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Home, Work, and Play

Situating Canadian Social History

Edited by James Opp & John C. Walsh

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Contents

Chronological Contents ix
Acknowledgements xi
Introduction xiii

Part I: At Home 1

1 Women's Agency in Upper Canada: Prescott's Board of Police Record, 1834–50 4
Katherine M.J. McKenna

2 Nurture and Education: The Christian Home 18
Marguerite Van Die

3 Living on Display: Colonial Visions of Aboriginal Domestic Spaces 32
Paige Raibmon

4 Swatting Flies for Health: Children and Tuberculosis in Early Twentieth-Century Montreal 47
Valerie Minnett and Mary Anne Poutanen

5 "There Were Always Men in Our House": Gender and the Childhood Memories of Working-Class Ukrainians in Depression-Era Canada 63
Stacey Zembrzycki

6 What to Do with the "Tubby Hubby"? "Obesity," the Crisis of Masculinity, and the Nuclear Family in Early Cold War Canada 77
Deborah McPhail

7 Jell-O Salads, One-Stop Shopping, and Maria the Homemaker: The Gender Politics of Food 94
Franca Iacovetta and Valerie J. Korinek

8 A Model Suburb for Model Suburbanites: Order, Control, and Expertise in Thorncrest Village 110
Patrick Vitale

9 Framing Regent Park: The National Film Board of Canada and the Construction of "Outcast Spaces" in the Inner City, 1953 and 1994 125
Sean Purdy

10 Visualizing Home 140

Part II: At Work 157

11 The Theatre of Hegemony: Masters, Clerks, and Servants 161
Carolyn Podruchny

12 A Colony of Miners 176
Daniel Samson

13 Encounters with Industrial Space 190
Nicolas Kenny

14 "The Best Men That Ever Worked the Lumber": Aboriginal Longshoremen on Burrard Inlet, BC, 1863–1939 206
Andrew Parnaby

15 "Miss Remington" Goes to Work: Gender, Space, and Technology at the Dawn of the Information Age 221
Kate Boyer

16 Even the Turnips Were Edible 233
Merle Massie

17 The National Selective Service Women's Division and the Management of Women War Workers 248
Jennifer A. Stephen

18 Exploring Post-War Consumption: The Campaign to Unionize Eaton's in Toronto, 1948–52 263
Donica Belisle

19 When Ghosts Hovered: Community and Crisis in the Company Town of Britannia Beach, British Columbia, Canada, 1957–65 278
Katharine Rollwagen

20 Spectacular Striptease: Performing the Sexual and Racial Other in Vancouver, BC, 1945–75 293
Becki Ross and Kim Greenwell

21 Visualizing Work 310

Part III: At Play 325

22 "Brave North Western Voyageurs": Snowshoeing in Montreal 328
Gillian Poulter

23 "Every Boy Ought to Learn to Shoot and to Obey Orders": Guns, Boys, and the Law in English Canada from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Great War 343
R. Blake Brown

24 Borderlands, Baselines, and Big Game: Conceptualizing the Northeast as a Sporting Region 358
Colin D. Howell

25 Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: "Playing Indian" at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920–55 371
Sharon Wall

26 Constructing the Preferred Spectator: Arena Design and Operation and the Consumption of Hockey in 1930s Toronto 386
Russell Field

27 Try to Control Yourself: The Regulation of Public Drinking in Post-Prohibition Ontario, 1927–44 400
Dan Malleck

28 "We're the Girls of the Pansy Parade": Historicizing Winnipeg's Queer Subcultures, 1930s–1970 414
Valerie J. Korinek

29 "Our New Palace of Donut Pleasure": The Donut Shop and Consumer Culture, 1961–76 429
Steve Penfold

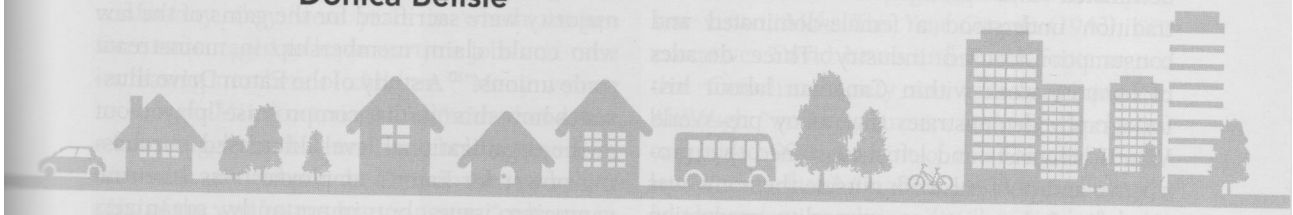
30 Films, Tourists, and Bears in the National Parks: Managing Park Use and the Problematic "Highway Bum" Bear in the 1970s 444
George Colpitts

31 Visualizing Play 456

More online. Look for this icon at the end of the readings for additional material online.

