Vancouver saw more than its share of "boxcar tourists" throughout the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Along with the network of hotels, restaurants, flophouses and pool rooms geared to serving working men during the traditional winter off-season, the city was also home to numerous unemployed organizations offering political support and sociability. In that first year, tens of thousands of transients passed through the city – police constables reported 75 to 100 men arriving via train each day – prompting City Council to warn Prime Minister R.B. Bennett that "the situation in Vancouver is beyond our control."<sup>16</sup> While jungles had existed in Vancouver since the Great Crash, their size and scope expanded dramatically due to worsening economic conditions in the spring of 1931, coupled with the Relief Department's decision in March to drastically reduce services for transient single men. That month, on order from City Council to reduce expenditures, Colonel Cooper denied relief to 2,500 single men then in receipt of bed and meal tickets. "It is estimated that 50% of those cut off are still in the City," Cooper fretted.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Anderson argued for the existence of five types of homeless men: "(a) the seasonal worker, (b) the transient or occasional worker or hobo, (c) the tramp who 'dreams and wanders' and works only when it is convenient, (d) the bum who seldom wanders and seldom works, and (e) the home guard who lives in Hobohemia and does not leave town." Anderson, *The Hobo*, 89-122.

<sup>15</sup> On transients in earlier periods, see Patricia Roy, "Vancouver: 'The Mecca of the Unemployed,' 1907-1929," in *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, ed. Alan Artibise (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), 393-413.

<sup>16</sup> Vancouver City Archives (VCA), City Council Minutes, MCR 1-31, 31 December 1930; *Ibid.*, City Clerks' Papers, series 20, box 15-A-6, file 7, William McQueen to R.B. Bennett, 31 December 1930.

<sup>17</sup> VCA, City Clerks' Papers, series 20, box 15-D-4, file 9, H.W. Cooper, Memorandum Re Unemployment, 27 March 1931.

The policy shift forced thousands to seek food and shelter outside of established public charity networks. By June there were four distinct jungles within Vancouver's city limits. According to surveys conducted in mid-summer – before the jungles reached their peak population – an average of 150 lived in temporary shelters built along the shore of Burrard Inlet on property administered by the Harbour Board. Two hundred lived on the False Creek flats near the Great Northern Railway terminal, while another 250, most of them at least forty years old, lived in a temporary structure built under the Georgia Viaduct. The fourth jungle, located adjacent to Prior Street, housed approximately 450, most of them of Swedish and Finnish descent. By the end of the summer, another jungle would appear, this one at the southeastern end of the railway yards. Unknown numbers squatted in Stanley Park, on Deadman's Island, and on the former Kitsilano reserve (now the site of Vanier Park) (see Figure 1).<sup>18</sup> This mass provided First United, the "Church of the Open Door," with an identifiable market niche serviced by no other institution; these hoboes, lined up by the hundreds, enabled the debut of Roddan's activist social gospel program.

Like the transients to whom he ministered, Roddan was a newcomer to Vancouver, arriving in December 1929 to take charge of First United's outpost on the edge of Skid Row. Born in Hawick, Scotland, in 1882, Roddan worked as a lay missionary with the British Navy, ministering to sailors and soldiers on Gibraltar, before arriving in Canada in 1910. Taking up residence in Winnipeg, he completed his studies at Manitoba College before beginning his first field mission in Niverville, Manitoba. Roddan would minister at Winnipeg's Home Street Presbyterian for nine years, and he also served for several terms as president of the city's Children's Aid Society. He then relocated to St. Paul's United in Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay), where he spent three years before being called to Vancouver. Roddan's son Sam remembered his father as a "muscular Christian who believed in good deeds and good works."<sup>19</sup> During his stint in Winnipeg, Roddan became caught up in the profound clashes within Protestant churches in the immediate postwar era. At the Presbyterian conference held in June 1919, Roddan and others adopted positions on business, government, and organized religion that one conservative newspaper characterized as a "long pent up

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., box 15-D-4, file 10, H.W. Cooper to Alderman Atherton, 3 September 1931; Ibid., Statement of Dr. H.A. McDonald, 3 September 1931. See also Jill Wade, "Home or Homelessness? Marginal Housing in Vancouver, 1886-1950," *Urban History Review* 25 (March 1997): 19-29.

<sup>19</sup> Sam Roddan, quoted in Helen Borrell, "Mr. Greatheart: Reverend Andrew Roddan," *British Columbia Historical News* 30, 2 (Spring 1997): 30-5.



Figure 1: Location of the Jungles, Summer 1931. Cartography by Catherine Griffiths.

flood of shallow socialism.”<sup>20</sup> He would remain a devout social gospeller throughout the interwar years, and he enthusiastically sought to make the church’s mission relevant to Vancouver’s East End by relieving the suffering engendered by the economic crisis. “By temperament, training, and experience, the Board believe he is the right man in the right place,” announced the first church publication after his arrival: Roddan “earnestly [sought] to apply the principles of the Kingdom of God to the life of the people and the community.”<sup>21</sup>

John Belshaw notes that Roddan’s social gospel was accompanied by a “stagy oratorical style” to market both himself and First United as the vanguard of charity work in Vancouver.<sup>22</sup> Yet, his mission to the jungles did not represent a significant departure from church tradition. First United, particularly its women congregants, had long established programs for the downtrodden of East End Vancouver as an extension of the principles of “our practical Christianity.”<sup>23</sup> On the eve of Roddan’s arrival, Mrs. A.C. Smith, who headed up First United’s Welfare Department, voiced her optimism about the possibilities for the church’s relief programs. “A gloriously wide field for missionary work lies right at our door, in the Welfare Department of this church, if it is grasped,” she enthused. “Many a word for the Master can be effectively spoken even in such an uninviting environment as that of cast-off clothing.”<sup>24</sup> Smith launched a program to provide soup for families in need that winter but had to terminate it due to lack of funds.

What distinguished Roddan’s 1931 summer mission from previous efforts was its magnitude, itself a product of the vacuum in which he operated: Relief Officer Cooper regretfully observed in May 1932 that First United was one of only two citizens’ groups that “felt called upon to co-operate with the Government and City authorities” in the relief effort.<sup>25</sup> With success came fame, and First United’s minister was publicly recognized as

<sup>20</sup> See the account of the conference in Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 122.

<sup>21</sup> *The Story of First Church: The Church of the Open Door* (Vancouver: First United Church, n.d. [c. 1930]), 3, 15; Borrell, “Mr. Greatheart.”

<sup>22</sup> John Douglas Belshaw, “Two Christian Denominations and the Administration of Relief to Vancouver’s Unemployed, 1929-1939,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 2 (December 1987): 290. On the Social Gospel in the interwar years, see Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> *The Story of First Church*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> VST, First United Church Papers, box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1929, Mrs. A.C. Smith, Report of Welfare Department, 38.

<sup>25</sup> VCA, Papers of the Mayor’s Office, series 483, box 33-B-2, file 2, H.W. Cooper to Alderman A.G. Harvey, 9 May 1932. See also Marion Lane, “Unemployment during the Depression: The Problems of the Single Unemployed Transient in British Columbia, 1930-1938” (BA honours

the expert on all things transient. Roddan clearly appreciated his public image, once proudly noting that he was “known from coast to coast as the Apostle to the Poor, the Down and Out, the Unemployed, and to all who needed the help of God and man.”<sup>26</sup> Across Canada progressive clergymen recognized the need to concern themselves with the “psychology of salesmanship.”<sup>27</sup> Roddan’s profile in Vancouver owed much to his use of mass media, which, in turn, made him increasingly central to the relief effort.<sup>28</sup> H.A. Johnston of First United’s Secretarial Department maintained that “people responded splendidly to Mr. Roddan’s appeals over the radio, great quantities of food being received and the workers were proud and grateful to be able to participate in such a beneficent and Christ-like work.”<sup>29</sup> Roddan’s celebrity not only helped to facilitate First United’s large-scale relief effort but also expressly commended the relief of poverty as one (if not the only) purpose of the Christian church and its followers. Roddan criticized those congregations that focused on the “externals of religion,” such as new buildings:

Too many of our modern churches have seized the opportunity to get something for nothing. They have gambled in real estate, moved into a new locality, built beautiful churches, called a safe preacher and then invited God to come and worship with them on condition that He would not interfere with their way of running religion. In the meantime, factories, warehouses, picture shows, or beer saloons, have taken the place of the Church in these downtown areas. The United Church of Canada has seen a vision and the great opportunity and responsibility of holding these strategic centres for the Kingdom of God, believing that it is real Home Mission work.<sup>30</sup>

At one point he intemperately suggested that “the Church has shown little interest in [homeless men] apart from the fact that some church

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essay, University of British Columbia, 1966); John Belshaw, “The Administration of Relief to the Unemployed in Vancouver During the Great Depression” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1982).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Roddan, *How I Was Changed* (Vancouver: First United Church, n.d. [c. 1932]), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Gauvreau and Christie, *Full Orbed Christianity*, 67–9.

