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# "Canada Needs All Our Food-Power" Industrial Nutrition in Canada, 1941–1948

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### Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine l'économie politique de la nutrition en tant que stratégie parrainée par l'État pour accroître la productivité des travailleurs industriels, en temps de guerre comme en temps de paix. Au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'État et ses alliés de l'industrie des munitions ont largement considéré la santé nutritionnelle des travailleurs comme un élément essentiel pour parvenir à une production industrielle maximale en temps de guerre. Après la guerre, l'État et l'industrie ont tous deux estimé que la santé nutritionnelle des corps des travailleurs était essentielle à la prospérité du Canada d'après-guerre. Faciliter mais aussi frustrer ces programmes nutritionnels largement dirigés par les États était une combinaison des connaissances médicales et scientifiques, une participation parfois incertaine et imprévisible des employeurs et des travailleurs, et des contextes historiques nationaux et internationaux plus vastes.

## ARTICLE

# "Canada Needs All Our Food-Power": Industrial Nutrition in Canada, 1941–1948

**Eric Strikwerda**

IN NOVEMBER 1942, CANADA'S NUTRITION Division chief Dr. Lionel B. Pett stood before the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Advertisers and made a startling observation. Poor nutritional health among workers in Canada's war industries was costing the nation's war effort some nine million lost man-days each year. Put in material terms, Pett reckoned that this translated into no less than 2,000 bombers not built and therefore not contributing to the Allied cause overseas. Malnutrition among war workers, he explained, meant "increased sickness and fatigue. It means backaches and sore eyes and sore muscles and tired eyes and apathy and accidents and stomach troubles and worry and more colds and many other common causes of absenteeism or decreased production."<sup>1</sup> Winning the war, in other words, rested in no small measure on workers achieving maximum nutritional health. "Canada," Pett concluded, "needs all our food power."<sup>2</sup> Pett was far from alone in linking good nutrition to the successful prosecution of the war. Politicians, newspaper reporters and magazine writers, medical commentators, social service agents, and many others agreed almost universally that good nutrition practices on the home front could only aid the Allied cause overseas. Who could dispute such an obvious connection between healthful eating and production?<sup>3</sup>

1. L. B. Pett, "Food Makes a Difference," *Canadian Public Health Journal* 33, 12 (December 1942): 567. See Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 38–40.

2. Pett, "Food Makes a Difference," 565.

3. Nutritionists in the United States had come to similar conclusions. See Robert S. Goodhart & L. B. Pett, "The War-Time Nutrition Programs for Workers in the United States and Canada," *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 23, 2 (April 1945): 161–179.

During wartime, nutritionists explicitly equated good industrial nutrition practices with the widely understood and highly patriotic “good” of the Allied interest. But the benefits of encouraging good nutrition practices went well beyond Canada’s immediate wartime needs. In fact, this basic impulse translated easily into the postwar years, as state-sponsored nutritionists from the Nutrition Division and their industrial allies subtly cleaved toward equating good industrial nutrition with the widely understood and often highly nationalistic “good” of Canada’s postwar economic growth and prosperity.

For Pett and his nutrition-expert colleagues, the evidence was clear. Malnourished workers missed more workdays than healthy workers did. Workers who skipped important meals through the day, either by their own choice or through circumstances beyond their control, were less productive on the job than were workers who followed a healthy, nutritional food regimen. And workers who, for a variety of complex reasons, neglected their diets eroded both their own working morale and the morale of any industrial organization with which they were associated. The solution was equally clear. Encouraging workers to eat better both on and off the job would reduce industrial wastage, increase productivity and efficiency, and bolster workplace morale – an especially important outcome given the soaring rates of worker discontent, work stoppages, and strikes through the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, industrial nutrition programs placed much of the responsibility for nutritional health on workers and their families, generally requiring minimal employer outlays, and leaving management rights largely unmolested.