18 Exploring Post-War Consumption
The Campaign to Unionize Eaton's in Toronto, 1948–52

Donica Belisle



> Unionized employees have substantially increased their purchasing power. This is *your* Opportunity Day to do so by joining Local 1000.
>
> —Leaflet distributed by the Canadian Congress of Labour to Eaton's Toronto employees, 1950

Though it occasionally delves into the topics of fordism and leisure,[1] Canadian labour history is not usually associated with research on consumer culture. Recent work by US labour historians suggests that through their politicization of salaries, job security, living standards, commodity distribution, and mass culture, unionists have made consumption central to labour politics.[2] Exploring a campaign by the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) to organize 12,000 Toronto Eaton's employees between 1948 and 1952, this article offers a preliminary investigation of Canadian unionism's relationship with consumption. Led by up-and-coming members of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and supported by the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) and such major unions as the Steelworkers, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), and the United Automobile Workers (UAW), the "Eaton Drive" was the largest single union campaign in Canadian history and "the closest thing to a crusade in the English-speaking union movement."[3]

At the middle of the twentieth century the T. Eaton Company was not only Canada's largest department store, it was the country's third-largest employer.[4] Its two major Toronto stores were the acknowledged jewels in the company's crown. Located at the present site of the Eaton Centre, Eaton's flagship Main Store hummed with customers daily, and Eaton's College Street Store was a haute couture shopping mecca.[5] Twelve thousand Toronto Eaton's employees were eligible for collective bargaining, more than half of whom were women. Prior to the late 1940s, Canadian organized labour had made sporadic attempts to unionize white-collar workers, but its major victories remained concentrated in male-dominated production industries. Seeking to expand its membership after World War II, the CCL decided to organize the service industries. Choosing Eaton's as its first target, the Eaton Drive was intended to be a springboard for a white-collar movement. Yet after four years of intense campaigning, Eaton's employees voted against certification. This defeat spurred unionists to retreat from white-collar initiatives, and to this

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day Canadian retail employees remain almost entirely nonunionized.

As the Eaton Drive was the most sustained attempt in Canadian history to unionize a retail workforce, an investigation of its literature and events provides unique insight into how a male-dominated and production-focused labourist tradition understood a female-dominated and consumption-focused industry. Three decades of feminist work within Canadian labour historiography demonstrates that many pre–World War II labourists and leftists assumed that productive and political work outside the home was masculine.[6] Associating commodity production with muscular masculinity, some labour and left advocates even suggested that the bourgeois order was effeminate; they called on strong and heroic male workers to overthrow capitalism's chains and bring about a newly vigorous world order.[7] . . .

By analyzing the CCL's portrayals of Eaton's employees, we can determine whether this equation of femininity with consumption affected the Eaton Drive. Such investigations are intrinsically important, for they help to develop an understanding of Canadian unionists' thoughts on consumption. Yet they also have practical significances. Since World War II the presence of women within the labour force has steadily increased, particularly within the service sector.[8] Employers' sophisticated union-busting tactics are largely responsible for retail's nonunionization, as Walmart's notorious anti-unionist manoeuvres demonstrate.[9] Nonetheless, scholars must also seek to determine whether organized labour's and the left's views of women and consumption have affected attempts to unionize consumer workers.

. . .

Historians sometimes imply that unionism's post-war emphases on bargaining strategies and salary increases indicate a retreat from radicalism. Three mid-century developments—the legalization of collective bargaining, labour's belief that purchasing power would stimulate mass production and create full employment, and the inducement to conservatism prompted by Cold War anti-Communism—caused a narrowing of unionism's goals. As Peter McInnis puts it, after World War II, "trade unions embraced exclusive contractual obligations premised on productivity bargaining and mass consumerism. Thus, broad social reforms for the working-class majority were sacrificed for the gains of the few who could claim membership in mainstream trade unions."[10] A study of the Eaton Drive illustrates how this "fordist compromise" played out at the organizational level. Increased purchasing power for Eaton's employees was a central campaign issue, but importantly, organizers perceived salary increases as part of a broader strategy for social–democratic reform. They believed that Canadian society was inequitable because working people did not have the same material opportunities as did more affluent Canadians. Unionism would increase workers' material entitlements, thus enriching workers' lives and helping them become full Canadian citizens. In this view, purchasing power was not a retreat from politics but a point of entry into civic life.

Finally, this article reveals the importance of gender to ideas about consumption, work, and citizenship in post-war Canada. In the late 1940s different groups of female activists, including the Housewives' Consumer Association (HCA), demanded that the federal government reintroduce wartime price controls on household goods, especially food, because inflation was causing a significant gap between income and necessities. Their arguments drew on a sense of what Magda Fahrni calls "economic citizenship"; they also drew on the conventional association of femininity with household labour.[11] During the Eaton Drive CCL organizers also made consumer demands. Whereas female activists called on the state to lower prices, the CCLers called on business—in this case, Eaton's—to increase wages. Like female consumer activists, the CCLers made gender central to their claims; unlike them, they appealed to masculinity. Working people

deserved higher wages, they suggested, because they had to support their families. The typical worker, in this opinion, was a male breadwinner.

The CCLers' quest for the family wage underscores the importance of patriarchal domesticity in Canadian post-war life. Although the late 1940s and 1950s were not characterized by total gender conformity, they were years in which women were encouraged to leave wartime jobs and raise increasing numbers of children.[12] Many women took on full-time marriage and motherhood, but a few struggled to balance household responsibilities with paid labour. In Ontario "at the beginning of the war," notes Joan Sangster, "only one in twenty married women worked for pay; by 1951 it was one in ten."[13] Women were disproportionately represented in low-level white-collar positions, including those in department stores. In 1949 women constituted 57 per cent of Toronto Eaton's employees eligible for unionization, and they dominated all of Eaton's unskilled occupations. Fifty-three per cent were between the ages of 21 and 44, while 31 per cent were older than 44. Forty-seven per cent were single, 45 per cent were married, and 7 per cent were widowed.[14] Their presence encouraged some organizers to include women in the Eaton Drive, but the CCL's overarching commitment to male breadwinner rights overshadowed their efforts. In the literature of the Eaton Drive, female wage earners were secondary workers, secondary union members, and secondary citizens.

