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## Articles

# Charity and Change: Montreal English Protestant Charity Faces the Crisis of Depression

Anne MacLennan

### Résumé/Abstract

*Durant les années trente, tous les organismes charitables tant publics que privés, à travers le Canada, doivent s'adapter aux nouvelles circonstances engendrées par la Dépression. La crise est ressentie de façon particulièrement aiguë par le Montreal Council of Social Agencies, une organisation de la minorité protestante anglophone, dans une ville peu encline à accepter sa part de responsabilité au niveau des services publics. Le Conseil se voit contraint d'assumer le fardeau des services d'assistance destinés aux membres de sa communauté. La Dépression provoque un bouleversement brusque et à long terme des opérations du Conseil l'obligeant ainsi à réévaluer et à réaffirmer son rôle au sein des services sociaux. Par conséquent, le Montreal Council of Social Agencies exerce des pressions sur les autorités municipales, provinciales et fédérales, les incitant à s'impliquer davantage dans l'assistance sociale afin d'alléger les problèmes immédiats et potentiels. Il est important de souligner que durant les années trente, le Montreal Council of Social Agencies s'appuie sur les principes de la Charity Organization Society. Ces principes n'ont pas fléchi durant cette crise, au contraire ils se sont maintenus et consolidés.*

*The depression of the 1930s forced private and public charities across Canada to adapt to new circumstances. The crisis was particularly acute for the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, a minority English Protestant organization in a city reluctant to accept any responsibility for public services. The Council was forced to assume the burden of relief services for its community. The abrupt and long term disruptions in the operations of the Council caused by the Depression forced it to reevaluate and reassess its role in social services. Consequently, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies tried to compel municipal, provincial and federal governments to play larger roles in welfare work to relieve immediate and future problems. Most importantly, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was guided through the 1930s by the principles of the Charity Organization Society, which were retained and reinforced rather than weakened by this crisis.*

The depression of the 1930s provoked dramatic changes in Canada's private and public social welfare systems. Change in the Canadian social welfare system was inevitable but not immediate. The federal and provincial governments were able to withstand temporarily the economic pressures of the depression and delay the organization of public social services. Meanwhile, Canada's private char-

ities and municipal institutions bore the brunt of the country's poverty, unemployment and social dislocation. Municipalities, like their provincial and federal counterparts, tried to avoid the political responsibility for the crisis and shift the financial burden upon private charities. Consequently, these charities met the challenge with immediate change, but overall, the depression decade resulted in a reinforcement of traditional views of charity.

behind most of Canada's major cities in the development of relief services. Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Hamilton bore the full burden of relief within their city limits. Vancouver was one of the first large cities in Canada to operate a fully organized civic relief department. It was adapted to the needs of the depression in 1930. Winnipeg possessed the Greater Winnipeg Advisory Board of Unemployment Relief, the Unemployment Relief Committee, The Relief Commission for the Care of Unemployed Single Men and the Social Welfare Commission. Prior to 1931 the city of Toronto had a Division of Social Welfare within the Civic Department of Public Health, and in 1931 the Civic Division of Social Welfare was formed. Hamilton had a Public Welfare Board. Toronto relief rates were higher than in most other cities. Toronto's Department of Public Welfare maintained a central clothing depot, an employment bureau and a central registry for homeless men, in addition to dispensing relief. Although these civic organizations accepted different levels of responsibility for public relief, each city made some attempt to give relief to the unemployed and in some cases the unemployable.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike these municipalities, Montreal was slow to accept responsibility for the needy. The administration of relief services was left largely in the hands of private charities. The presence of the Catholic Church in relief services made it easier for the city of Montreal to refuse to intervene.

The sudden and sharp increases in demand for social services during the 1930s compelled private charities to alter their structures and operations in order to do more with less. Early in the depression the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, the coordinator of non-sectarian and Protestant charities, realized that it had to make more efficient use of its resources if it were to meet the minimum need of its clientele. The position of the Council in Montreal was the unique one of an English Protestant charitable federation in a predominantly French Catholic city. Because the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was English and Protestant, it borrowed its methods and ideas from the Charity Organization Society which was established in England, the United States and other Canadian provinces. Charity Organization principles adopted by the Council stressed professionalization, elimination of waste and duplication, self-reliance, education and "scientific" statistical charity. The Council's solutions to the poverty and distress caused by the depression reflected its traditional views of poverty. But the financial crisis gradually forced a reevaluation of a system long overdue for reform. Conceptions of and approaches to poverty were radically altered. These new ideas and the drastic need for alternate sources of funding led private charities to plead with every level of government to play a larger role in the provision of social services.

The Montreal Council of Social Agencies adjusted slowly to the depression. The Council could not predict the end to the crisis and like the federal government expected it to be

temporary. Consequently, its solutions were designed to patch and make due, rather than to dramatically change the system and methods in use. When it was discovered that the depression would outlast the funds available for social services, the Council hoped for government intervention.

The Montreal Council of Social Agencies' desire for provincial social reform was renewed when the Quebec Social Insurance Commission was appointed by an order-in-council, October 29, 1930. The provincial government directed the commission to investigate questions of public charities, social insurance and industrial hygiene.<sup>2</sup> The commission embarked on a fact-finding mission and published its findings in seven reports in 1933.

The Financial Federation of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was very optimistic about the commission's work when it was formed. Immediately following the formation of the commission, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies began to prepare briefs to submit to the commission. Meanwhile, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was actively monitoring other government endeavours. In 1931, it urged the provincial government to broaden its program of inspection of organizations receiving grants from the Bureau of Public Charities. The Council hoped to "safeguard the quality of work" done by these groups through inspection.<sup>3</sup> The concepts of quality control and inspection were strongly reminiscent of Charity Organization desires to regulate all charities, whether or not they subscribed to the Charity Organization principles of scientific charity. Provincial social reform was insufficient without enforcement of the legislation it passed.

In the recommendations of the Quebec Social Insurance Commission on charities, the commission agreed with the basic structure of the Public Charities Act, but proposed a few revisions. The commissioners recognized the value of outdoor relief and advised that grants be based on service for organizations offering outdoor relief that did not qualify as institutions. They recommended grants to creches, orphanages and maternity hospitals be increased, and grants be continued to those entrusted with the care of young girls. The commission also hoped that the federal and provincial governments would cooperate to solve the problem of relief applicants, who did not meet municipal residence requirements.

The final recommendation of the commission in this area was a great compliment to the organization of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. The Quebec Social Insurance Commission advised that a central bureau of social service be established in large cities, such as Montreal and Quebec. The bureau would be a clearing house for information and provide contacts and charitable services just as the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was for the Protestant community in Montreal. This stamp of approval from the commission gave the Council added confidence in its own

organization, because it always had believed a city-wide clearing house for charities could have been established in Montreal. When the commission's findings were published, the directors of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies welcomed its recommendations on charities and anticipated immediate action.<sup>4</sup>

The appointment of the Quebec Social Insurance Commission was the first time the provincial government showed an interest in social reform since the Public Charities Act of 1921. It proved a disappointment to those who expected social reform, because the advice of the Quebec Social Insurance Commission fell upon deaf ears. The provincial government did not act upon its recommendations. Part of the province's reluctance to act may have stemmed from the inopportune timing of the commission's findings. By the time the seven reports were published, the municipalities and province were having difficulties supporting existing programs, without any extension of social services.