<sup>28</sup> Roddan published a collection of his radio sermons in *The Christ of the Wireless Way* (Vancouver: Clarke and Stuart, 1932).

<sup>29</sup> VST, First United Church Papers, box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1931, H.A. Johnston, Report of Secretarial Department, 15.

<sup>30</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 55–6. At least one of Roddan’s parishioners echoed this sentiment: “What is the matter with the Church? One is tempted to think going along Tenth Avenue in Vancouver on Sunday evening and seeing the numerous cars of the worshippers, hearing the melodious strains of the organ and the singing of the people that the church has no place for the unemployed struggling along on relief, others working for a bare existence.” Quoted in Sam Roddan, *Batter My Heart* (Vancouver: United Church of Canada, 1975), 75.

members may have invested their money in the project on which they are working, and they are looking for the dividends in return.”<sup>31</sup> To celebrate Roddan and his campaign for poor relief, then, was to engage with fellow believers and impel them to genuine acts of Christian charity.

Interestingly, when Sam Roddan looked back on the Depression years from the early 1970s, it was not his father’s work he singled out for praise but, rather, that of Jeannie MacDuff, “The Pin-Up Girl for the Hungry and Homeless” who ran the First United soup kitchen and served 1,252 men in a single sitting in November 1930. *God in the Jungles* contains a photograph of that day: Jeannie is nowhere to be seen, while Roddan stands in front of the crowd (Figure 2).<sup>32</sup> Despite her never-ending struggle to secure enough food for the unemployed in the jungles, Jeannie recalled that she and the other women in the First United kitchen put “something personal [into] every bowl of soup we handed to a hungry man. We tried to make each man feel he was somebody pretty important.” Jeannie and her crew put more than sympathy into the food. “Their arms ached and their feet were tired and we took turns having a wee rest,” she reminisced, “but I never heard a complaint. The stove was hot and the sweat poured from our faces but it was as though we were all one big family.”<sup>33</sup> According to session reports, these women provided 3,932 “relief meals” to homeless men in the period from 12 December to 31 December 1930, and they served a total of 53,785 meals during 1931.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these labours, Roddan’s image came to dominate public discourse about the jungles. In First United’s annual session reports for 1930, Roddan appeared as one individual among the many involved in welfare activities already long-established at First United: his status as leader of the congregation was obvious but not all-encompassing. In the reports that followed the jungle mission, however, Roddan was lionized at the expense of the contributions that dozens of volunteers continued to make. The hagiography that grew up around Roddan – a complex issue, especially since the volunteers themselves spoke glowingly of his

<sup>31</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Roddan, *God in the Jungles* (Vancouver: First United, n.d.[c. 1931]), plate between pp. 8 and 9.

<sup>33</sup> Sam Roddan, *Batter My Heart*, 75–8. Sam Roddan is deserving of his own study, especially for his paintings, which both echo and rework many of the themes of deep interest to his father. Some of these works can be seen online at <<http://mypage.direct.ca/c/carnnews/sroi1299.html>>.

<sup>34</sup> VST, First United Church Papers, box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1930, H.A. Johnston, Report of Secretarial Department, 34; *Ibid.*, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1931, H.A. Johnston, Report of Secretarial Department, 16. If accurate, these figures suggest that Roddan’s claim to have fed 50,000 homeless men is exaggerated, as it would mean that most only received a single meal.



Figure 2: VCA Photo Re N5.1. Roddan and the Record-Setting Day.

leadership – requires our attention because of its echoes in his vision of the eradication of unemployment. This cult of personality effectively undermined the utopian claims he made about hobo lives.

Church observers enthusiastically spoke of Roddan and his mission work. In the session report of 1933, J. Hayward of First United's Welfare Department humbly enthused that he considered it "a privilege to be permitted to act as a co-worker with Mr. Roddan in this great programme for the cause of Christ and the relief of human suffering."<sup>35</sup> Jessie Pentland – herself with almost a decade of experience in mission work – described her admiration "for the Christ-like leadership of our Supt., Rev. Mr. Roddan."<sup>36</sup> H.A. Johnston voiced her "sincere gratitude and appreciation of the sympathy and guidance we have received from Mr. Roddan." "We feel it a great privilege to work under the leadership of one so gifted and devoted," she continued, "and are glad to think we are fellow-laborers with him in the great work of helping our suffering fellow citizens and extending the Kingdom of Righteousness."<sup>37</sup> The most effusive praise of Roddan came from his colleague, Reverend Andrew Turner, and is worth quoting at length:

We thank God that our minister was able to help thousands also, who came to his study with their domestic problems and difficulties. No one is ever turned away. He spent much time also in the "Jungles" of this great city, where the hobo, the tramp, the drifter and thousands of homeless men of all races and creeds, lived in the open or in rude huts, built from the refuse found on the city dumps. Here, with the generous contributions of friends, in food[,] clothing and money, he was able to minister to the needs of thousands who had been forced by circumstances into the depths of poverty and despair. Our minister shoulders new responsibilities and countless burdens with a cheerfulness, unselfishness and confidence that is an inspiration, giving himself unreservedly like the Master to the uplifting of his fellow men ... Sick and helpless children are his special concern. He is the friend of mothers, and the champion of womanhood. Wounds have been healed by his gracious touch, and burdens heavier than those of poverty and want have been lifted from aching hearts.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1933, J. Hayward, Report of Welfare Department, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1932, Jessie Pentland, Report of Mothers' Work, 36. Details on Pentland are found in *The Story of First Church*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> VST, First United Church Papers, box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1934, H.A. Johnston, Report of Secretarial Department, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1931, A.B. Turner, Session Report, 1-2.



With such positively gushing passages, Roddan's work was sanctified, bestowed with heroic meanings that only a truly great leader could bear.

This is not to suggest that Roddan wished to be singled out and celebrated, although, in *God in the Jungles*, he did include glowing newspaper articles about his work written by Vancouver reporters A.R. Evans and Sydney Williamson.<sup>39</sup> Rather, it is to recognize the contradiction implicit in Roddan's unique position as Vancouver's "Apostle to the Poor," which gave his writings a measure of authority that hoboes simply did not have. His words about the customs of the jungles counted for more in the public sphere than did those of the men whom these words objectified. These elements of the cult of personality surrounding Andrew Roddan were the products of the jungle mission, in which Roddan's missionary work was adorned with great significance while the daily domestic labours of dozens of unnamed others all too often went unremarked. At bottom the "Great Man" role in which Roddan found himself, partly through his own devices and partly through the ideological work of others, reinforced his power over the means of life so desperately sought by Vancouver's paupers.

To recognize this contradiction is not to call into question the sincerity of feeling that motivated Roddan, elegantly expressed in the dedication of his book: "to my homeless brothers." Roddan begins his journey into the jungles equipped with a simple yet powerful sense of common humanity. All could be saved if only the church could reach them: "we who profess His name can do no less than hear His call and lend a hand to these homeless men."<sup>40</sup> The parallels between Vancouver's tramps and the life of Jesus Christ resonate deeply with Roddan: *God in the Jungles* opened with a quotation from Matthew 8:20: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."<sup>41</sup> Christ, Roddan reverently proclaims, had also experienced "that sense of utter loneliness" that was the lot of tramps. And by unearthing the experiences of hoboes, Roddan hoped to "create a sympathetic understanding of the life and problems of the homeless man," the first step on the path to a national solution to unemployment, itself a precondition to universal salvation.<sup>42</sup>

In introducing his book, Roddan carefully positions himself as the intermediary between the citizenry and the disenfranchised. Because

<sup>39</sup> Sydney Williamson, "Autos from Dumps, Made into Bunks" and A.R. Evans, "All in a Day's Work," both in Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 83-94.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

of his experience, he could ably translate the customs and values of the poor into a form comprehensible to the general reading public. “When you think of a jungle,” he writes on the second page of his study, “you imagine a dense tropical forest with heavy, tangled undergrowth, where the light of sun rarely penetrates and which is the haunt of wild beasts and savage men.” The jungles of Vancouver, however, offered a “very different picture before the mind”:

this jungle is composed of crude shelters made out of old tins, boards, boxes, disused motorcars, anything and everything, gathered from the dump heap nearby and formed into a rough shelter into which crawl, not animals, but homeless men, without saying their prayers, feeling as the Psalmist felt when he said: “No man careth for my soul.” Their bellies slack and gnawing with hunger, they lie down and go to sleep, while the other half sleep in hotels and comfortable homes.<sup>43</sup>