Reconstruction and the Eaton Drive

The desire to strengthen the male breadwinner/female homemaker family model, along with the notion that increased prosperity would foster national improvement, guided both the state's and the CCF's approaches to post-war reconstruction. The governing Liberals believed that increased production and investment would provide full employment for male breadwinners. The result would not only create social stability but increase individual households' purchasing power, thereby fuelling the nation's productive capacity.[15] Founded during the Great Depression, the social-democratic CCF envisioned a world in which Canadians shared equally in the fruits of industrial production and modern cultural life. In their famous 197-page outline of their post-war vision, *Make This Your Canada* (1943), CCF executives David Lewis and Frank Scott argued that Canadian society was grossly inequitable: Although "workers, farmers and middle classes" comprised 99.4 per cent of the Canadian population, they faced "inadequate living standards, [a] dependent condition, [and] individual helplessness and lack of opportunity." To eradicate inequality, Canadians had to "expand" their "political democracy" to "economic and social democracy"; by voting for the CCF, which promised to nationalize industry, business, and social services, Canadians would enhance all people's standards of living and create "opportunities for full enjoyment by all of the riches of modern society."[16]

Although *Make This Your Canada* pays lip service to women's presence in political life, it portrays Canada's inhabitants as men. Not only is the masculine pronoun used to refer to all Canadians, as was common during the era, but all workers and farmers—the CCF's target voters—are represented as males. One illustration depicts a man in overalls as a "worker" and a man with a pitchfork as a "farmer." Women are not illustrated anywhere in the publication.[17] Elsewhere, the CCF did portray women as political actors. As Sangster notes, they tended to use "a representational figure" of "the suffrage era: the homemaker, with apron and broom, ready to 'tidy up' political life and anxious to have her home-centred concerns heard."[18] Such depictions reflected Canadian leftists' assumption that men's and women's political interests arose from the sexual division of labour. The CCF's central concerns in the post-war period were male workers and farmers, people whom CCF leaders believed were the nation's main economic and civic actors.[19]

. . .

In 1946 the CCL created a Department Store Organizing Committee (DSOC) to oversee the Eaton Drive. The DSOC, in turn, cultivated an impressive team of union organizers. After appointing Eileen Tallman, a talented Steelworker organizer with white-collar unionization experience, as head organizer, the DSOC hired Lynn Williams, Marjorie Gow, and Wally Ross, all Steelworker organizers; Angus Sumner, a Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU) organizer; Olive Richardson, an experienced clerical worker; Ernest Arnold, a former United Auto Workers (UAW) organizer; Alex Gilbert, a former All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) organizer; and Mae Coulston, a long-time Eaton's cafeteria employee. No one other than former CCF National Secretary and co-author of *Make This Your Canada*, David Lewis, agreed to provide legal counsel. Most of these organizers had participated in the CCF Youth Movement during the Depression, and after the Drive, Tallman and Williams became prominent advocates of social–democratic unionism. In Tallman's 1982 history of the Drive, she recalls that team members shared "the same political philosophy . . . We believed that unions had a vital role to play in the democratic achievement of social and economic change." Tallman herself felt that "a solid base of organized workers was a prerequisite to the success of a socialist political party." Like many of her CCF colleagues, she was anti-communist, and in 1943 she had worked in the Steelworkers' Vancouver office to help start "a monthly tabloid for our BC membership, to provide an alternative to the policies advocated by the Labour Progressive Party, the wartime name used by the Communists."[20]

In her 1982 book about the Eaton Drive, Tallman contends that the team did not "press [their] political views upon the [Eaton] Local or on individual members." A review of the Drive's literature, however, indicates that organizers made social–democratic unionism central to the campaign. One of the first broadsides distributed to employees was titled "For a *happier* new year—take the *union road*!" Featuring a picture of two young workers trying to decide between unionism and Eaton's paternalism, the leaflet urges Eaton's workers to unionize: "Unionization is modern—efficient. It is the up-to-date way of approaching management for increased salaries and improved working conditions. . . . Union membership makes for better workers and better citizens . . . A union is *democracy in action*." As did the CCL executive, these CCL organizers believed that unionism would enable workers to overthrow outmoded types of labour management and become decision-making participants in the workplace and broader polity. As "F. W. Dowling of the United Packinghouse Workers" put it in another Eaton Drive leaflet, "The organized labour movement is the most articulate voice in the country for a better world. . . . We look forward with pleasure to having Eaton employees join with us in making democracy work for themselves and for others."[21]

Along with the Main Store and Eaton's College Street, Eaton's Toronto operations after World War II included a discount store called the Annex, a mail order building, a factory building, several small "workrooms," and a few delivery and dispatch locations. The Main Store boasted the largest number of employees eligible for union membership: 4,000. Eaton's mail order building had 1,900 eligible employees; Eaton's College Street had 1,350; Eaton's factory, 1,000; and Eaton's Annex, 700. Other eligible employees included 1,000 office workers, 800 delivery workers, 220 warehouse workers, and 210 maintenance workers.[22] From 1947 to 1952 organizers led a massive, multipronged campaign to convince these disparate workers to form one large union. *Unionize*, a four-page broadside that organizers delivered each Saturday morning to Eaton's employees, was central to their efforts. Edited by Marjorie Gow until 1950 and by Eileen Tallman for the remainder of the campaign, it featured written, illustrated, and photographic contributions from organizers, volunteers, Eaton's employees, and other unionists.