Although the Council maintained its role as watchdog of the public sector trying to force the provincial and municipal authorities to take more responsibility for social services, the financial pressures of the depression did not allow the Council the luxury of waiting until these authorities acted. In the period of adjustment to the depression from 1931 to 1934, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies began to look upon the city of Montreal for relief services.

The relief expenditures of the city of Montreal were dependent upon the relief funding plans and contributions that came from the federal and provincial governments. In 1930, the city formed and maintained the Advisory Relief Board, which distributed these funds to the city's four private charitable federations who handled relief distribution in their own communities.<sup>5</sup> The board's creation was not an indication of the foresight of the city of Montreal, but the urgency created by federal relief legislation that did not dictate a means to execute the tasks it set.

Initially the Advisory Relief Board was the only service offered by the city of Montreal, thus, relief applicants were entirely dependent upon the work of private charities from 1930 to December 1933. The private charities were forced to take immediate emergency measures to combat the unemployment crisis. This proved a great challenge to them.

#### **Private Charity's Initial Reactions to the Unemployment Crisis**

In the annual report of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, *Welfare Work in Montreal in 1929*, the Council first expressed the concern that existing care for homeless men was insufficient. It hoped to find a solution to this problem through cooperation with Protestant churches.<sup>6</sup> The government was not even considered at this early stage in the unemployment crisis. The Council was very self-reliant

and looked within its own organization to find solutions to the unemployment crisis. It resorted to government aid in the mid-depression only when the unemployment crisis was compounded by time and neglect.

The schemes and methods devised to deal with the depression of the 1930s did not immediately demonstrate changes in the structure of the Council or changes in attitude. Many of the premises upon which its plans were based, however, became invalid during the depression. Some of the Council's systems for dealing with poverty were highly reminiscent of the methods of the Charity Organization Society. The concepts of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor were still imposed upon relief distribution. The unemployed were consciously separated by class and gender, when they applied for relief through the Council. During the initial period of adjustment to the depression, from 1930 to 1934, the hope that spring would bring prosperity flourished. Consequently, many of the Council's programs suffered due to inadequate long-term planning. The Council's lack of success with short-term plans and compromises finally resulted in an extensive reevaluation and reorganization of its work, accompanied by a plea for government assistance in social services.

Initially the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, when forced by the crisis, fell back upon traditional methods of relief distribution. Protestant charities had long-established methods of dealing with seasonal unemployment because of climatic conditions and the closure of the port. For example, an Emergency Relief Committee was formally established in 1924 to supervise relief distribution to the labouring class during the winter months.<sup>7</sup>

In the winter of 1929-1930 the needs of unemployed homeless men were met on an *ad hoc* basis by the clergymen of the city. Men assembled daily in long lines in front of the Christ Church Cathedral to apply for aid. Other men went to their own churches.<sup>8</sup> This unexpected crisis provoked the various denominations of Protestant clergymen to appeal to the Montreal Council of Social Agencies to help organize relief. The organization of the Special Committee on Unemployment in the autumn of 1930 was a result of the joint planning of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, the Salvation Army, the Old Brewery Mission, the Protestant House of Industry and various Protestant denominations to cope with the year-round demand for relief services.

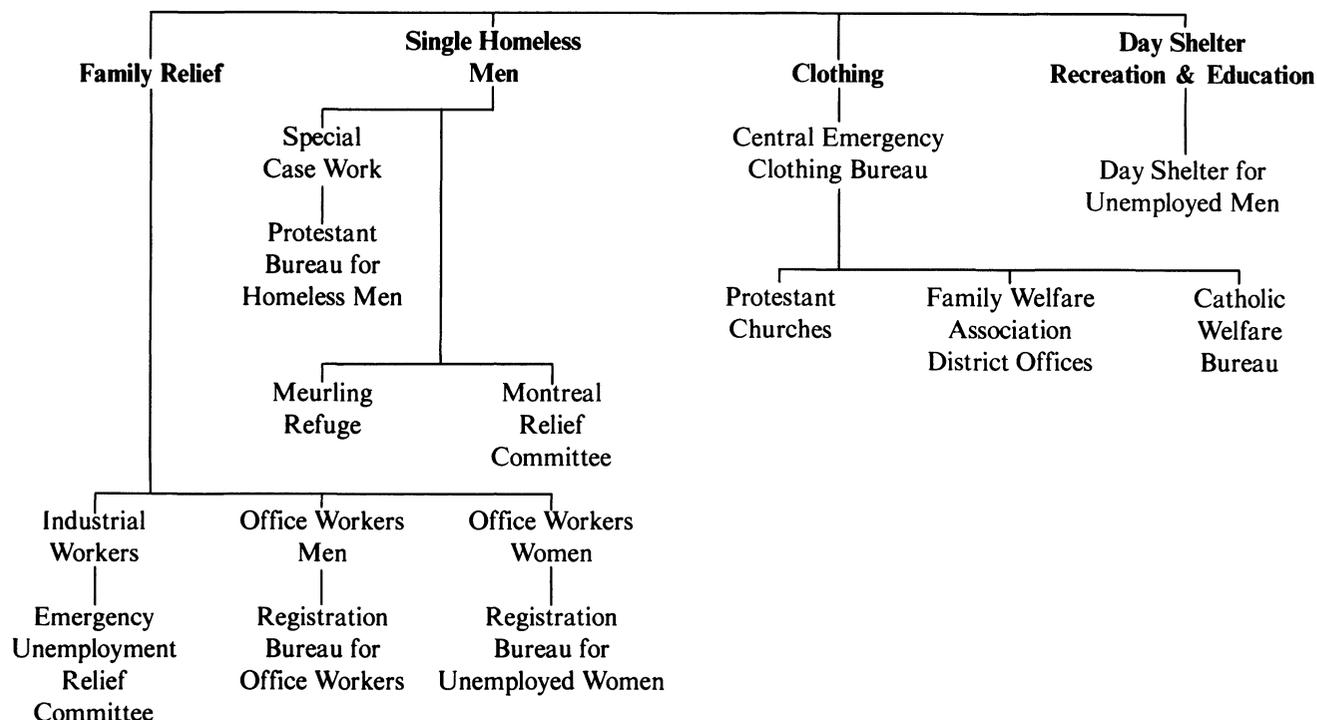
The Special Committee on Unemployment was soon adopted as one of the Council's own projects, because its membership was predominantly from the Council. As a result, this committee assumed an important role within the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, whose divisions began to coordinate their activities to suit the needs of the Special Committee on Unemployment. The committee's work was considered so urgent that the Council's member agencies did all they could to help it accomplish its goals and avoid duplication.

TABLE 1

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**The Structure of Relief Services of the Special Committee on Unemployment.**


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**MONTREAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL AGENCIES**
**Special Committee on Unemployment**


The structure of the relief services provided by the Special Committee on Unemployment was an example of the effort to apply old methods to a new situation. The framework of these services are illustrated in Table 1.<sup>9</sup> Notions of poverty as a moral failing had survived and were at the base of the organization of relief distribution. Most evident was the Charity Organization concept that any form of relief or aid was preferable to cash relief. The Montreal Council of Social Agencies organized their relief services on the idea that refuge, second-hand clothing, daytime activities and employment registration were more suitable for unemployed workers than cash relief. Another indication of the Charity Organization influence, was the emphasis the Council placed on recreation and education for the destitute homeless and unemployed.