Along with this vivid description, Roddan provided his readers with an index of the emotions stimulated by this spectacle: “a mental and moral revolt ... made my heart sick,” he exclaimed; “I felt like crying out to high Heaven against this cond[i]tion,” which was an unparalleled “breeding ground for Bolshevism.”<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, the lazy reader who manages only the opening sections of *God in the Jungles* could be forgiven for thinking that Roddan himself had done much to foster radical ideas. Not only does he argue that the jungles were home to a cooperative way of life that stood in stark contrast with the ideals of liberal individualism, but he also offers explanations for the relationship between tramping and capitalism that were often indistinguishable from those found in the pages of the radical press. “Wanderlust,” he explains, “...has played an important part in the development of human society.” Beginning with the account of Abraham in Genesis, he briefly surveys the history of “tinkers, tramps, [and] cadgers” in Britain and Europe. The New World, too, had seen its share of wanderers; this “psychological” urge lived on in the minds of young lads who desired to “see Canada first and free.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, as a mass phenomenon, transiency is inseparable from capitalist development and its relentless demand for labour. “I take my hat off to the hobo,” enthuses Roddan. “He has been an indispensable factor in the building of Canada”: “While we think of the architect and the engineer, with their brains and blueprints, let us not forget the man who, with his pick

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

and shovel, helped to make their plans a reality. They are the men who have developed our natural resources. The pioneers in the opening of new lands and the construction of great private and public works.<sup>46</sup> The roots of mass unemployment lay not in the personal character of transient workers but, rather, in the “free” labour market. Once these “great private and public works” had been completed and “with due pomp and ceremony the wheels of industry [were] set in motion,” hoboos were discarded, freed from their jobs and free to starve. Of marginal importance once the factory or railroad was built, unskilled workers had no choice but to roam the country in search of work. Add to this the effects of the “machine age,” where caterpillar tractors and trucks – the “great, black throbbing monster[s]” – displaced many common labourers on road projects and on farms. Hoboes were in this sense entirely forgettable, and it was this “lack of permanence” that led to their degradation, “wasting their lives in idleness through no fault of their own.”<sup>47</sup> “We have a form of slavery,” Roddan laments, “which may be worse than the alleged slavery in Russia.”<sup>48</sup>

*God in the Jungles* introduces readers to a number of well known texts of the road, many of them explicitly radical in origin, such as Louis Melis’s “The Slave Market,” with its depiction of the “human vultures” that prey upon the “mute outcasts.”<sup>49</sup> Roddan also selects the following excerpt from *John o’ London’s Weekly* for publication:

A hobo is a man who builds palaces and lives in shacks ...  
 He reaps the harvest and stands in the bread line,  
 He weaves silk shirts and wears bull wool,  
 He makes broadcloth and wears overalls,  
 He weaves linen sheets and sleeps on a plank,  
 He digs gold and has his teeth filled with cement,  
 He digs coal and shivers in the snow.  
 He builds the factories and is denied a job in them,  
 He builds skyscrapers and has no place to call a home,  
 He builds roads and is arrested on them for vagrancy,  
 He creates labour and is denied the right to labour,  
 He fights for freedom abroad and is put on the chain gang at home,  
 He has made Canada and is denied a vote.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 22-3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 20, 42-5. He argues that, while the introduction of machines creates employment in the long run, their immediate effect is to make thousands redundant.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 23-5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 22. *John o’ London’s Weekly* was a British publication.

On more than one occasion, Roddan views Canada's economic development through the lens of Marxist and socialist political economy as practised by the League for Social Reconstruction, the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, the Student Christian Movement, and other organizations.<sup>51</sup> As Roger Hutchinson notes, these activists articulated a vision of Christian faith that "spoke concretely and relevantly to the casualties of an economic system that rewarded greed and forced hard-working individuals into degrading poverty."<sup>52</sup> In one of his radio sermons, Roddan characterized capitalism as "a greedy and cruel system" that led to "the spectacle of millions of people on the verge of starvation in a world of plenty." In another address over the airwaves that articulated his vision of a "new world order," the minister affirmed his dedication to "seek the good life for all in a classless society of unbroken brotherhood where there shall be no 'poorer classes.'"<sup>53</sup> For decades, the nation had depended upon the labour-power of transients to build the infrastructure and produce profits. Their labour had in fact brought Canada out of the wilderness and into civilization. That they were now forgotten violated the fundamental tenets of Christian compassion.

Beyond the economic foundations of transiency, Roddan also meditated on the value to be found in the makeshift settlements constructed by transients themselves. Imbued with his missionary zeal, the utopian vision of the opening sections of *God in the Jungles* is striking. "There is a spirit of comradeship," he writes, impressed by the solidity of the jungle's communal values.<sup>54</sup> Without much in the way of resources, tramps organized their settlements around the principles of cooperation, mutuality, and tolerance. When transients arrived, they were accepted with "no questions ... asked." During discussions around the fires, information about one's past was not demanded but was given only "voluntarily, and so long as he play[ed] the game he [was] allowed to stay." In addition to their "domestic" activities, like cooking and cleaning, hoboes assisted each other in building makeshift shelters. Jungles were thus both a "refuge" and a place where homeless men "share[d] what they ha[d]," creating a "common brotherhood" that

<sup>51</sup> For example, see Catherine Gidney, "Poisoning the Student Mind? The Student Christian Movement at the University of Toronto, 1920-1965: *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 8 (1997): 147-63; Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>52</sup> Roger Hutchinson, "Introduction," in *Towards the Christian Revolution*, ed. R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos (Kingston: Ronald P. Frye and Co., 1989), ix.

<sup>53</sup> Roddan, *Christ of the Wireless Way*, 113, 118.

<sup>54</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 20.

was “forced ... by stern necessity.”<sup>55</sup> The jungles were thus wondrous examples of those collectivist values society lacked. Roddan ends his book on precisely this note: “We have had an overflow of nationalism, commercialism, science, and education. Now the time has come for an overflow of compassion and goodwill ... An order in which the motive of service and mutual helpfulness will take the place of selfish, heartless, cruel competition which is so rampant in the world today.”<sup>56</sup> Along with their humane organization of the day-to-day realities of living in the jungle, Vancouver’s tramps also offered a different approach to life itself. “There is a democracy in the jungle that is a stern reality. Here you will find democracy without the mock; where the men are all on the level.”<sup>57</sup> Some transients, in fact, adopted a kind of anarchist view of the discipline found in the world of wage labour. Roddan describes these men as “individualists” who “refuse[d] to submit to discipline, or training of any kind,” and thus adopted the life of the road as an alternative to their subjection:

The Bohemian instincts find expression in the life of these men, free to come, free to go, to work or wander, sleep or wake, calling [no] man their master, following th[ei]r own whims and fancies; they want to be free. Perhaps this is a revolt against the kind of life we are all living; where we have bound ourselves by customs, traditions, and habits that hamper life. Maybe the hobo is closer to nature and closer to truth than some of us are. Possessing nothing, he is monarch of all he surveys ... He is free, the master of his own life, to wander where he likes.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, Roddan found some elements of jungle life attractive.

While obviously tinged with romanticism, Roddan’s portrait of jungle life is not without foundation. In *Citizen Hobo*, American historian Todd DePastino deftly charts the “ethic of reciprocity and mutualism” fashioned by itinerants rooted in their “unapologetic rejections of acquisitivism.”<sup>59</sup> In the award-winning *Indispensable Outcasts*, Frank Tobias Higbie sensitively analyzes the complex intermingling of conflict and mutuality in the lives of hobo workers in the American midwest.<sup>60</sup> More to the point, some of Roddan’s ideas about jungle life were echoed

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. Emphasis in original.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-1.

<sup>59</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 69-70.

<sup>60</sup> Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, esp. 173-203. In 2004 it received both the Philip Taft Labor History Book Award and the Social Science History Association’s Allan Sharlin Memorial Award.

by BC tramps themselves. Sydney Hutcheson, for instance, believed that the principle of mutual assistance in the jungles was rooted in the material realities of the tramping life. Public and private charities never gave the individual enough sustenance. By combining their resources, however, hoboes could stretch their meagre allotment: "A man needed company at a time like this as we had to stick together to live."<sup>61</sup> While far from harmonious, jungle life was predicated upon reciprocity in the distribution of food, drink, cigarettes, and other goods. Extant evidence suggests that tramps in the jungles sustained each other through begging. They also engaged in petty theft, for example "grazing" for produce in farmers' fields along the railway lines and close to jungles.<sup>62</sup> Hoboes also relied on civic relief; many towns gave scrip to transients to be redeemed at local grocery stores. These resources they distributed among their fellow tramps in the recognition that tomorrow someone else would rustle up food and other necessities. Tramps who preferred to travel and live in groups rather than alone were thus often spared having to scramble for sustenance every day; instead, they could relax and "live the life of Riley."<sup>63</sup> Jungle life does not appear to have been labour-intensive. The monetary value of these goods was of little relevance, and the exchange was usually conducted face-to-face, without recourse to a medium such as money. The organization of the means of life was thus immediate and relatively consensual, a direct contrast not only to the ethos of capital accumulation but also to the restrictive rules of public charities and private shelters in the city.