More broadly, nutrition experts intended their interventions in both wartime and peacetime to shore up a particular capitalist and patriarchal status quo even in the face of a dramatically shifting terrain on the domestic front. State-sponsored nutrition campaigns promised the universality of human health that knew no class boundaries even while simultaneously focusing to a large extent on the industrial and resource working class. This is not surprising. The industrial and resource working class became central to the accelerating growth of production associated with the onset of World War II and, later, with the nation’s postwar economic prosperity.<sup>5</sup> Nutritionists’ emphasis on workers’ food both at home and on the job, in this sense,

4. See Douglas Cruikshank & Gregory Kealey, “Strikes in Canada, 1891–1950: III. The Data,” *Labour/Le Travail* 20 (Fall 1987): 133–145.

5. In this sense, nutrition experts were not alone in asserting their specialized health knowledge and expecting its application would better Canadian society. See, for example, Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario’s Mothers and Children, 1900–1940* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Wendy Mitchinson, *Body Failure: Medical Views of Women, 1900–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). For an earlier period, see Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). See also the more recent Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, *Prescribed Norms: Women and Health in Canada and the United States since 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

fashioned new spaces for state agents to exert an influence on workers' lives.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, and despite women's increased participation in the waged labour market, nutrition campaigns tended to place disproportionate responsibility for workers' nutritional health on women.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the success of state-sponsored nutrition campaigns rested on the unpaid labour and cooperation of workers and their families. In the end, health experts did not aim their nutrition campaigns principally at alleviating hunger during times of austerity. Nor did they necessarily concern themselves with achieving greater nutritional health to enhance the quality of Canadians' lives in any general sense. They instead linked their nutrition work to making production more efficient by reducing sickness on the job and improving workplace morale. The prescriptions of nutrition experts likewise tended to set industrial nutritional standards according to employers' capacities to accommodate them, rather than to workers' actual nutritional needs. And they were heavily focused on the uses of food as a means to further the nationalist, capitalist, and patriarchal interests of industry and the state.

6. Catherine Gidney has explored this effect, arguing that post-secondary educators' focus on student health "led to the creation of new sites through which administrators could exert their moral vision of the university and shape the student body." Gidney, *Tending the Student Body: Youth, Health, and the Modern University* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 9.

9. Mary Louise Adams has similarly examined the role of educators-as-experts in attempts to shape normalcy. See Adams, "The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality," in Michelle Webber & Kate Bezanson, eds., *Rethinking Society in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2008), 237–246. See also Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

7. See Ian Mosby's important discussion of women's "patriotic double duty of being both 'Rosie the Riveter' and the 'Housoldier' for the duration of the war," in *Food Will Win*, 104. See also Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 147. Amy Bentley has come to similar conclusions in the United States; see Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998). See also Jennifer Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada's Welfare State, 1939–1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Michael D. Stevenson, "Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle": *National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources during World War II* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). Veronica Strong-Boag illustrates the inherent contradictory impulses that saw women enter the workforce in record numbers while at the same time facing expectations that they continue to fulfill the "traditional" roles of wife and mother. Strong-Boag, "Home Dreams: Women and the Suburban Experiment in Canada, 1945–1960," *Canadian Historical Review* 72, 4 (December 1991): 471–504. See also Franca Iacovetta's work on postwar working-class families in Toronto, including *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992). More recently, Justin Nordstrom has noted similar state rhetoric in the US during World War I laying particular responsibilities on women to "serve less food, to prevent household waste and inefficiency, and to observe 'wheatless' and 'meatless' days, so that vitally needed foodstuffs could be sent to soldiers and civilians overseas." Nordstrom, "And Serve the Cause of Freedom: American Food Conservation in the First World War," *Global Food History* 3, 1 (2017): 41.

Canadian historians have in recent years contributed enthusiastically to a growing international literature exploring human interactions with food in the past.<sup>8</sup> Some of the earliest historical considerations of food writ large appeared in the contexts of economic and political history. But these tended to concentrate on foods-as-commodities and focused on the economics and science of production, as well as the transportation networks that brought those commodities to market.<sup>9</sup> More recently, historians have begun to employ different frameworks to analyze the cultural, social, political, and economic nature of food in Canadians' daily lives.<sup>10</sup> In these studies, Canadians at different times and across regional, class, ethnic, and gendered lines produced food, shopped for food, consumed food, and introduced new cultural dynamics onto Canadian palates (and plates).<sup>11</sup> They have put food to use as protest,<sup>12</sup> as a way to preserve and assert collective identities, and, more ominously, as a means of coercing groups and individuals to comply with broader state-directed policies and goals.<sup>13</sup> A smaller but growing field building on this work considers

8. Recent international examples include Katherine Leonard Turner, *How the Other Half Ate: A History of Working-Class Meals at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Megan J. Elias, *Food in the United States, 1890–1945* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press, 2009); Megan Elias, *Lunch: A History* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

9. Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957); Harold A. Innis, *The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1940).