The division of unemployed relief applicants according to class and gender was the most obvious sign of the conflict between older Charity Organization practices and beliefs and the new situation of massive unemployment. The private charities in the city were accustomed to dealing with the winter unemployment and having to provide for additional necessities such as winter clothing and fuel. The

Emergency Unemployment Committee had served this function during the winter months since 1924 and continued to serve the labouring class throughout the depression. During the depression the committee continued business as usual, except for the increase in its work load. In 1930 alone, 700 families received relief from this committee, at the total cost of \$22,490.78.<sup>10</sup>

The committee's methods, however, had not changed to meet an unemployment crisis. Relief applicants had to meet residence requirements and produce a letter from their clergyman to prove their need for relief. Consequently, the Protestant clergymen had a chance to assess the suitability of relief applicants before the applicant approached the appropriate social agencies. Applicants refused by this committee had the alternative of the Family Welfare Association. The Council's Health Service and Diet Dispensary were available in the case of illness. No new relief provisions were made for labourers during the depression, except that the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee changed its winter service to a year-round schedule. No special tactics were used to combat the volume of unemployment or to place the applicants in jobs. Unemployment was not considered

an unusual condition for the labouring class; only the magnitude of the problem had changed.

An acute distinction, however, was made between the chronic unemployment of the labouring class and the new white collar unemployed. The white collar workers were unaccustomed to job shortages. Consequently, their plight was most apparent, and alarmed the patrons of charity, who quickly devised solutions. In the fall of 1930, prior to the formation of the Special Committee on Unemployment, the Council received a proposal from the Sun Life Assurance Company regarding unemployment among office workers. The Sun Life Assurance Company offered space and personnel to the Montreal Council of Social Agencies to set up a registration bureau for unemployed office workers. The Council accepted the offer and agreed that the employment bureau should be divided according to class. Frank G. Pedley, the Secretary of the Special Committee on Unemployment, a long-standing member of the Council, McGill University professor and member of the Social Science Research Council was a strong supporter of this new bureau. In the "Report of Special Committee on Unemployment" for 1931 he noted that, "The value of this facility can hardly be questioned. Men of the "white collar" class may apply for work here without stigma, and present their problems to an individual who has time to listen and discuss."<sup>11</sup> The remark reveals that the stigma of unemployment was very real and linked unemployment to individual failings even in a period of overwhelming unemployment.

Many workers were ashamed to apply for relief at all. There was no less shame in relief for labourers. The Council, however, drew a clear line between white and blue collar workers and formed its policies accordingly. The special registration bureau for white collar workers showed that the Special Committee on Unemployment felt this group deserved special attention.

As a result, a whole new structure was created for them: the Central Registration Bureau for Office Workers. Initially, it was an employment agency, unlike services provided for labourers which focused more clearly upon relief rather than employment opportunities. This emphasis, however, was soon downplayed because it was not particularly successful.

Additional attention to the concerns of unemployed office workers was provided from 1931 to 1933, when the Young Men's Christian Association started working at the registration office located in the Sun Life Assurance Company offices. Employment for white collar workers became increasingly difficult to obtain: in 1931, 9.51 per cent of the applicants to the Central Registration Bureau for Office Workers were placed in jobs and 12.51 per cent were employed in 1932. The distribution of relief among office workers by the Y.M.C.A. increased yearly. Some 128 relief applicants received aid from the bureau in 1930. The figures increased to 669 in 1932 and 1,040 in 1933.<sup>12</sup> The Central

Registration Bureau for Office Workers, which was intended to become an employment bureau eventually duplicated the relief services of the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee.

Even though the Montreal Council of Social Agencies maintained a division between white and blue collar workers, the white collar workers were scarcely more successful at avoiding relief. Job placement was low, but the separation was rigidly maintained until the city took over relief distribution in December 1933.

Similarly, the separation of employment bureaus according to occupation was extended to unemployed women. Less importance was placed upon employment for women, illustrating the fact that women had not established a firm and permanent position for themselves in the workplace. Consequently, only widows with children were generally considered "deserving" poor and received relief from the Family Welfare Association. The Council assumed that just as someone cared for children, someone was taking care of women. Thus, the establishment of women's registration bureau was delayed until 1931.<sup>13</sup>

The Registration Bureau for Unemployed Women was housed at the Young Women's Christian Association and was divided according to type of employment. In 1931, 469 women were registered with the bureau for business and professional women and 5,592 were listed as industrial or domestic workers.<sup>14</sup> Although the main goal of these bureaus was to find work for its applicants, relief, educational and recreational services were also offered.

Providing shelter for the homeless became another major problem for the Special Committee on Unemployment. The Dependency and Delinquency Division of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies appointed a committee to study the problem as early as 1929. The homeless unemployed became a serious problem for the Protestant churches and the Protestant House of Industry and Refuge. As a result, they eagerly cooperated with the Council. The Special Committee on Unemployment not only hoped to house the homeless men, but hoped to rehabilitate the most promising cases.<sup>15</sup> The Protestant House of Industry and Refuge gave up its ward for occasional residents to make room for the hopeful cases sent to it from the Special Committee for Unemployment, but the arrangement was only temporary. Consequently, a new agency was formed, the Protestant Bureau for Homeless Men.

The coordination of social services for homeless men was a novel idea, but providing refuge for this group was not. Refuge was available through a number of private agencies. The Canadian Red Cross Refuge provided shelter for ex-soldiers. The Old Brewery Mission, Union Nationale Française and L'Oeuvre des Sans-Foyers each catered to their own clientele and were among the city's refuges that received

grants from the municipality. The city of Montreal also operated, the Meurling Municipal Refuge and after 1931 the Temporary Refuge on Vitre and Inspector Streets. The Meurling Municipal Refuge provided the most lodgings for the city's homeless. In 1932, it reported providing lodging 254,407 times, calculated on a per man per night basis. That made its share of the total lodgings provided throughout the city 26.12 per cent. This feat was accomplished in part with the financial assistance of the federal government. The city's refuges were also more open to all groups in the city; they were not restricted to specific religious groups or other groups such as veterans, as was generally the case in private refuges.<sup>16</sup>

As for "The Protestant Bureau for Homeless Men," created as part of the Special Committee on Unemployment's programs, its goals were, "to promote co-operation of all agencies interested in . . . homeless men, so as to avoid duplication of efforts and waste of money, and to ensure prompt and efficient measures of relief being taken when occasion demands."<sup>17</sup>

The Montreal Council of Social Agencies in this endeavour, as in all its others, tried to avoid waste and duplication. The new bureau became responsible for the Dufferin School Refuge in 1930. The building was generously donated by the Protestant School Board of Montreal. The Bureau registered the unemployed and supplied relief for homeless men. It also cooperated with the Protestant House of Industry and Refuge to do some case work, at least until 1934 when all these services were discontinued. The Canadian National Railways donated the refuge on Vitre Street to the Bureau in 1931, but the Canadian National Railway's refuge became the responsibility of the city through its Montreal Relief Committee in August 1931. This refuge had double the capacity of the Dufferin Refuge.<sup>18</sup> A tabulation of the shel-

ter provided appears in Table 2. The Dufferin Refuge, however, made a large contribution to lodgings for the homeless men of Montreal.