In her 1982 history of the Eaton Drive, Tallman pays especial attention to Eaton's female employees. Because many women had temporary and part-time status, organizers found them difficult to organize. All the same, relates Tallman, the Eaton Drive proved that "women can be quite . . . strong and committed [to unions] . . . despite their double workload . . . Dozens of . . . women made the extra effort to . . . bring the number of women members in Local 1000 to about half."[23] What Tallman's history of the Drive neglects to mention is the organizing team's own ambiguous approach to female wage earners. According to Sandra Aylward, the CCL sought to supplant Eaton's patriarchal paternalism with patriarchal unionism. While organizers supported equal pay for equal work, they also perceived women's work as less valuable than men's. In discussions of pay rates, organizers concentrated on "same-sex age and favoritism discrepancies" and "mitigat[ed] those based on sex and marital status." In 1948 *Unionize* remarked that "Girls" in the "Provision Packing" department receive "$24 weekly" and "Single men" receive "$27"; since these wages were higher than those received in the Drug Stock department, the Drug Stock wages should be increased.[24] Instead of comparing "girls'" and "men's" wages, this contribution compared pay rates across departments. Aylward views this as logical because "women, along with some boys, were simply defined [by organizers] as unskilled workers doing unskilled work."[25]

My own reading of the Drive supports Aylward's findings. Some of the CCL organizers obviously believed that unionism was a tool for enhancing male breadwinners' entitlements. In 1949 *Unionize* ran an anonymous poem called "Swan Song," dedicated to Eaton's employees:

> Rockabye Baby, in the tree top,
> When you grow old, you'll work in a shop,
> *When you get married,*
> *your wife will work too,*
> *So that the rich will have nothing to do.*
> Hushabye Baby, in the tree top,
> When you grow old your wages will stop,
> When you have spent the little you save,
> Hushabye, Baby—off to the grave.[26]

Suggesting that it was a matter of working-class pride for men to provide for their families, this poem implies that working-class wives entered the workforce only because their husbands' wages were inadequate. It was undignified for a married woman to earn money. Not only did the working man derive his sense of manhood from his ability to provide for his family, the respectability of the working-class family hinged on the husband's ability to earn a family wage. Such sentiments were likely responsible for some organizers' holding of a union seminar entitled "Should Eaton's Employ Married Women?"[27] While this seminar may have been a vehicle for probing members' thoughts on working wives, its title does suggest that the CCLers were prepared to advocate that married women leave Eaton's if this were what members desired.

Not everyone involved with Local 1000 believed that unionism's main objective was to further male workers' entitlements. Unfortunately, most *Unionize* contributions are unsigned, so it is difficult to pinpoint particular people's perspectives. However, certain *Unionize* sketches, which were likely drawn by Marjorie Gow, portray female and male white-collar employees working together to build Local 1000. Some unsigned *Unionize* articles, likely authored by Tallman, draw attention to women's particular grievances. One article notes that female groceteria workers were angered that Eaton's conveyor belt system, requiring much heavy lifting, caused back injuries.[28] And some female union members spoke out against disparities between men's and women's wages. In 1949 Tallman hosted a radio show designed to increase support for Local 1000. She asked Local 1000 member Mrs. Mould about her opinion about "the Union objective of equal pay for equal work." Mould replied, "There should be a rate set for a job, not for the person who does the job. What difference does it make whether it

is a man, woman, or boy who does the job? . . . In Eaton's, many women salesclerks have as much responsibility as men, but get much lower pay."[29]

Despite some organizers' and employees' commitments to gender equity, the belief that unionism was intended to protect male workers dominated the campaign. Following older labourist and leftist traditions, campaign broadsides depicted typical workers as men. They also personified Local 1000 by portraying it as a brawny man (Figure 1). This utilization of masculine imagery in a drive to unionize a predominantly female labour force suggests that the CCLers found it difficult to develop a labourist discourse that would encompass both female and male wage earners. It also speaks to the pervasive mid-century assumption that wage earning was a male right. On the same radio show in which Mould voiced her support for fair pay, pro-union employee Fred Tinker stated that men should support equal pay for equal work because higher pay for men's jobs imperilled men's employment rights: "We men must make it our business to see that women do not undercut our rates of pay. [I]f . . . a depression comes along, we'll find women doing our work . . . and we'll be out in the cold. I think equal pay for equal work . . . is the best job security our Union can aim to get."[30]

In December 1951 CCL organizers were devastated to learn the results of Local 1000's certification vote: 41 per cent of employees voted to certify the union, but 50 per cent voted against certification.[31] After another certification attempt failed, Local 1000 disbanded. For over 30 years former members harboured resentments. Especial hostility was directed toward female workers. In the early 1980s one male employee stated that "the married women and part-timers killed us. Then there were the old maids, Loyal Eatonians, who had been at Eaton's since they were 14. There was no way people like that were going to change."[32] While scholars have identified a range of factors causing employees to vote against certification—an unfounded belief that

Figure 1. Unionization as masculine.
Source: *Unionize*, 30 November 1948.