10. Canadian historians have in recent decades made important additions to wider international literatures relating to food. See, for example, Janis Thiessen, *Snacks: A Canadian Food History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017); Dorothy Duncan, *Canadians at Table: Food, Fellowship, and Folklore: A Culinary History of Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2006); Steve Penfold, *The Donut: A Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Diane Tye, *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Esther Reiter, *Making Fast Food: From the Frying Pan into the Fryer* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); W. H. Heick, *A Propensity to Protect: Butter, Margarine, and the Rise of Urban Culture in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991).

11. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek & Marlene Epp, eds., *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Nathalie Cooke, ed., *What's to Eat? Entrees in Canadian Food History* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

12. Julie Guard, "A Mighty Power against the Cost of Living: Canadian Housewives Organize in the 1930s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 77 (Spring 2010): 27–47; Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900–1939* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992).

13. Ian Mosby, "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 46, 91 (May 2013): 615–642; James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). See also John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential*

critical connections between food and nutrition science. Ian Mosby's pioneering *Food Will Win the War*, for example, charts the various ways the state, in conjunction with its bureaucratic agents and food industry allies, cast food production and consumption as patriotic activities critical to the successful prosecution of World War II. Similarly, Caroline Durand's *Nourrir la machine humaine* explores nutrition experts' efforts at convincing Quebeckers through the first half of the 20th century that nutritional health was an individual responsibility, while at the same time advocating a broader discourse that would see nutritionally healthy bodies in service to state and market interests.<sup>14</sup> The present study builds on these contributions in two ways. First, it considers in detail the state's and nutrition experts' attention to ensuring that industrial workers consumed nutritious foods for wartime production. And second, it extends Mosby's and Durand's analyses of nutrition policy into the immediate postwar years, as both the state and nutrition experts continued to emphasize industrial workers' nutritional health, only this time in the service of postwar prosperity and, not incidentally, employer profits.

## Nutrition Science and the Industrial Body

MID-20TH-CENTURY nutrition experts drew on well-established and long-standing medico-scientific connections between the consumption of food and the human body's capacity for productive work.<sup>15</sup> More than a century earlier, researchers in Germany had first divided what they called "ultimate foodstuffs" into three broad categories (proteins, fats, and carbohydrates) and then begun investigating the processes by which the body transformed those foodstuffs into energy and waste.<sup>16</sup> Inspired by this research, as well as by the emerging industrial order, economic and scientific thinkers began imagining physical bodies as human motors. As historian Cynthia Commachio notes, "Body and machine were [or ought to be] interchangeable component parts of the larger system of industrial capitalist society."<sup>17</sup>

Such thinking was closely linked to the emergence of the factory system, marked as it was by the application of mechanized technological innovations to industrial production. As work moved out of the home and the small

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*School System, 1879–1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

14. Caroline Durand's *Nourrir la machine humaine: Nutrition et alimentation au Québec, 1860–1945* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

15. Cynthia Comacchio cogently explores the historical background of "human motors," in "Mechanomorphosis: Science, Management, and 'Human Machinery' in Industrial Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 35–67.

16. Dietrich Milles, "Working Capacity and Calorie Consumption: The History of Rational Physical Economy," in Harmka Kamminga & Andrew Cunningham, eds., *The Science and Culture of Nutrition, 1840–1940* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 75–76.