Although there were many refuges for men, no similar provisions were made for women. In August 1932, however, the City's Advisory Relief Board felt it was necessary to arrange refuge for destitute single women. The city itself rejected the idea, but agreed to subsidize agencies in the field that wished to provide such a service. Anxious to benefit from the city's largesse, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies arranged for the Big Sister Association, the Society for the Protection of Women and Children, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Salvation Army and the Sheltering Home to participate in this program to house about 600 unemployed Protestant women of the city.<sup>19</sup> The fact that 600 women appealed to the Council for housing refuted the notion that women were being housed and fed by their families. The Young Women's Christian Association remained the hub of activity for the care of homeless and destitute women.

Depression forced cooperation across institutionalized religious barriers. In addition to providing relief, shelter and registering the unemployed, the Special Committee on Unemployment administered the distribution of clothing. The Central Emergency Clothing Bureau was a joint venture of the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee, the Family Welfare Association, the Catholic Welfare Bureau and a network of Protestant churches throughout the city. At the Central Emergency Clothing Bureau clothing was collected, mended, sorted and redistributed to those in need. Although Catholic and Protestant agencies cooperated on this venture, it was not the beginning of large scale cooperation along linguistic rather than religious lines. This venture was a sign of the importance of the Special Committee on

TABLE 2

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**Nights of Shelter Provided at the Dufferin Refuge, 1931-1940.**


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Year	Nights of Shelter Provided
1931	5,364
1932	6,948
1933	5,477
1934	*
1935	9,616
1936	9,207
1937	6,941
1938	9,010
1939	11,456
1940	7,373

\*No comparable statistic available.

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Unemployment. It was the only central bureau to coordinate relief services in the early part of the depression because of the city's failure to provide central relief services.

Shelter, clothing distribution, employment registration and relief services were considered the essential services provided by the Special Committee on Unemployment. The final but less obvious essential service was provided by the Day Shelter for Unemployed Men of the Education and Recreation Division of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. The programs that emerged from this division were intended to be spiritually uplifting. The Council feared the disastrous effects of unoccupied, unemployed men and hoped to set up programs to counter the ill effects of their extended leisure time.

In 1930 no programs were organized for recreation, education or day shelter for the unemployed. That year federal programs gave public works greater financial support than direct relief. Dr. Frank G. Pedley, noted in the annual report of the Special Committee on Unemployment of 1930 that, "The excuse that there is no work to do cannot stand in the face of these facts. If social work is to be constructive . . . it must consider ways and means to overcome such economic conditions as we are afflicted with this year."<sup>20</sup> Pedley left no doubt that he felt idle hands and idle minds were wasteful in a society where there was a great deal of work to be done. Values consistent with the Protestant work ethic formed the basis of activities which were organized for the benefit of the unemployed.

In 1931, when the organized educational and recreational activities were initiated for unemployed men, the belief that idleness was a danger to society was reemphasized. The "Report of the Special Committee on Unemployment" stated, "that the great majority of individuals who have applied for assistance are anxious to work. . . . Prolonged idleness . . . creates . . . a disinclination to work . . . one of the worst features of a period of economic depression."<sup>21</sup> The Day Shelter for Unemployed Men was the first program implemented to impede the development of further idleness, by keeping the unemployed men in the shelter occupied. The Special Committee on Unemployment organized a committee of interested parties, who contributed to the day shelter project. Montreal Tramways donated a property to house the shelter and some funds. Some \$2,000 was contributed by the Montreal Relief committee. The United Church made a library and reading room available for the men. The Anglican Church took responsibility for the daily concerts held at the Shelter. Theatrical equipment and games such as checkers and cards were also supplied. Many groups were brought together to make the Day Shelter a success. The Day Shelter for Unemployed Men continued to receive the support of the city and Montreal Tramways in 1932 and 1933. Educational classes and a shoe repair shop soon supplemented its activities. The Day Shelter was a success. It kept the unemployed homeless men occupied and off the

streets during the winter months until 1934. In that year, it became of less concern since the number of homeless men had decreased and reached a level that older institutions, such as the Salvation Army and the Old Brewery Mission, could handle.<sup>22</sup>

The provision of such necessities as food, fuel, clothing and shelter were unavoidable. Recreational activities organized by the Council, however, were less essential, but helped perpetuate and impress the moral values of charity workers upon recipients of relief. The threat of large groups of idle unemployed men was eliminated by keeping them occupied with entertainment and educational activities. In this way the charity workers hoped to uplift the moral standards of the unemployed. The library, educational and training courses were designed to provide a means to a "better" life. While the relief recipients were suitably occupied, the class dispensing charity was protected from the influence of the unemployed and destitute.

### The City's Intervention

The need to organize relief distribution and shelter for the homeless as well as provide activities and recreation, disrupted the normal operations of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. As the burden of relief became too great for private charities to handle, the attraction of municipal social services became greater. The emergence of the Montreal Relief Committee in 1931 and the refuge it supervised was the start of municipal relief services. Consequently, the city started to put itself in a position to take a larger responsibility for social services. The pressure placed upon the existing private agencies made the artificial religious and linguistic divisions between the organizations more evident. The stage was set for the public sector to assume a larger role in social services. Private charities had dealt with emergency needs and the municipality had had time to plan its strategy for relief services. The compounded and continuous demands for relief made it increasingly difficult for private charities to meet these needs. By the end of 1933, the city was ready to make its first tentative steps into relief services. The entry of the city of Montreal into relief services enabled the Montreal Council of Social Agencies to become more interested in long term strategies to deal with relief, poverty and unemployment, thereby leaving the city to assume the time consuming occupation of providing relief.

In 1933, the "Unemployment Commission" replaced the Advisory Relief Board. H.A. Terreault, a former chief engineer of the city, was appointed chairman of the commission. The city's decision to reform its relief services was based strictly on financial considerations, consequently the commission did not start its work without protest and resistance. The Trades and Labour Council objected to its formation because the Unemployment Commission intended to distribute direct relief instead of setting up a program of public



**FIGURE 1.** 1941 display of the Parks and Playgrounds Association as a part of the Federated Charities.

SOURCE: McGill University Archives. Manuscript Group 2079. Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association, PR025433.

works. Private charities contested the city's right to take over unemployment relief distribution, because they could not hope to regulate the quality of relief services offered by municipal authorities. The charities could not be sure that the city would use the same definitions of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. Although the private charities pleaded for assistance, they wanted to be sure that the assistance came on their terms. Financial assistance would have satisfied them. The private charities did not want to disrupt their carefully regulated system with the inexperienced efforts of the municipal authorities.<sup>23</sup>

In December 1933, the commission took direct control of the distribution of relief and relief applicants brought their requests to the city. This departure in city policy lifted a great burden from the private charities of Montreal. The municipal authorities, however, were far from providing as complete a program of social services as did the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. The city of Montreal merely dispensed cash relief. It did not attempt to maintain a clothing depot, employment bureau or registry for homeless men as Toronto's Department of Public Welfare did. The Unemployment Commission was Montreal's first serious attempt to provide relief. Four years of deprivation and poverty for the city's population had preceded its formation.