*God in the Jungles* thus offered an initial glimpse, albeit a brief one, of the freedom, however limited, that came from living outside the wage-labour nexus. This image, when coupled with Roddan's rough version of the labour theory of value and his dialectical approach to economic development and class formation – profit and poverty came from the same place – should have won him many converts within the city's unemployed organizations.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, while, as Belshaw notes, in the early 1930s Roddan's views were considered radical within the ambit

<sup>61</sup> Sydney Hutcheson, *Depression Stories* (Vancouver: New Star, 1976), 64.

<sup>62</sup> For examples of petty theft, see Hutcheson, *Depression Stories*, 27; G.H. Westbury, *Misadventures of a Working Hobo in Canada* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1930), 89.

<sup>63</sup> Hutcheson, *Depression Stories*, 60. For examples of cooperative mutualism, see Hutcheson, *Depression Stories*, 59–62; One of Them, "Riding the Rods Proves Easy if You Know the Ropes," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 3 August 1931.

<sup>64</sup> On unemployed organizations in the Lower Mainland, see Bettina Bradbury, "The Road to Receivership: Unemployment and Relief in Burnaby, North Vancouver City and District and West Vancouver, 1929–1933" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1975), esp. 62–4, 70–2, 140–2; John Manley, "'Starve, Be Damned!' Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 79 (1998): 466–91; Todd McCallum, "Still Raining,

of organized Christianity in Vancouver, they had a “run-of-the-mill” quality when seen from the standpoint of the city’s leftist movements.<sup>65</sup> The local branch of the Independent Labor Party (ILP), a group that would have much influence in the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Vancouver, routinely offered this kind of analysis, as, for instance, in John Sidaway’s “The Problem of Unemployment,” published in the February 1930 issue of *ILP News*. One of the party’s key propagandists in the municipal and federal election campaigns that year, Sidaway asserted that “the cause” of unemployment “is deep rooted, and drastic treatment involving structural changes in our social system are necessary before a permanent, lasting cure can be made. Economists now recognize unemployment as a social disease in which those affected are victims of circumstances largely beyond their control. It is permanent, chronic, and world wide, and is just as much a part of the profit system as punch clocks, tag days, and cash registers.”<sup>66</sup> After the appearance of the jungles, the Women’s Section of the ILP attacked civic officials for dereliction of duty: had they fulfilled their constitutional responsibilities and cared for the destitute, Jessie Todd wrote, there would have been no need for unemployed men to “live out of doors under conditions that are not fit for human beings.”<sup>67</sup> Communists, too, attacked politicians for their obvious failure to provide for those in the jungles. “As this is the busy Tourist season,” wrote T. Griffin in *The Worker*, “thousands of well fed parasite[s] from the U.S. are able to take in the sight at the city dump, where hundreds of workers are gradually starving to death in the pitiful attempt to salvage an existence from the garbage.”<sup>68</sup>

Because sections of *God in the Jungles* resembled ideas already made public by the city’s coterie of leftist intellectuals, some readers no doubt dismissed Roddan as a radical whose dangerous ideas not only encouraged idleness but also lent legitimacy to the Communist-led and transient-dominated protest movements in the city. Such a view would not be altogether unfounded, at least for those who read only the first

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Market Still Rotten’: Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression in Vancouver” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> See Belshaw, “Two Christian Denominations.” On the ideology of the non-Communist left in Vancouver, see Walter Young, “Ideology, Personality and the Origins of the CCF in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 32 (1976-77): 139-62; Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999); and James Naylor, “Pacifism or Anti-Imperialism? The CCF Response to the Outbreak of World War II,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* n.s., 8 (1997): 213-37.

<sup>66</sup> *ILP News*, February 1930, pp. 1-4.

<sup>67</sup> VCA, City Clerks’ Papers, series 20, box 15-D-6, file 9, Jessie Todd to City Clerk, 26 June 1931;

Ibid., C. Robinson to City Clerk, 24 July 1931.

<sup>68</sup> *The Worker*, 25 July 1931.

third of the book, where the jungle is imagined as home to cooperative and mutualist values practised en masse by homeless men – both a place and a state of mind fundamentally at odds with the prevailing norms of capitalist “greed,” which had caused the crisis. Yet, for all his radical words, Roddan came to these ideas provisionally, each new thought grafted upon his already considerable intellectual formation in ways that did not always produce a consistent result. In this regard, Roddan was far from unique: moments of crisis – and the early thirties certainly were that – usually meant upheavals in the intellectual formations of reformers and radicals.<sup>69</sup> For many, the criticism of old positions and the working out of new ones was inseparable from a sense of urgency, in that what one thought and did might either significantly reduce suffering or significantly increase it. We should not be surprised, then, to find contradictions in social gospel conceptions of the transient problem in the summer of 1931, just as we find them in the ideas of those who romantically lamented the “vanishing Indian” while furthering assimilationist agendas, or who scientifically traced the “social evil” of prostitution to women’s economic marginality in the city, all the while maintaining an “abiding conviction that only immorally disposed women would sell their sexual services.”<sup>70</sup>

In our particular case, Roddan’s radicalism stood in uneasy, if not contradictory, relation to religious traditions in which individual sin and personal responsibility loomed large. The final result? Roddan would assert both that the jungle was organized according to the principles of cooperation and democracy *and* that the bulk of its residents were sinners who very likely would become degenerates, permanently draining the resources of society, unless Christians took action. As one delves further into the book, passages extolling the cooperative ethos of homeless men cease to appear. Filling the pages instead are tales that convey in vivid detail the multitude of “sins of the hobo.”<sup>71</sup> In essence, Roddan devotes the second half of *God in the Jungles* to an onslaught of moral discourse that drowns out his initial materialism: the blame for unemployment

<sup>69</sup> For a recent comment on this process in relation to Communists and CCFers, see Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), esp. 157–83.

<sup>70</sup> On the “vanishing Indian,” see Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992). On the contradictions within reformers’ views on prostitution, see Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), quote from 110. Also useful is Cathy James, “Reforming Reform: Toronto’s Settlement House Movement, 1900–20,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, 1 (2001): 55–90.

<sup>71</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 46.



shifts from society to the homeless man. Just as important, Roddan contains the opposition he witnessed between the “greed” of capitalist society and the mutuality of the jungle by identifying the latter with an earlier, pre-civilized era. Whatever the differences between Vancouver’s jungles and those of “tropical forests,” Roddan’s story resembles tales of European civilization brought to the untamed wilderness in one key respect: his portrait of hoboes looks very much like a portrait of a race. In short, the opening vision of rough equality in the jungles gives way to a portrait of transient degradation in which only Christian mission work can save homeless men from poverty and from themselves.

“The Church of the Open Door” was a badge Roddan wore with pride. Most of First United’s literature references the fact that they ministered to “27 different nationalities,” the “cosmopolitan” character of the congregation demanding tolerance.<sup>72</sup> In this context Roddan emphasizes the racial and ethnic diversity he found in the jungles, speaking of them as a “miniature League of Nations.”<sup>73</sup> He personally commiserated with a number of “Scotsmen” as they built their shacks. *God in the Jungles* contains a copy of a letter one tramp received from his mother, adding to the book’s misery quotient: after commenting on the death of “Bob” (relation unknown), she writes, “There is nothing but troubles and disappointment here below. We will, I trust, all meet again up Yonder where all is peace and joy.” And she ends the letter with: “With best love and wishes, from your old and lonely Mother.”<sup>74</sup> One man from Aberdeen told Roddan that it was “the first time I have been in a place like this ... I would be ashamed to have my people know where I am today.” The Finns Roddan found to be “instinctively clean in ... habits and person,” while the Germans, Norwegians, and Scandinavians provided examples of “some of the finest types of men we have in the Dominion of Canada.” Roddan had also been surprised to discover that the hoboes too had their own “miniature Chinatown”<sup>75</sup> (Figure 3). His portrait of diversity in the jungles mirrors that of Vancouver’s working class as a whole.

Yet, despite the many races, ethnicities, and nationalities to be found in the jungles, Roddan describes transients in the same terms that others used to describe Asians, Natives, and other subordinate racial groups. Consider his explanation of “the bum,” the stationary parasite who

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, *The Story of First Church*, 2; Andrew Roddan, *The Church in Action: The Story of Ten Years of Active Service* (Vancouver: First United Church, n.d. [c. 1939]), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 18.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–20.