17. Commachio, "Mechanomorphosis," 41–42.

workshop, and into larger industrial spaces through especially the mid- to late 19th century, a process of capitalist consolidation reorganized the production process. Worker autonomy in determining the nature and pace of production gave way to employer-installed time clocks and bells and whistles alerting workers to the starts and stops of the working day.<sup>18</sup> These industrial changes occurred for the most part only gradually, and their characters differed greatly across, and even within, industries and regions throughout the industrializing world. Nevertheless, even the most dilettante observer of the unfolding industrial order readily recognized by the middle of the 19th century a general pattern toward greater industrial efficiencies through employer control over the production process.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, and given what appeared to be broad scientific consensus on the relationship between food consumed by the body and energy produced and measured by work outputs, one might well expect employers' close attention to the nutritional health of workers. And yet, historian Arthur McIvor has noted in the British context that this was not so. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, he has argued, "there is little evidence of any widespread movement to rationalize labour management scientifically or to accept (or even test) the hypothesis that improving the health and fitness of workers could reap considerable benefits in terms of increased productivity."<sup>20</sup> Employers, in other words, retained an apparent fealty to classical economic theory, viewing workers (and their bodies) as merely one among multiple commodities that together made up the production process.<sup>21</sup>

The onset of World War I finally revealed in a way never clearer the consequences of nutritional deficiencies among especially the young men on whom nations relied to do their soldiering. Authorities on all sides of the conflict were appalled at their military-medical structures' almost routine rejection of potential recruits for medical reasons.<sup>22</sup> And while the inability to serve due

18. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (December 1967): 56–97.

19. See Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: The Economic History of Britain 1700–1914* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

20. A. J. McIvor, "Employers, the Government, and Industrial Fatigue in Britain, 1890–1918," *British Journal of Industrial Medicine* 44 (1987): 731.

21. McIvor, "Employers," 725.

22. Actual rejection figures remain elusive, historian David Silbey warns, given the irregular medical inspections amid the mad rush to enlist, but official estimates of 30 per cent likely underestimate the numbers of British recruits turned away from service. See Silbey, *The British Working-Class and the Enthusiasm for War* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2004), 101. In the United States, historian Susan Levine has noted, "almost one-third of all young men called up for military service after the Americans joined the war had been rejected either because they were underweight or because they had suffered from some nutrition-related condition such as rickets or poor teeth." Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2008), 23.



to ill health could (and doubtless did) have multiple complex causes, medical authorities not infrequently cited malnutrition as a major reason.<sup>23</sup> But while the war exposed the consequences of nutritional neglect among industrial populations, both in terms of effective soldiering at the front and efficient munitions production at home, neither nation-states nor their industrial sectors were especially positioned to deal with the problem in any meaningful way. In the end, and as Canada's Lionel Pett lamented in his address to the Association of Canadian Advertisers in 1942, "almost the total of applied nutrition in the last war ... meant simply getting enough to eat."<sup>24</sup> Pett was exaggerating the limits of the state of nutritional knowledge at the end of the long 19th century, of course, but his observation was not too far off the mark. In practice, nutritionists could offer little more than prescriptive advice to consume sufficient, though varying, quantities of proteins, carbohydrates (including fruits and vegetables), and fats.

Emerging research in the first decade of the century, however, was beginning to suggest that there was a good deal more to "good" nutrition than merely satiating hunger with quantities of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats, however precisely measured or generously doled out. By 1906, researchers in Britain and the United States had begun to conclude that somehow the body required additional components, including what Polish biochemist Casimir Funk called "vitamines" (from vital amines) and minerals, in order to stave off disease and to repair and sustain the body.<sup>25</sup> By the 1920s, these earlier inchoate "additional components" had given way to more precise understandings of the natures and functions of vitamins and minerals.<sup>26</sup> Their discovery, and especially the understanding of the vital role of trace nutrients in maintaining nutritional health, was, according to historian Rima Apple, a "triumph of science."<sup>27</sup> Vitamin science – widely referred to as the newer knowledge of

23. The League of Nations Health Committee's Interim Report (1937) noted that "the rejection as unfit of a proportion of the men called up is not evidence that malnutrition is the only cause of their rejection, but military doctors do, in fact, assert, on their knowledge of the facts, that malnutrition is one of the main causes" (p. 49).

24. Pett, "Food Makes a Difference," 565.

25. R. H. Follis, "Cellular Pathology and the Development of the Deficiency Disease Concept," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 34, 4 (1960): 307. See also M. Teich, "Science and Food during the Great War: Britain and Germany," in Kamminga & Cunningham, eds., *Science and Culture*, 223.