The Council's temporary emergency relief structure was dismantled only when the city finally agreed to take on greater responsibility for relief services. The relief of Protestant families was transferred immediately to the Commission and single women remained in the care of private charity. Systems of relief in kind by using food vouchers or 'bons' were abolished and relief recipients were given cheques. The Council welcomed the new Commission in its 1933 annual report as revolutionizing unemployment relief in Montreal.

The work of the Unemployment Relief Commission directed by Brigadier General E. de B. Panet, Col. Kenneth Perry and Mr. A. Mathieu, satisfied the watchdogs of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies for the short period it was in operation. There were problems, of course. In 1934 a system of cash relief proved inadequate to pay rents, and a number of relief recipients were evicted. Fuel allowances, too, were insufficient. In an address delivered to the City Improvement League, December 20, 1935, Brigadier General Panet assured the league that these problems were being straightened out. Rents were paid directly to the landlords. Some attempts were made to supply work for unemployed men at a dollar a day. There was an attempt to demand proof that unattached women collecting relief, were really in search of employment. The possibility of sending single unemployed men to federal relief camps was investigated and women investigators were employed, in response to critiques that none were working for the Commission. Panet noted that the operating costs of the Commission represented 4.48 per cent of the cost of relief. Panet also described the amounts paid for direct relief in Montreal as being increasingly generous.<sup>24</sup>

These relief payments represented equal contributions from municipal, provincial and federal governments. The enormous increases in direct relief were not related to a boost in this program by the city as implied by Panet. The acceleration of the relief program in 1932 and 1933 can be traced to the decisions of the federal government to rely upon direct relief rather than public works. These payments remained consistently high during the first two years of the Unemployment Relief Commission's operations. The Commission made every effort to ensure the efficient distribution of relief. Soon after its establishment, however, the Commission was plagued by accusations of abuse of power and funds. By 1935 the Council began to see the limitations of the Commission's work. It hoped that the scope of the Commission's activities could be broadened to include: a clothing allowance, provision for household necessities, medical care, relief for families who arrived in Montreal after May 1, 1933 and relief for families, who were destitute, but were not able to work.<sup>25</sup>

### The Council's Supplementary Programs

The Unemployment Commission did not put an end to the Montreal Council of Social Agencies' relief work. Many projects were initiated before the Unemployment Commission was formed and continued long afterward. Among these projects were other organized activities for the unemployed of the community, not just the homeless, following the example set by the Day Shelter for the Unemployed. The Community Garden League was formed in 1932, and enjoyed the greatest degree of success of all the activities planned for the unemployed. It was a joint project of the Education and Recreation Division and the Dependency and



**FIGURE 2.** 1940, Community Gardens League in Maisonneuve.

SOURCE: McGill University Archives. Manuscript Group 2079. Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association PU025831.



**FIGURE 3.** 1940, Community Gardens League, “Gardening in Maisonneuve.”

SOURCE: McGill University Archives. Manuscript Group 2079. Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association, PU025983.

Delinquency Division of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. The League’s goal was to distribute vacant lands for garden plots to the families of unemployed men in residential areas. In addition to the land, tools and seeds were provided for each man participating in the project. Hence, these men were able to work their own plot to provide vegetables for their families. This project was able to keep the unemployed occupied and simultaneously supplemented their food allowances.

The project was considered a huge success. In its first year over 500 community gardens were established in seven residential districts at a total cost of approximately \$800. The program grew steadily every year with 1,850 gardens in 1933, 2,434 in 1934 and 2,983 in 1935.<sup>26</sup> This project outlasted the depression. In 1937 the Montreal Council of Social Agencies ceased to classify the Community Garden League as an emergency relief activity. Since the community continued to be interested in the activity, it was transferred to the Parks and Playgrounds Association. It operated for the remainder of the depression and in the 1940s as a recreational activity.

A second concentrated effort to occupy the leisure time of the unemployed appeared in the form of the Rosemount Community Centre. This centre was formed in 1932, as a joint experiment of the Parks and Playgrounds Association and the Family Welfare Association in cooperation with the Junior League, which provided an initial \$1,000 grant.<sup>27</sup> The Protestant Board of School Commissioners made four classrooms available five nights a week. The Rosemount Community Centre provided classes, practical training, clubs and common interest groups. There was sufficient variety among these services to interest the whole family. Sewing classes, carpentry, sign writing, lectures, debates, orchestra, family concerts, entertainment, dance, instruction in health and cooking, were among the activities sponsored by the centre.

Under the administration of the Parks and Playgrounds Association, the Rosemount Community Centre also outlasted the depression. In December 1932, its first month of operation, it recorded an attendance of 3,085. A wide variety of interest groups were housed by the centre and it recorded a large attendance throughout the depression.

In 1933 the Montreal Boys' Association echoed the concern of the Council regarding idleness. It noted that, "Increasingly large numbers of these youths were found to be wandering the streets without hope of securing employment . . . anxious to work at anything rather than prolong . . . enforced idleness. *Something had to be done.*" The result of these fears was the Unemployed Boys' Training Farm. With land at Caledonia Springs placed at the disposal of the Association by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, a farm was established in May 1933, and by the



FIGURE 4. A girl's group from the Rosemount Community Centre, 1932.

SOURCE: McGill University Archives. Manuscript Group 2079. Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association, PU025747.

end of the first month 100 boys were sent to train as farm labourers. The farm was successful in taking boys off the streets and limiting their leisure time. The organizers also hoped to teach the boys the elements of farm work as they tried "to wean [them] from the bright lights of the city." It was hoped that they would see advantages in "country life." This was Montreal's own version of the back-to-the-land program, vaunted by Edouard Montpetit of the Quebec Social Insurance Commission and some of the federal relief programs.<sup>28</sup>

The Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association continued to advance its program of "Constructive Use of Leisure." In 1934, the Maisonneuve Community Centre was formed under its direction with financial support from the Junior League and the Financial Federation. It was modelled after the Rosemount Community Centre and organized activities in which each member of the family could participate.<sup>29</sup>

In 1934, the Education and Recreation Division of the Council proposed a program for the "employment of white collar unemployed in recreation leadership." The new program was discussed and endorsed. It was another attempt to set unemployed white collar workers apart from the blue collar. This program, however, was never formally put into action. It may have been used informally when recruiting volunteers to offer courses, but never in an organized or planned way.<sup>30</sup>

The concentrated efforts to provide material relief for the poor were consistent with the Council's work prior to the depression. In the past, relief in kind such as food, fuel, jobs and clothing, had always been the first choice of the Council, in keeping with its Charity Organization Society principles. Direct relief or cash payments always were avoided because it was feared that it would have a pauperizing influence, creating a class dependent upon and expecting charity. In the face of the overwhelming unemployment of the depression, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was unable to maintain such a strong stand against direct relief. It could not supply employment instead of relief, but through its varied organized activities it was able to ensure that the energies of the idle were channelled into suitable endeavours.