Figure 3: VCA Photo Re N7. A 'Miniature Chinatown.'

neither wanders nor works: “Many of them were first a problem in the home and at school and then to society in general ... Here, in this class, you will find the drug addicts, coke eaters, alcoholics, moral perverts, morons, feeble-minded, canned-heat artists, and if there be any other class or type of depraved humanity, you can put them in this category.” To this point, Roddan’s description does not stand out from the bulk of social service writing about the jobless: the “bum” was a socioeconomic category having obvious moral implications. Then, he elaborates:

When day after day as the bread-line passes by, you learn to pick them out by their bleary eyes, shaky hands, trembling bodies, unkempt appearance, dirty clothes, gabbling tongues, always grouching about something or somebody, or sullen, morose and quiet. In this class we find ourselves face to face with the human derelict ... They are at the bottom of the scale, some of them lower than the beasts of the fields.<sup>76</sup>

Here, the “bum” moves from the terrain of “the social” to that of race: the cumulative description – particularly the bodily references to eyes, hands, and tongues – marks their identity in the popular lexicon with Vancouver’s Chinese population. Substitute “Asiatic” or “Chinee” for “bum” and this description would be wholly at home in Hilda Glynn-Ward’s panicked racial dystopia, *The Writing on the Wall*, and a host of like-minded contemporary works.<sup>77</sup> Like Chinese men, who as “houseboys” had long been associated with feminized forms of labour, hoboes were said to be “domesticated through years of practice ... It is a marvel with their limited resources and conveniences that they are able to keep their camp clean, wash their clothes, do their sewing, without the help of a woman.”<sup>78</sup> And, like the Chinese, hoboes were said to be prone to a host of moral failings such as gambling.<sup>79</sup> More generally, transients were characterized as having their own religion and value system, even their own language, as well as their own territory, the jungles supplying the final piece of the puzzle – the spatial dimension. It was thus only natural that Roddan would use Robert Service’s poem, “The Men That Don’t Fit In,” which characterized tramps as “a race

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 26-8.

<sup>77</sup> Hilda Glynn-Ward, *The Writing on the Wall* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974 [1921]). On the broader context of racialist thought in British Columbia during this period, see Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 2nd ed., (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

<sup>78</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 49.

that can't stay still" because of the "curse of the gypsy blood."<sup>80</sup> The reader of *God in the Jungles* thus accumulated enough signs to situate the hobo within the terms of reference of racist thought.

This is not to argue either that Roddan offers a biological explanation for the economic crisis and the existence of the jungles or that he invents a new system of racial classification, placing "bum" somewhere on a continuum between "Oriental" and "Caucasian"; rather, it is to recognize that, in the process of creating his portrait of jungle life, Roddan uses the already existing building blocks of racial categorization, and, in this regard, he is no innovator. This would not mark the first time in which the poor had been cast as a foreign presence, "dangerous classes" that threatened the nation-state from within.<sup>81</sup> Slums, for example, served as evidence of British racial deterioration; the "residuum" of London's East End, Gareth Stedman Jones explains, was thought to be a product of "urban degeneration."<sup>82</sup> This mood is perfectly captured in William Booth's *In Darkest London*, where comparisons with "Darkest Africa" are made explicit. On some occasions, the British working class could become, in the minds of Victorian *flâneurs* and reformers, an inferior race.<sup>83</sup> As they moved from the Old World to the New World in the nineteenth century, Irish Catholics discovered that, in the minds of many native-born Americans, they were an intermediate race, popularly understood as somewhere between "white" and "black."<sup>84</sup> This phenomenon persisted well into the twentieth century. Before the Second World War, Eastern and Southern Europeans had not yet been granted full possession of whiteness; instead, in the words of David Roediger, they occupied an ambiguous place as "not-yet-white ethnics."<sup>85</sup> Tobias Higbie notes that American migrant workers were often depicted in racial terms, understood as "both socially marginal and somehow genetically inferior." Their "savagery," whether in the

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 34-5.

<sup>81</sup> Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>82</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), esp. 127-51, 281-314.

<sup>83</sup> This argument is effectively charted in Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>84</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991). Also important is Theodore W. Allen, "On Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness*," published in the journal *Cultural Logic*, found at <<http://eserver.org/clogic/4-2/allen.html>>.

<sup>85</sup> David Roediger, "Whiteness and Ethnicity in the History of 'White Ethnics' in the United States," in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994), 181-98.

form of moral failings, mob behaviour, or political radicalism, served as a counterpoint to the values of white “civilization.”<sup>86</sup>

In the Canadian context, the identification of racial supremacy with Anglo-Saxon heritage meant that the subordination of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who arrived in Canada during the Laurier-Sifton boom years took on a specifically racial form, denying to them the rights of citizenship shared by their Anglo-Canadian counterparts.<sup>87</sup> This group, too, provided the bodies to which the label of “enemy alien” could be affixed during the Great War and the labour revolt that followed hard upon its conclusion.<sup>88</sup> In the midst of a 1921 organizing drive among Vancouver’s Chinese and Japanese workers, One Big Union activist Bill Pritchard singled out not white supremacy but Anglo supremacy as a threat to working-class unity. According to Pritchard, many European immigrants, especially those who could be considered “not-yet-white ethnics,” sought to remake their identity in order to receive the benefits of Anglo-Canadian society: “the son of a Polish Jew from Warsaw and an Italian mother from Naples, when he lands in Canada becomes immediately an Anglo-Saxon, and of course joins the c[h]orus with the rest of his kind against the Orientals.”<sup>89</sup> Pritchard’s call for Anglo-Canadian workers to cast off the privilege of skin reminds us that race was as much a mixture of nativity, occupation, and politics as it was physical appearance and scientific discourse. In the early 1930s the transient represented the latest in a long line of “foreign” or “alien” characters to threaten the community.

Why does it matter that Roddan used the building blocks of racial categorization in his portrait of Vancouver’s tramps? Along with images of “gabbling tongues” and “trembling bodies,” racist thought provided Roddan with a vision of the teleological stages of social development: just as hoboes were linguistically represented as a subordinate racial group, so their mutualist makeshift encampments were understood as a “pre-civilized” way of life that, by definition, lacked a foundation of Christian ethics. In a 1939 account of his tour of the jungles with Dr.

<sup>86</sup> Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, 17–18.

<sup>87</sup> Gillian Creese argues that the denial of the political rights of citizenship to Asian migrants was central to their racial oppression. Creese, “Class, Ethnicity and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigration, 1880–1936,” in *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers*, ed. Rennie Warburton and David Coburn (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), 55–85; Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the ‘Oriental Problem,’” *BC Studies*, 80 (1988–89): 24–51.

<sup>88</sup> Donald Avery, “The Radical Alien and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919,” in *The West and the Nation*, ed. Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 209–31.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Todd McCallum, “‘Not a Sex Question’? The One Big Union and the Politics of Radical Manhood,” *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (1998): 28.

Toyohiko Kagawa, a minister from Japan who visited Vancouver in 1931, Roddan clearly associates hobo encampments with a pre-civilized state of being. Roddan asks Kagawa if “he would like to visit the ‘Jungles.’” For a moment, his visitor was perplexed. “‘Jungles?’ he said, ‘What do you mean? This is a civilized country, No?’ ‘Well,’ I replied, ‘We will see.’” Upon arriving at the collection of “wretched hovels,” Roddan explains to his honoured visitor that “we have always associated poverty and human suffering on a large scale with Oriental countries.” Kagawa responds that, while “we are young in the ways of western civilization,” his country had not witnessed “anything like this.”<sup>90</sup> Roddan asks Kagawa how best to resolve the social and economic problems of the Depression: “I wish you could have heard him say: ‘The application of the principles of the Cross. There is no other answer.’ These were his thoughts, and I think you will agree with me he was, and is, right.”<sup>91</sup> This exchange wonderfully captures the sense in which Roddan’s use of racialist thought serves to contain his book’s utopian elements. In this reading, the moral economy of the jungle is understood as essentially a primitive order, and while Roddan truly admires the feelings of “brotherhood” and “comradeship” he finds there, he never imagines that the new world would spring from these squatters’ shacks; instead, the greater claims of progress and civilization, as interpreted through the lens of the social gospel, take precedence. Homeless men could be saved, but only through the destruction of the jungles and the assimilation of transients into a new society organized according to Christian principles.

Along with the traditions of racialist thought, Roddan also drew insight from newer genres of writing about poverty and the homeless. Some of his book, *God in the Jungles*, is lifted from the classic work of American sociologist Nels Anderson on the “Hobohemia” of Chicago in 1921 and 1922. Roddan “gratefully acknowledge[s]” Anderson’s *The Hobo* and borrows its classification scheme for hoboos, tramps, bums, and other characters as well as other features, including the titles for many of several sections such as “Why Do Men Leave Home” and “Wanderlust.”<sup>92</sup> At the same time, because much of Roddan’s narrative closely follows that of Anderson, it is difficult to ascertain what material Roddan drew from his personal encounters with tramps in Vancouver and what from sources predating the economic crisis.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Andrew Roddan, *The Church in Action*, 9–10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver’s Hoboes*, 25.