Local 1000 was communist, rapid turnover, loyalty to the Eaton family, fears that unionists would lose privileges, fears that unionists would be fired, and a notion that white-collar workers did not need unions[33]—the CCL's privileging of male workers may also have been influential. Former Eaton's employee Doris Anderson, who later became editor of *Chatelaine*, stated in the 1990s that while she thought Eaton's needed a union, she was alienated by Local 1000's approach to gender. "The men held forth in the union," she recalled, "while the women did the donkey work like taking notes and making coffee."[34]

Consumption and the Creation of Local 1000

Recognizing that the Eaton's principle of free entry into its stores could work to their advantage, organizers made shopping central to their campaign strategies. Although it was illegal to discuss union matters with employees while they were working, in autumn 1949 and spring 1950 organizers held "Union Shopping Days," during which volunteers from other CCL unions walked around Eaton's stores carrying bags with the phrase "Join Local 1000" printed on them. During the autumn event volunteers wore badges with the words "Union Pay Is Good Pay—I Get It!" on them. During the spring event, volunteers stood outside Eaton's doors and handed out 5,000 Join Local 1000 bags to sympathetic shoppers. They also handed out helium-filled balloons with the words "Join Local 1000" on them to customers' children. Tallman recalls that Union Shopping Days were "lots of fun" for everyone except "management": "Predictably, when a child let go of a balloon, it floated up to the ceiling. The sight of a manager in the Main Store climbing a ladder to retrieve this novel form of union propaganda caused considerable comment."[35]

Since almost half of Eaton's Toronto employees eligible for unionization occupied customer service positions, organizers made frequent references in their campaign literature to salespeople's work experiences. Disparities between affluent customers and low-income employees were especially remarked upon. Throughout Eaton's stores tensions regularly flared between customers who demanded deferential treatment and employees who behaved as though they were customers' equals.[36] Picking up this aspect of customer service, organizers occasionally poked fun at customers' assertions of superiority. One joke in *Unionize* described a female customer "holding her lapdog up for a drink at one of the fountains" in a department store. A manager spotted her doing this and rushed over. "My dear Madam," he said, "this fountain is for the use of customers." The woman apologized: "Oh, I am sorry," she replied. "I thought it was for employees."[37] Alluding to employees' shared experiences of class discrimination, this anecdote demonstrated that Local 1000 could be an alternative, dignity-affirming organization for Eaton's employees.

Early in their campaign, the CCLers recognized that many of Eaton's employees were regular Eaton's customers. Not only did they purchase fashionable goods from Eaton's, so did many buy their household staples from their employer. One early *Unionize* quoted a male caretaker who stated that his manager's practice of paying them sometimes on Wednesday and sometimes on Thursday "is an inconvenience to ourselves and to our wives who are accustomed to meeting us in the store Wednesdays to do the family shopping."[38] When the CCLers found out that some of Eaton's workers were scared to unionize because they heard that Eaton's would take away these discounts, they rebuffed this fear. Emphasizing the revenue Eaton's received from employees' purchases, *Unionize* stated that "this discount is very good business for the Eaton company. . . . Would a company give up this large group of buyers for whom they have to put out no special service or advertising? Not likely!"[39] Attempting to ease some workers' concerns about unionizing, organizers tried to demonstrate that Eaton's workers had significant financial clout.

Since Eaton's employees were also Eaton's customers, organizers suggested that Eaton's should treat them with more respect. In May 1952 *Unionize* drew readers' attention to a recent Eaton's customer service training pamphlet. After quoting the pamphlet on the importance of treating customers well, the broadside inserted more comments: "You can easily tell a customer from an employee. The employee has a number. When we dispense with an employee, his number is just handed on to the next one we hire. . . . Unlike a customer, an employee has no feelings or emotions." After concluding its revisions, *Unionize* asked, "What? You say to remember that . . . employees are customers too? That spoils everything. Now we'll have to find a new definition for 'What Is a Customer!'"[40]

Organizers also encouraged employees to view shopping as an opportunity for forging labourist solidarity. One *Unionize* article recommended that when members of Local 1000 were shopping in Eaton's departments, they should "speak to [their] fellow employees about the Union [and] *sign the non-members*!"[41] Another suggested that when employees went shopping at Eaton's they "should ask to be served by a union clerk."[42] Not only did organizers attempt to build cohesion among Eaton's employees, they also tried to create camaraderie between Eaton's workers and members of other unions. In 1950 *Unionize* urged Eaton's employees to purchase suits carrying the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' (ACW) label. "Let the [Eaton's] clerk who serves you know that it makes a difference to you that goods are made by union paid workers," it stated, continuing, "Many salesmen in Eaton's Men's Furnishings are members of Local 1000. Ask for a union clerk when you go in to buy that new union-made suit!"[43] Organizers' stress upon the ACW label was strategic. Earlier that year, the ACW had promised to donate $2,000 per month to the Eaton Drive. Asking employees to support the ACW, organizers nurtured connections between Local 1000 and the ACW and created international lines of solidarity.