There was a certain element of social control in the Council's planning. It could not use cash relief payments to buy food, fuel and clothing and distribute these items, because of the sheer magnitude of such a task. The minimum of relief services was straining the Council to its limit. With the help of community and day shelter projects, the Council hoped to counteract the negative effects of distributing funds to people who did nothing to earn them. During this period of adjustment, 1930 to 1934, this program to improve the sense of self worth of the unemployed required almost as much effort as distributing relief.

### The Need for Adjustment

At mid-decade, the depression had forced the Montreal Council of Social Agencies to make many compromises to adjust to emergency circumstances. In these years, the Council's activities were concentrated upon emergency relief services to the detriment of all its other programs and services. Short-term planning was the rule; there was neither the time nor the resources to devote to long range strategies.

The Council had tried to patch and make due with old policies and methods in drastically changed financial times, simply to cope with the crisis. Coordination of services was one of the Charity Organization principles maintained by the Council. This led the Council to cooperate with other religious charitable federations and the government. But as the burden of relief became increasingly large, the Council viewed government responsibility for social services as the inevitable solution. Only when the municipal Unemployment Relief Commission began to assume control of relief services was there a change in the orientation of its work. The initiation of municipal relief services allowed the Council to abandon its emergency relief structure and return to its original principles and methods of operation. The major reassessment of the Council's work and ideology, published in the "Report of the Survey Committee" in 1935, reaffirmed many of its original principles and proved to be the foundation for its future growth and development.

The latter half of the 1930s was a period of reassessment and reorganization for the Montreal Council of Social Agencies. It, however, could not pick up its operations where it had left them in 1929. The depression was not over and its effects extended beyond the city's new task of distributing relief to unemployed men. Although the first half of the depression had changed some ideas about unemployment, it reinforced others. The impact of the depression on social services was irreversible, as the recommendations of the "Report of the Survey Committee" in 1935 made painfully clear.

Two dominant themes emerged from the "Report of the Survey Committee." First, the report suggested a streamlining of service and social agencies and the reorganization of many services on a broader city-wide basis. This was a return to the original recommendations of the survey report of 1919, when the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was formed and of the Quebec Social Insurance Commission. The report was a reaffirmation of Charity Organization goals of efficiency and the elimination of redundancy. Second, there was a call for greater public assistance and responsibility for social services.

These recommendations went to the heart of the crisis. Financial pressure, after all, had led to the survey report in the first place. The Federation's fund raising campaign had become a great concern, since competition from other federations had become a threat. The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies was formed in 1916 and the Financial Federation of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was founded in 1922. Under financial pressure of the depression, the Catholic charities finally organized into federations. In 1929 the Federation of Catholic Charities for English speaking Catholics was founded as was the Federation des Oeuvres de Charite Canadienne-Francaise in 1933. Since the competition for funds was increasingly greater, the survey report suggested a single "community chest" to end competing

appeals for public donations.<sup>32</sup> Consistent with the goals enumerated at the formation of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, the survey recommended a city-wide, non-sectarian council. Just as in 1919, when the original survey report was published, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was unable to interest the city's other federations in cooperation on a city-wide council and federation.

The cost conscious reforms of the "Report of the Survey Committee" extended to all the divisions of the Council's operations. Although every member social agency of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies did not belong to the Financial Federation and consequently did not receive grants from it, those that did belong to the Federation depended upon its grants as a major source of funding. The Social Agencies that were members of both the Financial Federation and Council followed the progress of the survey committee with great interest. The proposed budget cuts were supported by the Montreal Council of Social Agencies and its member agencies, but only because these cuts were conditional on greater government responsibility for social services.

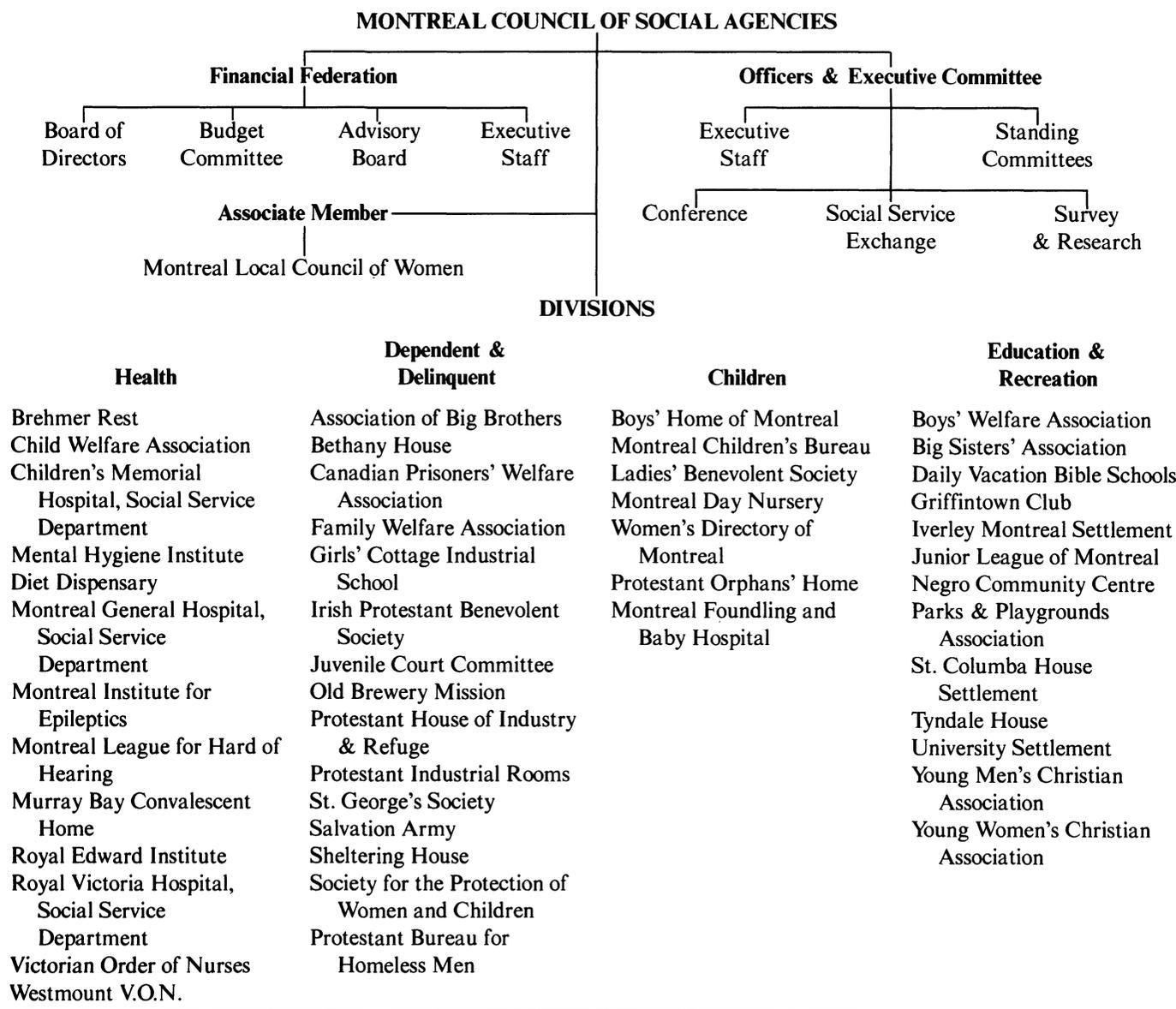
The report's suggestions reached into every corner of the Council's workings. The overall structure, however, remained unchanged. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the similarity of the structure of the organization in 1930 and 1940. The changes recommended by the report were internal rather than structural. Whenever possible the survey committee felt obliged to economize and urge municipal and provincial governments to take a greater share of the responsibility for social services. The report's objective was to, "intensify their efforts to persuade Public Authorities to remedy the present inadequacies in the provision for unemployment relief, particularly with respect to the services which philanthropy is now compelled to undertake and finance."<sup>32</sup>