<sup>93</sup> There are a number of factual contradictions in the book. Near the beginning, Roddan wrote that “in all the serving of thousands of men I have yet to hear the first angry word, or the first

More important are the interpretive contradictions that undermine his socialist explanation of the workings of capitalist development and the birth of the tramp by grafting onto this line of analysis key elements of liberal individualism: while mass transiency has systemic roots, the individuals who became tramps did so largely because of flaws in their personal character. This is made most clear in the section entitled “Why Men Fail.” Roddan draws from a report from the Life Insurance Sales Research Bureau that calculated the relative odds of root causes for individual failures:

Out of 100 men:  
 37 fail for lack of industry.  
 37 fail because discouraged.  
 12 fail by not following instructions.  
 8 fail for lack of knowledge.  
 4 fail through dishonesty.  
 2 fail because of ill-luck.<sup>94</sup>

The hobo was unemployed because of his personal failure; nowhere on the above list do we find “global economic downturn” or “managerial misreading of the market.” In short, Canada had jobless hoboese because of its economic structure; which of its residents became jobless, however, was largely a question of individual character. Roddan’s source is noteworthy: “Why Men Fail” was circulated in pamphlet form by Harold Brown, one-time president of the Vancouver Board of Trade. *God in the Jungles* thus grants authority to a study that represents the laissez-faire business ideology that Roddan devotes so many words to critiquing. “In an age of keen competition,” Roddan adds, “it is only the industrious who can hold their own with any measure of success.”<sup>95</sup> The cooperative ideal, initially portrayed as a central part of Christian compassion, was shelved, replaced by the traditional ethos of competition and efficiency.

Also overturned was the portrait of the value of the migrant worker. Upon losing his job he became a “human derelict” who was, “in the long run, a costly member of society.”<sup>96</sup> Despite the positive images of

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swear word from any one of the men,” only to claim twenty pages later that “the hobo is an expert at the [creation] of new and expressive swear words, and when angered he can make the air so blue with the language that even the devil himself would blush to hear.” To his credit, he observes that this is not exclusively a tramp problem, since “diseased minds” could also be found “in the ranks of the intellegen[t]sia”! *Ibid.*, 20, 51.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. “Lack of industry,” in this case, meant the absence of a proper work ethic.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-7.

jungle life, Roddan also claims that “the tramp has no purpose in his life ... For a time they will stay and work a town or district and then move on aimlessly like derelicts on the ocean of life.”<sup>97</sup> The subject thus shifts from an interrogation of the social structures that enable – indeed, demand – both the creation of tremendous wealth and tremendous poverty to an inquiry into what factors “prevent [tramps] from becoming useful citizens.”<sup>98</sup>

It is in the wide-ranging section entitled “Sins of the Hobo” that Roddan most clearly undermines the utopian spirit that animates the beginning of his book. This is the tragedy that confronts the reader of *God in the Jungles*: the image Roddan initially offers of a cooperative and humane order fashioned by outcasts gradually fades from view as he piles on scene after scene to convince readers of the profoundly sinful state of Vancouver’s transients. “Sin is a theological term,” he explains, “and literally means ‘Missing the mark.’ This can be well applied to the homeless man, because of all classes of men, he has most certainly in more ways than one, ‘missed the mark.’” Here, the singular subject connotes a universal state of degradation that is the particular lot of tramps, although Roddan does temper his portrait on occasion. He suggests that the sins of hoboes are “sins of the flesh,” which, he argues, Jesus had more kindly regarded than other sins, such as hypocrisy and selfishness. The “reckless, free, roving type of life” lived by tramps led many of them to a gambling addiction, “the old desire to get something for nothing.”<sup>99</sup> And the hobo’s tendency to invent “new and expressive swear words” often results in blasphemy, although Roddan notes that “the hobo is no worse than some so-called respectable people who take the name of God in vain and yet make a profession of religion.”<sup>100</sup>

Alcohol also stood as a cliché of immorality, although here too Roddan’s opinion differs from that of the mainstream. He begins his account of “the hobo and alcohol” with sharp criticism of a female parishioner who believes that the homeless have “wasted their substance in riotous living” while the rich have “never touched alcohol.” “It made my blood boil that anyone could be so ignorant and blind,” he proclaims. Part of the problem lay in the church’s failure to take an interest in the poor; saloon-keepers and prostitutes filled the vacuum, taking advantage of the tramp’s “hungering ... for fellowship.” It was also, according to Roddan, “scientifically true” that hoboes drank less than most “moderate

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 52.



drinker[s].”<sup>101</sup> Drinking allowed the hobo to make up for the “utter loneliness which fills his heart”; responsibility for the problem lay in the hands of politicians, alcohol manufacturers, and “an indifferent, self-centred society that refuses to deal with this problem.”<sup>102</sup>

Troubling news is also found in the section entitled “The Sex Life of the Hobo,” in which Roddan departs from the comparatively complex analysis of transient sexuality found in Nels Anderson’s pioneering work and instead presents a simple-minded sketch of how tramping inevitably leads to perversion.<sup>103</sup> “The hobo hungers and craves for the fellowship and intimate association of a good woman,” Roddan explains, but this is denied to him; instead, “when he is penniless, and ragged, he associates with the lowest of the low. Soon or late the homeless man finds himself the victim of a loathsome venereal disease ... When the disease is in an active state he becomes a menace to all with whom he associates.”<sup>104</sup> Even in the commercialized sex trade, the tramp feels the effects of immiseration! But the dangers of sexual immorality do not stop here. Wary of the possibilities of infection, hoboes have another choice: “the practice of homo-sexuality has come into vogue.” Most significant for Roddan is the corruption of the young by “old, hardened rascals” who claim “ownership of the unfortunate youth” for their “own unlawful use”:

A young lad who had been coming to our church, had taken sick and was not able to come for his daily rations of food. We investigated and found the lad was being held in fear and bondage in the cabin of one of these depraved men. The case was reported and the police took action and set him free. They have a special name for this type of man; he is called a Wolf.<sup>105</sup>

“What would you expect from the life of these homeless men [other] than a perverted sex nature,” Roddan asks. Yet, the meaning of this anecdote is far from clear. The story is not told as evidence that younger transient men are vulnerable to sexual coercion in the city but, rather, to convince readers that hoboes are likely to become sexual deviants, prone to violent practices that could only horrify the majority of Vancouverites. While Roddan did issue the now typical disclaimer that the “unnatural life” of the tramp was the product of necessity, this did little to cleanse

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-9.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>103</sup> For comparative purposes, see Anderson, *The Hobo*, 137-49.

<sup>104</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 53.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

the bitter taste left by his single-minded portrait of homosexual activity as violent degeneracy.<sup>106</sup>

One story, in particular, serves to symbolize the drift in Roddan's portrayal of transient life from one of freedom to one of degradation:

A man stumbled into the church the other day, a regular dead-beat; one of the lowest types possible. He was a cripple with a crutch. He had been falling on the pavement, his face was battered and bleeding – what a sight – ugly and repulsive. My first impulse was to bawl him out, and then looking at him I remembered the words of the Master, “I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” I asked myself, “Does God love the hobo, the tramp, the bum, the moocher? Does God love this poor wretch in front of me?” The answer came, “Yes; while He hates the sin, He loves the sinner.”<sup>107</sup>

So absorbed is Roddan in his belief in this tramp's immorality that he does not bother to name his particular sin. True, one could infer that the “dead-beat” was intoxicated, but why should that have resulted in such a visceral outpouring of emotion? Taken as a whole, the scene underlines the extent to which the tramp identity triumphs over their common humanity, separating Roddan from the outcast. The transformation of Roddan's message is thus complete: the economic crisis may have caused personal suffering and prompted many to abandon Christian values and take up alcohol and illicit sex; at the same time, however, the quest to eradicate sin comes to focus on the failings of the tramp rather than on those of the system that produced him.

What was to be done? Roddan did not automatically dismiss the critiques of society offered by those on the left, particularly since they passionately cared about the issues of homeless men. “I only wish,” Roddan wrote, “the Christian Church could catch something of the missionary zeal which is burning so strong in the heart of the Communist.” Roddan viewed the question as “the old conflict between economic determinism and spiritual determinism,” and he expressed hope that “there must be a *via media* between those two philosophies.”<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, however, he returned to the Christian gospel, believing “spiritual determinism” to

<sup>106</sup>To take Roddan's account at face value, the “wolf” in question, having a “cabin” in which to keep the younger man captive, cannot be considered homeless. For an illuminating discussion of the sexual relationships of the road, see Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, 121–7.

<sup>107</sup>Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 28. I disagree with the characterization of Helen Borrell, who sees this story as an “example of Jesus Christ in action.” See Borrell, “Mr. Greatheart.”