When trying to politicize consumption for progressive ends, organizers spent much time on what leftist scholars sometimes call "mass culture,"[44] or the for-profit sports, entertainment, fashion, and beauty industries. In her study of the CIO in 1930s Chicago, Cohen demonstrates that unionists made dances, bowling leagues, and radio programs part of their organizational strategies. During the 1920s welfarist employers had used these activities to create loyalty; by incorporating them into unionism CIO leaders demonstrated that recreation could be part of a labour-identified culture.[45] Welfare programs had existed at Eaton's in Toronto since the early 1900s; by the 1940s they included summer camps, dances, self-improvement classes, drama and musical societies, and athletic activities.[46] Many such activities had mass cultural components, as did the large dances that required stylish clothes, the fashion and cosmetics classes that required interest in the grooming industries, and the sporting events that required commodities like badminton racquets and ice skates. Eaton's employees' working lives were even more heavily saturated by mass culture. Training literature informed employees of new products, and several employees worked in sales departments that sold fashionable clothing and accessories, radios, and in the early 1950s, television sets. They were thus deeply familiar with what in 1947 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer disparagingly called the "culture industry."[47]

Although the modernist equation of mass culture with bourgeois effeminacy might have led Eaton Drive organizers to criticize workers' interests in mass culture, they instead perceived mass culture as an opportunity to convince Eaton's employees to unionize. In 1949 they established a social committee, whose members oversaw movie nights, a bowling league, Christmas parties, banquets, and, most popularly, numerous dances. Some of the smaller dances were held at union halls and were usually put on for particular occupational groups. Other, larger, dances were extravagant affairs. . . .

Unionize also utilized mass culture as an organizational tool. One . . . cartoon features a woman applying cosmetics in front of a theatre-style vanity. . . . Accompanying the sketch is the heading, "You Can't Buy '*talent*' at bargain-basement prices. And the reason you can't is because it's *unionized*"; underneath, *Unionize* states, "The big names . . . in Movies, Theatre, Television, Radio, and Music are union members" and by "joining" the union, "you're not only helping yourself to a *better life*, you will be helping to raise retail standards for hundreds of thousands of men and women across Canada."[48] Calling attention to the fact that many celebrities were unionized, *Unionize* tried to demonstrate that unionization was compatible with glamour and prestige.

. . .

While organizers knew that mass entertainment held special attractions for Eaton's employees, a few disempowering overtones did creep into the Eaton Drive's references to fashion and entertainment. In one *Unionize* cartoon, two women are imploring a man to go with them to a show and a dance. The man refuses, saying, "Sorry girls, some other time—tonight is my department meeting!" (Figure 2). Though the women in this cartoon probably are not meant to represent Eaton's female employees, the sketch does connect political agency to masculinity and frivolity to femininity. In this way it echoes the modernist vision of civic culture as a male sphere as well as reflects some leftists' attitudes toward mass culture. In 1894 Thorstein Veblen decried the irrationality at the heart of women's interests in fashion and beauty; more than 40 years later Adorno and Horkheimer suggested that those who participated in mass culture were in danger of cultural castration.[49]

. . .

A few CCLers recognized this dynamic of Eaton's female employees' experiences. Sometimes they contended that Eaton's should pay wages commensurate with Eaton's employees' clothing requirements. One 1949 leaflet stated, "Today [selling] is far below on the salary scale, yet store employees must pay much more for appearance on the job than any other type of worker."[50] They also praised working women's skills in style and appearance. A leaflet handed out early in the campaign describes a fictional saleswoman: "Sally Smith is a slick chick. From her Firm Form Foundation to her slim black gown with bustle drapery in the rear, from her

Figure 2. Masculine rationality versus feminine frivolity. Source: *Unionize*, 17 January 1950.

ankle strap slippers to her shining, sculptured hair-do, Sally is sleek perfection." The leaflet went on to discuss Sally's small salary, arguing that she had difficulties making ends meet. "*But*," the leaflet asserted, "Sally is as smart as she is beautiful. She has signed a card in the [union]."[51]

A 1950 campaign event made organizers' awareness of Eaton's employees' interests in fashion even more explicit. Between twelve and one o'clock one April day, they staged a "Fashion Parade" outside Eaton's flagship store and repeated this performance at five o'clock outside Eaton's College Street.[52] During the interwar years, fashion shows had become staple public relations events at Eaton's. Intended to demonstrate the company's fashion leadership, they featured elaborate settings, professional models, and fashions by prestigious designers.[53] Local 1000's Fashion Parade followed a decidedly different trajectory. Under a heading titled "Easter Fashion Parade" in organizers' meeting memoranda, "suggestions" for the parade included "Frayed white collars; Boss with folding money sticking out of pockets, followed by a miserable little employee with empty pockets hanging out . . . Girl in barrel with sign 'My new Easter outfit' [and another employee with a sign featuring the words] Budget Plan buying: 'In 16 months this suit will be mine.'"[54] Parodying Eaton's role as a fashion merchant, the parade constructed comedic, visual evidence of the class disparities engendered by, on the one hand, Eaton's high clothing prices, and on the other, low wages paid to workers. Recognizing that employees were interested in stylish garments, the parade appealed to employees' interests in fashion and argued that they should unionize to gain salaries that could cover their fashion needs.