This plea for public assistance was a departure from the independence to which the Montreal Council of Social Agencies was accustomed. The idea of the public sector playing a role in social services had long been a part of the Charity Organization philosophy. Francis H. McLean, the first general secretary of the Montreal Charity Organization Society, complained at the turn of the century about the lack of public social services. The problem had become more pronounced and acute during the depression of the 1930s. This plea for increased public assistance in the area of social services is significant because it was a sign of the reinforcement of the traditional values of the Charity Organization Society, that were at the base of the Council's philosophy.

The report stressed the need for trained professional social workers to have a larger part in the Council's future. The report advised a separation of finances and social work so that social workers could more readily have an impact on their area of speciality. Planning and professionalization were emphasized throughout.

TABLE 3

Flow Chart of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, 1930.



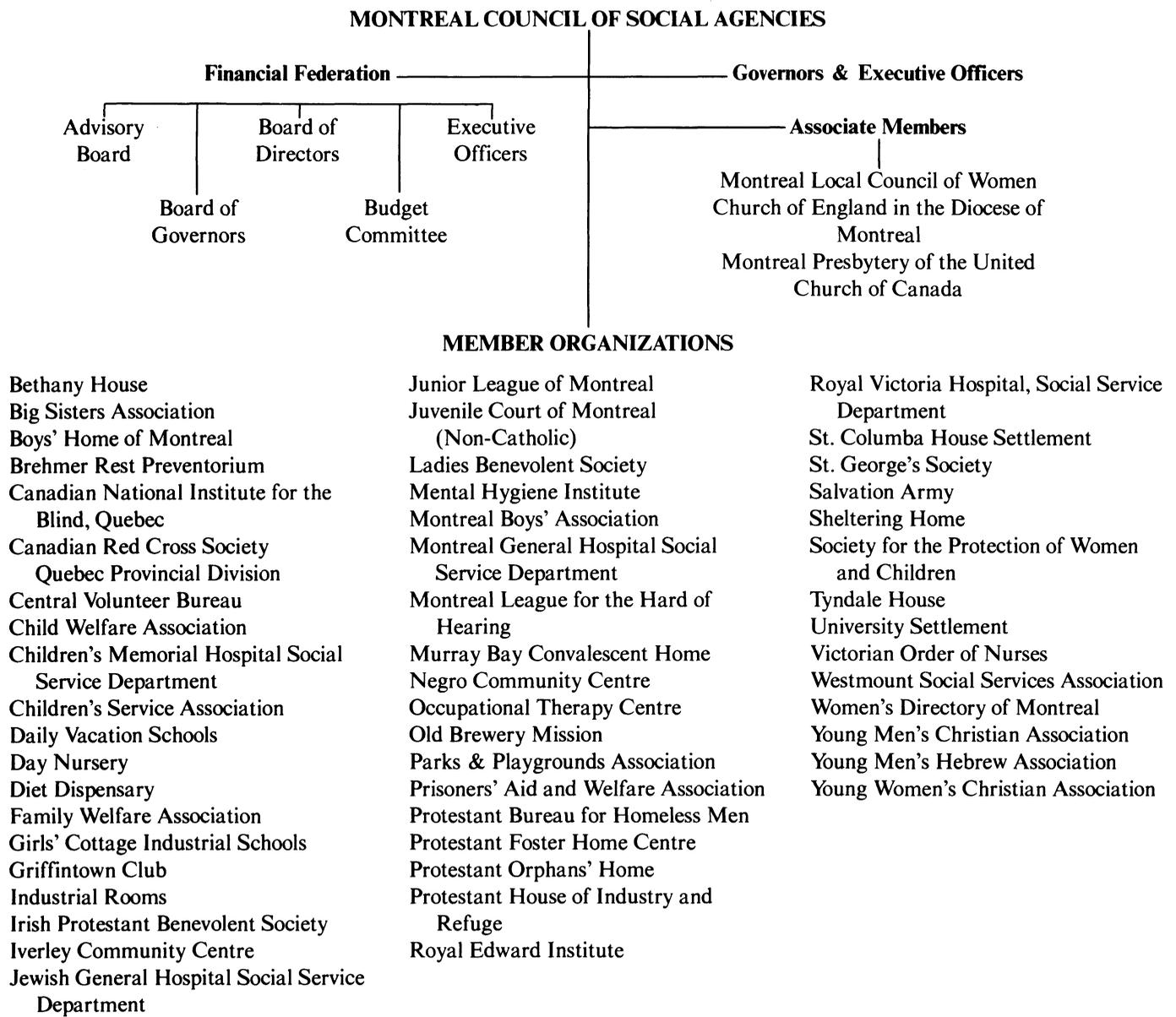
The survey report provided a blueprint for the future, ironically by returning to the notions of streamlined and efficient organization planned in 1919. The "Report of the Survey Committee" called for stricter admission standards for admitting new agencies. It pointed to the inadequacies of the city's relief services and called for the Council to continue to lobby for increased public social programs. The report also recommended that a minimum of professional social workers be placed on the Council.

In the latter half of the 1930s, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies reformed its methods and operations following the recommendations of the "Report of the Survey

Committee" and in turn urged municipal, provincial and federal governments to advance into the field of social work. Prior to the depression, private charities believed that their work was infinitely superior to any system devised by government authorities and were not interested in allocating a share of their work to public authorities. The surplus of unemployed during the depression, however, made private charities rethink their policies. A role was created for government agencies, when private charities could not handle a complete program of social services. Once the Montreal Council of Social Agencies decided government had a role to play in the field, it continued to press the various levels of government to assume the roles the Council deemed appro-

TABLE 4

## Flow Chart of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies, 1940.



priate. The report's suggestion that the Council lobby for change was well received.

The Montreal Council of Social Agencies had long been frustrated by the lack of government social services. The Council grew out of the Charity Organization movement, which assumed that a minimum of public social services had been established. The Council's Charity Organization principles were constantly forced to adjust to the municipality's failure to accept such responsibility. By 1936, the Financial Federation felt its role had been so altered by the financial pressures of the depression and the advent of government

participation in unemployment relief that it altered its policy. Although the Federation knew it would be criticized for its stand, it decided that any relief applicants eligible for the benefits of the city's Unemployment Relief Commission should be refused so that the federation could concentrate on persons ineligible for public support. In 1935, 191,778 unemployed persons were listed as relief recipients from the city and 10,000 more were estimated as receiving relief from private charities. In 1936, approximately 150,000 people were still on the city relief rolls. The group assisted by private charities in that year was described as the "unknown thousands."<sup>33</sup>

The reevaluation of goals, methods and policies that followed the "Report of the Survey Committee" and the concept of government responsibility for unemployment, indicated that private charities were more than willing to give up relief services. The Council carved its own niche in social work by choosing rehabilitative and preventative work as its sole responsibility. This reassessment of the 1930s represented a return to and victory of the values and principles of the Charity Organization Society.