<sup>108</sup>Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 78. Emphasis in original.

be the true path to salvation. As he put it in one of his radio sermons, “the best way to beat the Communists is to beat them to it, and put into operation a plan of production and distribution where the motive will not be based on a cruel, selfish, unchristian acquisitiveness, but on the principle of the kingdom of God in real earnest.”<sup>109</sup>

Yet, one story illuminates the extent to which Roddan’s control of the means of life – itself very much rooted in the material world – shaped the political character of his relief mission. Most of the photographs found in *God in the Jungles* were taken by W.J. Moore, a professional recruited by Roddan to document the jungles and First United’s presence therein (Figures 4 and 5). Moore later described his visit to city archivist Major J.S. Matthews, recalling that “a girl, more correctly [a] young woman” appeared during one mealtime in an attempt to organize the men. She was, explained Moore, “undoubtedly of Communist theories, and angry,” and proceeded to call the residents “ugly names”:

In a shrill, strident voice she ejaculated “You call yourselves men; you stand for this and do nothing. Why don’t you fight[?] ... You call yourselves human beings and starve while the bosses wax fat. Why do you stand for it? Why don’t you get a bit of Socialism in your miserable spirits?” It was a harsh bullying declamation of a wild impassioned young female. “Why, Jesus Christ was a socialist.”

Moore recounted that Roddan responded “in a low tone, ‘Yes, that’s true; the greatest Socialist the world ever knew.’” Did Roddan then tell the tramps to march to the banks and disrupt the moneylenders – an act that would have had a 1930s feel to it – or did he preach submission?

But the men took no notice of the girl; they just looked at her; neither smiled nor scowled; just looked in stern silence. The Rev. Roddan stood nearby. Preparations were in progress to “dish up” ... his presence controlled the situation. I doubt if there was another man in all Vancouver who could handle these men as the Rev. Roddan could. They respected him; they obeyed him. He explained quietly to the men that there was just so much food and no more; that no man should be allowed to go hungry if he could help it; that if there was any left over after each had had an equal share, they could come back, and finish what was left over. The men were very orderly ... [A]s I watched, [I] thought to myself, “There’s an exhibition of real freemasonry.”<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Roddan, *Christ of the Wireless Way*, 14-5.

<sup>110</sup> VCA, Add Mss. 54, Major James Skitt Matthews Collection, vol. 8, no. 1, box 503-c-2, Narrative of W.J. Moore, 23 August 1933.



Figure 4: VCA Photo Re N4.3: 'Dishing Up' in the Jungles.

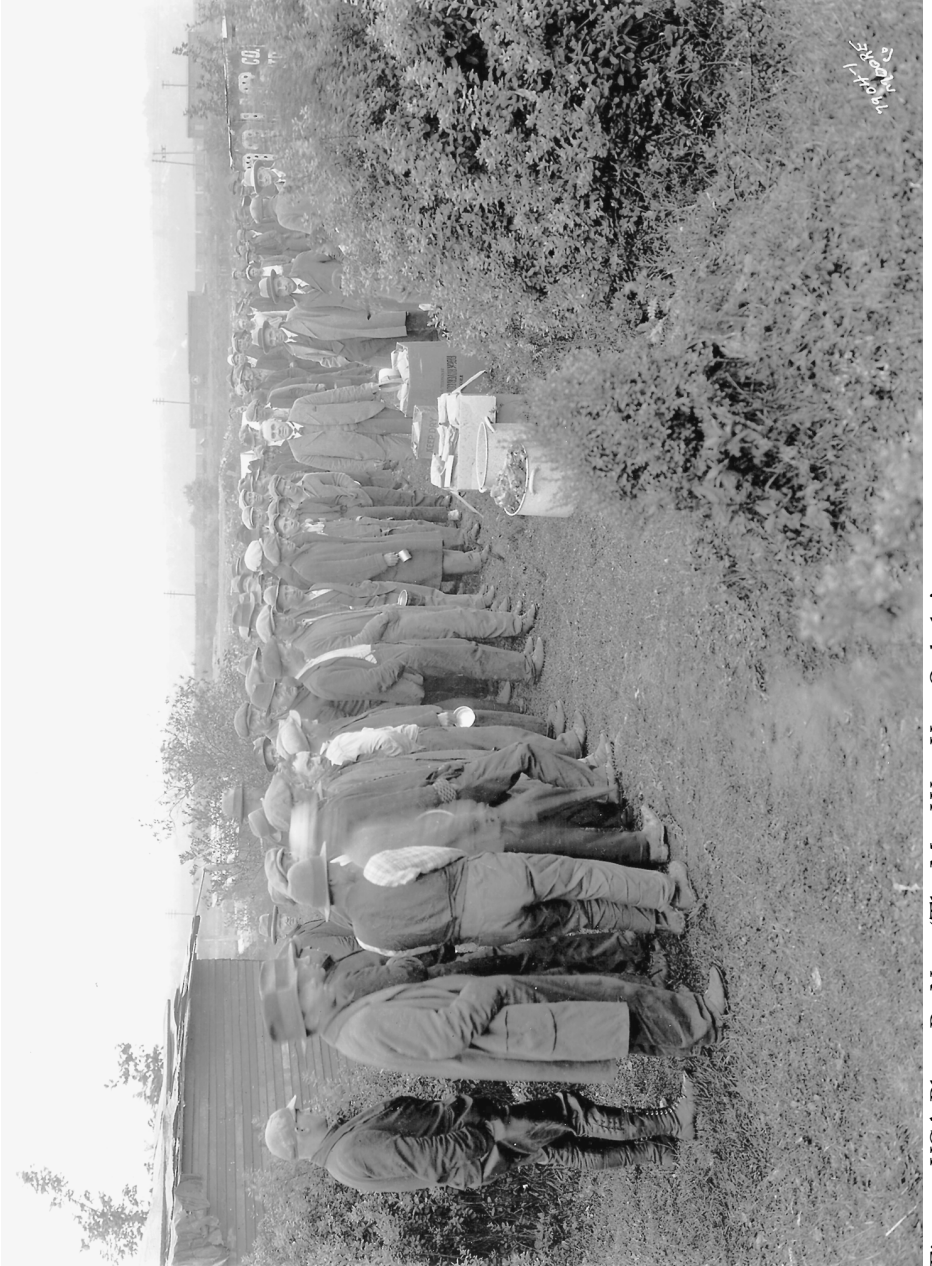


Figure 5: VCA Photo Re N4-4. 'The Men Were Very Orderly.'

It is clear from this passage that Roddan's control over the means of provision enabled what Moore saw as a spectacle of obedience. Jungle inhabitants could take up the revolutionary call of this "girl" and reject Roddan's ministering or they could eat. Roddan was conscious of this power, which, we should remember, came to him only through the unpaid labours of Jeannie MacDuff and her volunteer army. On another occasion, Communists distributed leaflets in the jungles while Roddan prepared to distribute the day's meal: "I stood in full view of the long line of men. Putting one of the leaflets in my mouth, I said: 'Look, fellows, you can't eat that,' and then holding a loaf of bread in my hand, I said: 'But you can eat this, and while the others are doing all the talking, I will do the feeding, and we will work together for a solution of our problems.'"<sup>111</sup> The materialists had only ideas to offer, while the minister's drawing card was mulligan stew: this was a tragic scene.

In the context of the financial crisis that caused the labour camp initiative of BC premier Simon Fraser Tolmie to stall in its tracks, and of the ensuing mass protests widely attributed to the machinations of Communist organizers, who would publish unflattering stories about him in the *Unemployed Worker*, Roddan's view of the Communists and transients would harden considerably.<sup>112</sup> In *The Christ of the Wireless Way*, a 1932 collection of his Sunday radio talks published by Vancouver firm Clarke and Stuart, he included several that established his growing concern with the "materialist" menace, such as "Jesus and the Proletariat," and "Why Stalin Changed His Mind." The same year, *Canada's Untouchables* – largely a rehash of *God in the Jungles*, although with a harder edge – was issued, also by Clarke and Stuart. The revision process involved subtle, unremarked shifts in tone and emphasis that undermined much of the humanist, salvation-oriented message of his earlier work. Some of the detailed material on the collective ethos of hobo culture was removed, replaced with several poems like Marie Joussey's "The Ninety and Nine" and Jim Seymour's "The Dishwasher" that vibrantly expressed working-class resentment, if not rage. When originally published by the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World, respectively, these verses sounded a call to revolution. In *Canada's Untouchables*, however, they served as evidence of the anti-social tendencies of the lower orders and as a rallying cry for state intervention – not surprising in light of mass demonstrations in the camps and in

<sup>111</sup> Roddan, *Vancouver's Hoboes*, 77–8.