A few employees responded enthusiastically to such efforts. In June 1948 a salesperson, who did not indicate her or his gender loyalty, wrote a letter to *Unionize*'s editor:

> Dear People:
>
> Glad you are taking an interest in the Big Store. Do try and get us a weekly pay, as every other week we are half starved—no money to go shopping. It certainly is a drag to live on Eaton's meagre wage and keep up an appearance before the public with clothes and food prices the way they are. . . .
>
> The way the price of meals is soaring up it's no wonder the employees look as if they had TB or tapeworm.[55]

By referring to the costs of keeping up appearances, organizers sparked at least some employees' interests in taking action against their powerful employer.

Yet even while convincing fashionable female employees to unionize, the CCL team suggested that women with fashion and beauty interests were secondary union members. On the leaflet praising Sally Smith, organizers printed an illustration of a young woman holding a pennant on which the words "Union Maid" are emblazoned; she is smiling invitingly at a man standing behind her. Because she is holding a pennant, the picture suggests that women belong in the union in an auxiliary, cheerleader-like fashion. In 1951 this dynamic of praising stylish women while relegating them to secondary status again appeared. That spring the Social Committee sponsored a Miss Local 1000 Beauty Contest at the Royal York Hotel. On the night of the event 14 "beauties from Eaton's" donned fashionable party dresses and evening gowns, put on jewellery and makeup, paid special attention to their hairstyles, and stepped into high-heeled evening shoes. At half past ten they "paraded" before a "three-man jury": "Murray Cotterill, president of the Toronto Labor Council; Jim Perna, United Automobile Workers, and executive board member of Toronto Labor Council; and Eamon Park, MPP and United Steelworkers' Director of Publicity." A 19-year-old elevator operator won first prize. After the contest she phoned home to Cochrane to share the good news with her family, and later that summer she wore her "Miss Local 1000" banner while riding in a convertible in the Toronto Labour Day Parade.[56]

. . . The judging of women by prominent male leaders was an objectifying action that transformed youthful female unionists into depoliticized targets of a masculine gaze. In fact, the *Unionize* article that described the beauty pageant was titled "Line of Lovelies Judged."[57] Both the contest and *Unionize* suggested that organized labour valued women only because they were attractive.

. . .

While mass culture was integral to the Eaton Drive, organizers had a more overarching vision of consumption in post-war Canada. As we have seen, CCLers believed that social–democratic unionism would enable workers to achieve higher standards of living, thereby allowing them to become full, participating citizens in Canada's polity.[58] The CCF similarly felt that social democracy would create a more equitable distribution of goods, hence improving workers' material conditions. In keeping with their parent organizations' emphases on material disparities in Canadian society, the Eaton Drive's organizers' literature referred often to a "decent living standard."[59] Believing that everyone was entitled to a life that was enjoyable, comfortable, and fulfilling, they contended that if people were too busy earning money to cover subsistence costs, they would have no time to spend with their families and no energy to contribute as citizens. In 1950 organizers distributed an extraordinary broadside called "Opportunity Day." Spoofing Eaton's "Opportunity Day" sale flyers, the leaflet declared that "Unionized employees have substantially increased their purchasing power. This is *your* Opportunity Day to do so by joining Local 1000." It depicted a number of goods and services that would become available for purchase after unionization. Although this leaflet is indicative of organizers' belief that Eaton's employees should have increased living standards, it is also suggestive of the egalitarian assumptions underpinning this belief. Organizers did not want workers to be affluent for affluence's sake; rather, they wanted them to share in the fruits of post-war production. As the section titled "Television Set" declared, "Working people should have access to the newest inventions."

. . .

The CCLers suggested that both male and female employees would benefit from increased purchasing power: One sketch hinted that Eaton's low wages prevented both male and female employees from buying their own homes. Most references to living standards, however, implied that working-class families should contain a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. One *Unionize* responded to reports that some employees were working two jobs to "make ends meet." "Of course if they *want* to use their leisure in these ways, the union has no objection." However, "The union's contention is that *one* full-time job should pay enough to keep a man and his family in decency."[60] Another *Unionize* cited cost-of-living statistics released by the Toronto Welfare Council and argued that Eaton's did not pay enough money to keep "a man, his wife and three children" in "good health, decent living and self respect."[61] *Unionize* cartoons also emphasized the need for Eaton's to pay a family wage. One depicts a husband handing his wife his paycheque, stating, "Well, Dear, here's my pay check—it looks pretty measly after all those deductions." The wife stirs a pot on the stove and imagines a refrigerator, washing machine, and iron flying away from her (Figure 3).

Though CCLers' abstract discussions of purchasing power did imply that male breadwinners were responsible for both earning and spending wages, direct references to household consumption suggested that women, not men, were responsible for budgeting and shopping. One of the campaign's earliest broadsides stated, "Your Wife's *Expecting* You to Bring Home the Bacon—Not Your *Beefs*."[62] Such depictions highlight the centrality of consumption to women's domestic responsibilities in the post-war years. They also subtly imply that it would have been unmanly for men to wish for household goods. Organizers

Figure 3. Consumer dreams. Source: *Unionize*, 16 November 1948.

never depicted breadwinners as desiring household commodities; rather, they portrayed them as earning money so that they could buy things for their wives and children. In 1949 *Unionize* carried an illustration in which an Eaton's manager is firing a male employee; the employee's wife and son are waiting outside. The little boy is restless, so his mother says, "Be patient, dear, Daddy will be through at one o'clock." The boy replies, "Gee, and it's payday too, mebee Daddy will buy me my bike today."[63] Organizers' disinclination to suggest that men bought commodities for themselves indicates they may have been uncomfortable with the developing association between unionization and purchasing power. Working men earned money to provide, not to consume.