### Administrative Reorganization

Relinquishing relief to the civic authorities proved more difficult than might be assumed, since the city was still reluctant to assume the financial burden and political responsibility. In 1937 a major change occurred. First, on March 12, 1937 the City Council appointed the Civic Commission to help revise the city's relief services.

Then on the night of March 16, the provincial police seized the offices of the Unemployment Relief Commission on the orders of the Attorney General. The commission was outraged and were soon able to have its office reopened. The local newspapers reported that the Attorney General had conducted a reinvestigation of every Montreal relief applicant, to ensure that the city's interpretation of relief legislation was consistent with the provincial application.<sup>34</sup> This invasion of the Montreal relief offices was a striking indication of the lack of cooperation between the provincial and municipal governments and foreshadowed future conflicts.

The Civic Commission to Investigate Unemployment Relief presented its report on June 23, 1937, including majority and minority reports. Dr. Pedley, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies' representative, refused to sign the majority report, which urged that the province begin to contribute to expenses wholly supported by the city. It pressed the city to relieve itself of the burden of the unemployed, but not at the expense of the unemployed and that the commission be replaced by a superintendent. The minority generally supported these recommendations, except that it stressed that the commission should not be replaced by a superintendent. Both reports were made with greater cost efficiency in mind. Despite the praises of the commission's work, in July 1937 the Unemployment Relief Commission was dissolved when the Montreal Unemployment Relief Department was formed.<sup>35</sup>

Although the commission and its report were supposed to aid the cause of municipal relief administration, its real strategy was to try to make private charities absorb the costs of relief. One of the most significant clashes between the city of Montreal and private charity over relief occurred while the Commission to Investigate Unemployment Relief was still preparing its report.

The 1937 report of the Financial Federation stated that "The burden upon the Family Welfare Association is greater

than it has ever been and the relief arrangements are less satisfactory than they were in the depths of the depression."<sup>36</sup> The Family Welfare Association's increased burden can be attributed to several changes. First, the federal government made provisions for unemployment relief, but did not set up a program to administer it nor did it clearly define the groups that were eligible to receive relief. Until 1937 the eligible recipients had been determined by provincial interpretations.

In 1936 the National Employment Commission was formed. One of the most important contributions of its final report was that it clarified the definition of eligible relief recipients. The commission stated that aid granted by the Dominion as "unemployment aid" was to be given only to those who were employable.<sup>37</sup> The portion of the population, which was destitute for reasons independent of the depression, such as age and illness, were denied unemployment relief. The unemployables generally fell into the group that was classified as "deserving" poor. They were widows with children, people suffering from incurable illnesses and the aged, for the most part. Traditionally, this group was the responsibility of private charity and according to the National Employment Commission, the federal government was not going to offer this group any support. The Montreal Council of Social Agencies agreed with this interpretation of the Relief Acts. This clarification of federal policy, however, coincided with provincial and municipal attempts to reduce relief costs.<sup>38</sup> The provincial and municipal governments decided to take advantage of this strict interpretation of eligible relief recipients to economize. The burden of relief for the ineligible relief recipients thus fell upon private charities that were already overburdened. The poor became the victims of traditional notions and cost efficiency. If they could not work the applicants were not unemployed and consequently did not deserve or qualify for the unemployment relief, subsidized by the federal government.

The unemployment relief situation was further aggravated in Montreal by the rigid residence requirement. Relief applicants were required to have lived in Montreal for four consecutive years, while most cities asked that its applicants live in the city for one year. These practices made Montreal's public relief burden comparatively smaller than that of other major Canadian cities, but placed a heavier burden on private charities. The Montreal Council of Social Agencies opposed the city's narrow view of its responsibilities and protested that private charities would not be able to cope with the burdens created by the stricter enforcement of relief distribution by the city.

On March 5, 1937, provincial authorities refused to fund relief of women, because they considered them unemployable. This group included unmarried mothers, deserted, separated and single women. This strict interpretation of the intent of the federal government's aid to the unemployed was an attempt to make private charity take responsibility for as many of the unemployable as possible. In a letter from

William Tremblay, provincial Minister of Labour to Brigadier Panet of the Unemployment Relief Commission, Tremblay's policy was made clear: "To resume my dear General, . . . it is my formal intention to return to the integral spirit of the Federal Law, and to limit aid to persons capable of working, but incapable of procuring work." Once the National Employment Commission defined those ineligible for federal relief funds, no group was willing to take responsibility for their relief.<sup>39</sup>

The National Employment Commission's interpretation of the law allowed both the municipal and provincial governments to abandon their responsibilities for the unemployable. Consequently, on June 1, 1,334 of 3,000 widows, unmarried mothers, deserted, single and separated women were struck from the city's relief rolls and were turned over to the Family Welfare Association for aid. The Family Welfare Association, however, refused to be forced into this position. It was not prepared to accept more responsibility. Its tougher stand against the city's actions resulted in a large portion of the unemployable applicants, who were struck from the rolls being reinstated by October 23. Those who were not returned to the city's relief rolls were accepted by the Family Welfare Association. In 1937 the relief applicants that were disqualified by the city accounted for a \$20,000.75 deficit for the Family Welfare Association. The municipality's decisions had immediate and serious impact on private social agencies that were forced to shoulder burdens abandoned by the public sector.<sup>40</sup>

These extraordinary pressures of relief persisted in 1938. The Financial Federation's Advisory Board, Directors and agency presidents decided that the Family Welfare Association should refuse all employable persons relief after March 15. On April 30, 1938 the City Council granted the Federation a subsidy of \$17,305.36 to reimburse it for unemployment relief expenditures for 1937 and the Federation consequently relaxed its new position denying relief to all employable applicants.<sup>41</sup> This struggle to force the city to accept their portion of relief services continued throughout the 1930s.

As early as 1937, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies began to insist that private philanthropy could not support the destitute. Public welfare provision of relief for the unemployable persons of the city, became one of the Council's main objectives. In 1939 and 1940, even after the outbreak of war, relief remained a major concern of the Montreal Council of Social Agencies and its Financial Federation. They had relinquished supervision of relief services to the public sector, not only because of the inability to handle such a large burden during the depression but because of their feelings that emergency relief services were a public responsibility.

As the depression decade came to a close, the Montreal Council of Social Agencies' pleas for increased public assist-

ance in social service became a demand. The Council used this period to make the structure of its organization more efficient and effective and reassessed its role in the field of social services, as primarily preventative and rehabilitative. The Council felt that it was time for the city of Montreal to accept what it deemed the city's proper responsibility for its destitute, as other cities had before it. The Council's final separation of public and private duties in the realm of social work was not only an attempt to gain respite from the severity of the depression, but a triumph of traditional Charity Organization principles upon which the Montreal Council of Social Agencies' philosophy was based.

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