<sup>112</sup> McCallum, "Still Raining, Market Still Rotten," 498–524.

the cities. In expanding this book, Roddan also drew from studies of the Social Service Council of Canada that reinforced the image of “floaters” as maladjusted individuals only too willing to refuse wage work and to lie about their past to social work investigators. In short, Roddan’s second book on Vancouver’s homeless men introduced them to the nation in a much different light than did his first. Now, transients were “deteriorating morally and physically at an alarming rate,” thus presenting “a problem to themselves, and to the whole country.”<sup>113</sup>

The more Roddan became implicated in the project of seeking solutions for homelessness through the expansion of governmental responsibility, the more his radicalism was tempered by demands for the institutional control of transients.<sup>114</sup> First United’s Sunday services had been disrupted by unemployed men and women who mocked organized religion and advocated a more revolutionary campaign to redistribute wealth.<sup>115</sup> On a larger scale, the Gold Standard crisis led to the collapse of the provincial work relief program. The ensuing failure of provincial relief camps to effectively segregate thousands of unemployed men, many of whom congregated on the streets of Vancouver, shook the faith of some that tramps could be reformed and integrated into society through a spiritual program. Thousands of transients evaded government registration programs, maintaining themselves outside the official system of work camps. Forging jungles in the interior of the province, lying to state and private charity administrators, and begging on the streets and in neighbourhoods – all of these practices continued to thrive because thousands of homeless men found them preferable to life in a forced labour camp.

In such an atmosphere *Canada’s Untouchables* marked the tragic waning of Roddan’s utopian faith in universal salvation, which animates parts of *God in the Jungles*. Gradually, he shed his liberationist skin and came to advocate programs that separated the deserving from the undeserving. “Surely we have enough intelligence and organizing ability to face this problem,” he writes. “What we need is the heart and the will (we have the resources) to organize these men, (*eliminate the wasters,*) and deal with them as a distinct problem, and give the others work and

<sup>113</sup> Roddan, *Canada’s Untouchables: The Story of the Man without a Home* (Vancouver: Clarke and Stuart, 1932), 13, 57, III. On Seymour’s “The Dishwasher,” see Mark Leier, “Portrait of a Labour Spy: The Case of Robert Raglan Gosden, 1882–1961,” *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (1998): 80. On Jousseye, see Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987).

<sup>114</sup> I discuss Roddan’s 1933 involvement with the Vancouver Council of Social Agencies’ Committee on Homeless Men in “Still Raining, Market Still Rotten,” 353–72.

<sup>115</sup> See Roddan’s *The Church in the Modern City*, 35.

wages to keep them in decency and self respect.”<sup>116</sup> Although Roddan may still have cherished the belief that the “wasters” would ultimately be saved, he now lent his support to the campaign to coercively transform the lives of homeless men; and, sadly, he was not alone. The Anglican Synod of Kootenay adopted a hard line on the enforcement of vagrancy statutes, calling for the creation of labour camps:

It is hoped that by the setting up of such camps, men who are in their present plight of idleness and unrest through a chain of unfortunate circumstances would find a way out, and that as prosperity returns these fellows will return to their ordinary occupations, their morale undamaged. On the other hand, the idle, shiftless fellows, who refuse work under almost any and all conditions, will find their plight so unpalatable that they will move out of the country ... The thought of marshalling the army of unemployed into camps and putting them to work may be repugnant to many persons. It is a measure of compulsion whose justification is necessity.<sup>117</sup>

The jungles of Vancouver were destroyed in early September 1931, after a death attributed to typhoid.<sup>118</sup> Over 1,000 men, many of them from the jungles, were quickly dispatched to labour camps run by the provincial government of Conservative premier Simon Fraser Tolmie, but this provided only temporary relief. Jungles would reappear in Vancouver, Coquitlam, Kamloops, and other spots along the railway lines, and the transient question continued to dominate politics in British Columbia. Drawing inspiration from the organizing campaign of the Industrial Workers of the World twenty years previously, the Relief Camp Workers’ Union would conduct more than 100 strikes in government-run relief camps aimed at improving the lot of the jobless transient. The Hunger Marches of 1932 and 1933, the mass strike of April 1935 that led to the On-to-Ottawa Trek, and the post office sit-in of 1938 – all of which met with considerable violence from police forces – testified to the continuing relevance of the homeless tramp.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Roddan, *Canada’s Untouchables*, 14. Emphasis in original.

<sup>117</sup> *Kamloops Sentinel*, 9 June 1931.

<sup>118</sup> VCA, City Clerks’ Papers, series 20, box 15-D-4, file 10, H.W. Cooper to Alderman Atherton, 8 September 1931.

<sup>119</sup> Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-To-Ottawa Trek*, ed. Victor Hoar (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973); Steve Brodie, *Bloody Sunday: Vancouver – 1938*, ed. Sean Griffin (Vancouver: Young Communist League, 1974); Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1987); Victor Howard, “We Were the Salt of the Earth!”: *The On-To-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985); and Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The 1935 On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2003).



While his views of hobo life in the jungles hardened over time, Roddan still preached for a sympathetic understanding of the homeless. First United continued its mission work with the poor of downtown Vancouver, although it ceased its program in the jungles once the province opened the relief camps, concentrating instead on family relief cases. Roddan would declare himself “changed” by the Oxford Movement in 1933 and would look back on his life during the jungle mission with regret, believing that his fame had deadened his spiritual connection with his congregation:

Thousands of letters received from my radio audience, and congratulations from the great throngs who came to First Church, Vancouver, fully satisfied my pride and self-conceit. I could make people cry and laugh at will. I had the power to do all that in myself. Armed with all this knowledge I thought that it was not possible to expect anything more to happen in my life and experience. I must confess that, even after all my efforts, Sunday after Sunday, preaching eloquent and wonderful sermons, nothing very much happened. It is true that we had large numbers come forward at Easter. But I am afraid that many of these good people were more concerned about their salvation than I was. I told them to say their prayers, read the Bible, come to Church, help others, and being Scotch I reminded them about the collection.<sup>120</sup>

Roddan again became an important public figure during the 1935 walkouts, providing aid for striking relief camp residents and for the families of picketing longshoremen. That fall, Roddan issued a public statement via the radio, endorsing Arnold Webster, candidate for the CCF, in his race against Vancouver mayor (and foe of the relief camp strikers) Gerald Grattan McGeer for the federal riding of Vancouver-Burrard. Webster lost by six votes.<sup>121</sup> Roddan also spoke publicly in support of the republican government in Spain, then in the midst of the bloody civil war begun with a military coup, another significant leftist

<sup>120</sup>Roddan’s account of his life before the Oxford Movement, *For Doubters Only: How I Was Changed*, is available online at <<http://www.aabibliography.com/oxpamping1/doubters.html>>. For the broader context of the Oxford Movement in the province, see Bob Stewart, “The United Church of Canada,” found online at <[www.bc.united-church.ca/archives/\\_private/content/words.htm](http://www.bc.united-church.ca/archives/_private/content/words.htm)>.

<sup>121</sup>University of British Columbia, Special Collections, Arnold Webster Papers, box 1, file 7, Andrew Roddan to Arnold Webster, 2 October 1935. Roddan’s late arrival to the CCF cause – months after McGeer had caused blood to be shed during the relief camp strike – prompts a counterfactual question: what if Roddan had used the political capital accumulated via the jungle mission to run as a CCF candidate in the 1933 provincial election? His victory would likely have strengthened Robert Connell’s position within the parliamentary caucus and made the ascendancy of the Socialist Party faction less assured.

cause in the 1930s. There are even a few reports that he covertly provided assistance to a number of former On-to-Ottawa trekkers on their way to fight in Spain as part of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. He also continued to write, producing books and pamphlets to further the cause of the gospel. Most of these contain more than one reference to the jungle mission that had so captivated public attention in the summer of 1931, perhaps a hint of pride showing through. Andrew Roddan served at First United until his death in April 1948.

A testament to the abiding power of the social gospel, *God in the Jungles* began with a vision of the cooperative, mutualist, and non-acquisitive values in which jungles took root and flourished. At the same time, while recognizing the powerful traces of the economic crisis imprinted upon the activities of the thousands of tramps in the 1930s, its author also understood the transient in the context of older ideas about individual sin and personal responsibility, resulting in a contradictory account of the lives of these homeless men. In this respect, *God in the Jungles* represents a specific religious variant of the more general intellectual and political upheavals of the period, whose contradictions – some superficial, some deeply meaningful – powerfully articulated many of the broader social conflicts of Depression-era Canada. In the end, Roddan envisioned a spiritual transformation of society that would save the hobo as well as itself from both economic exploitation and moral degradation. Whatever their democratic and mutualist foundations, the jungles themselves could not survive if true Christian progress was to be assured. That was the real message of his mission, and that is why he chose to end his mission once the provincial government announced the opening of relief camps. Roddan and First United would no longer feed transients en masse; they did, however, donate educational magazines for men in the camps.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup>VST, First United Church Papers, box 3, Annual Reports, year ending 31 December 1932, G.F. Johnston, Goodwill Industries Report, 29.