Because some organizers believed that unionism was a tool for enhancing male breadwinners' authority within the family and broader polity, they had difficulties rationalizing married women's presence at Eaton's. In trying to understand married women's motivations for working for wages, some *Unionize* contributions suggested that they worked to earn extra household income. One article declares, "*If* you are only working for 'pin money' . . . or just want to work long enough to get that new rug or refrigerator paid for . . . then maybe you don't feel the need for collective bargaining." While this piece seems sympathetic toward working wives, it does not suggest that unionism would strengthen working women's entitlements. Instead it implores working wives to join Local 1000 and help facilitate working men's quests for high salaries: "*In the community* as a whole, the standard of living of your fellow employees affects *you*. If your husband is working in an organized industry and enjoying union standards, so long as Eaton's . . . remain unorganised, it is a constant threat to the gains his Union has won."[64] Just as organizers asked youthful, fashionable women to support their male co-workers' goals, this article asks married women to sign union cards so they could bolster their husbands' efforts.

As long as married women remained full-time homemakers, organizers had no difficulties with their desires for household goods. When wives obtained jobs to pay for their own domestic purchases, however, they became

unsettled. The presence of married women at Eaton's challenged the CCL's and the CCF's assumptions that wage earning and citizenship were masculine. It also called into question the foundation of working men's identities: If married women earned their own wages, then working men could no longer define their manhoods through their abilities to provide for their families. In 1951 *Unionize* ran an illustration that demonstrated the depth of organizers' apprehensions. A matronly woman gets a job as a sales-clerk so that she can purchase a new stove. A slender, youthful unionist asks her to join Local 1000, but she refuses, stating, "What's the use?—I'll only be here till I get my new stove." According to the cartoon's artist, this woman's refusal to join harms the "majority" of Eaton's workers. "Don't be a 'gimme pig,'" it instructs. The figure of the gimme pig surfaced again in *Unionize* in a description of a nonunion male employee, so the porcine imagery is not intentionally misogynist.[65] Nonetheless it does illustrate some organizers' distrust of wage-earning wives. Neither docile feminine unionists nor dutiful housewives, they existed outside certain organizers' understandings of acceptable feminine behaviour.

Gender, Unionism, and Consumer Culture

Between 1948 and 1952 in downtown Toronto, the CCL made consumption central to the Eaton Drive. References to shopping and mass culture arose from a recognition that Eaton's employees were involved with these aspects of consumption, and references to purchasing power and living standards arose from a commitment to a "decent living standard" for all working people. Particular assumptions governed the Drive's consumer references, including a minority of unionists' belief that women deserved unionism's benefits, the CCL's belief that the civic sphere was masculine, and the CCL's belief in the family wage. Some unionists portrayed working women's consumer interests sympathetically, while others depicted female worker–consumers as secondary union members. And certain unionists' support for the family wage spurred them to depict wage earning and breadwinning as masculine, and homemaking and consumption as feminine.

In 1947 CCL Vice-President Pat Conroy declared in a speech to the Canadian Club, "Security is labour's chief objective. Our [democratic capitalist] system is capable of providing the material wealth necessary for happiness, and the worker wants to secure *his* share."[66] This statement neatly captures the CCL's developing vision of social–democratic unionism. More socialist than the TLC [Trades and Labor Congress] but more conservative than the Labour Progressive Party, the CCL supported liberal industrial capitalism on the condition that it could provide job security and purchasing power for all-male labourers. When compared to other mid-twentieth-century perspectives, this vision is hardly revolutionary. The female-dominated HCA lobbied for state control of production, distribution, and pricing,[67] but the CCL believed that unionization was the best way to level material wealth. Pro-woman unionists, including some of the Eaton Drive's own organizers, challenged Canadian unionism's masculinity,[68] but the CCL sought to strengthen the patriarchal nuclear family. When compared with Marxist and environmentalist perspectives, the CCL's post-war platform also appears conformist. Since the nineteenth century Marxists have condemned individual property ownership,[69] but the CCL believed that workers should own their own commodities. Since the 1960s environmentalists have disparaged the modernist link between industrial development and social progress,[70] but the CCL felt that industrial development could create greater opportunities for all.

It is hardly surprising, then, that some scholars interpret the CCL's post-war trajectory as conservative. This article supports this assessment, but it also shows that a few CCLers challenged

patriarchal and modernist conventions. Going against masculinist labourist traditions, some organizers suggested that unions could be spaces in which men and women could participate equally and argued that unions should expand both men's and women's entitlements. Believing that workers' interests in mass entertainment, fashion, and beauty did not necessarily indicate *embourgeoisement*, they proved that mass culture was not inimical to labour-identified collective action. In an historical moment when most retail workers remain unorganized, these actions remain significant. Since World War II, consumption has become important not only to workers' leisure and domestic activities but also to their workplace experiences. If we are to adequately understand this historical development we must continue inquiring into unionism's and working people's relationships with consumer culture.

More online.

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