26. Harmke Kamminga, "Vitamins and the Dynamics of Molecularization: Biochemistry, Policy, and Industry in Britain, 1914–1939," in Soraya de Chadarevian & Harmke Kamminga, eds., *Molecularizing Biology and Medicine: New Practices and Alliances, 1910s–1970s* (Amsterdam: Harwood Press, 1998), 83.

27. Rima D. Apple, *Vitamania: Vitamins in American Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 2. By 1921, Apple notes, "scientists recognized three vitamins: Fat soluble vitamin A, water soluble vitamin B and water soluble vitamin C. By 1940 the list had grown to over twenty," 4.



nutrition to distinguish it from the earlier, more general focus on proteins, carbohydrates, and fats – shortly enjoyed a meteoric rise in both the scientific and public imaginations and enhanced the credibility of nutrition science more generally.<sup>28</sup>

In Canada, as throughout the Western world, the newer knowledge of nutrition took medical professionals, consumers, advertisers, and the food industry at large by storm. But the growing popularity of nutritional science largely failed to penetrate state policy in any meaningful way. This ought not be surprising given the prevailing small-l liberal and non-interventionist ideologies animating state policy thinking that dominated pre-World War II Canada. Nevertheless, food (as opposed to nutrition) did feature to varying degrees in the administration of state (and non-state) welfare programs. Early mixed social economy welfare systems, however, tended toward the local and small-scale and aimed to alleviate either perceived unemployment emergencies or the more chronic poverty of society's most vulnerable. In neither case did welfare administrations consider *nutritional* components in any appreciable way.

It was perhaps the Great Depression of the 1930s that set food issues at the centre of at least local welfare policymaking and marked among the earliest expressions of what Marcus Klee has called “relief capitalism” on a mass and industrial scale.<sup>29</sup> Municipal administrators nationwide struggled to fashion coherent relief systems to deal with the thousands of unemployed workers and their families laid victim by the economic downturn. Almost without fail, however, cost considerations superseded nutritional ones. During the 1930s in Toronto, relief recipients could expect a diet that was, according to historian James Struthers, “starchy and monotonous: heavy on carbohydrates and low on protein, fresh fruit or vegetables, and vitamins.”<sup>30</sup> For their part, relief recipients found local food delivery systems inflexible and demeaning, and relief foods insufficient in both quality and quantity.<sup>31</sup> In Ontario, historian Lara Campbell has observed, relief workers not infrequently singled out the lack of nutritious foods provided by municipal authorities in organized

28. Vitamin science permeated popular culture through the interwar period. See, for example, Raechel Lutz, “Still Life with Vitamins: Art and Science at the 1939 New York World's Fair,” *Environmental History* 21, 2 (April 2016): 365–378.

29. Marcus Klee, “Fighting the Sweatshop in Depression Ontario: Capital, Labour and the Industrial Standards Act,” *Labour/Le Travail* 45 (Spring 2000): 13–51. See also Doug Owram, “Economic Thought in the 1930s: The Prelude to Keynesianism,” in Raymond B. Blake and Jeff Keshen, eds., *Social Welfare Policy in Canada: Historical Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995).

30. Struthers, “How Much Is Enough? Creating a Social Minimum in Ontario, 1930–1944,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, 1 (March 1991): 45.

31. Eric Strikwerda, *The Wages of Relief: Cities and the Unemployed on the Urban Canadian Prairies, 1929–1939* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 79–80. See also Aleck Ostry, *Nutrition Policy in Canada, 1870–1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 87.

protests against local relief administrations.<sup>32</sup> Some welfare advocates, like Toronto's Visiting Homemakers' Association, agreed and lobbied relief administrators to raise relief allotments.<sup>33</sup> In their efforts to counteract such complaints, municipal relief administrators sometimes turned to nutritionists and other health experts to justify their relief food allotments.<sup>34</sup> Winnipeg relief officials, for instance, solicited nutritionists' assessments of that city's food schedules. Nutritionists from as far away as New York City and Montréal agreed that Winnipeg's relief schedule was sufficient and that if recipients were failing to achieve healthy diets, then it was likely due to their own poor food preparation practices.<sup>35</sup> Edmonton relief officials in 1933 dispatched a local medical doctor to investigate the nutritional health of families on relief. "Despite the Depression now existing it would appear from health reports that the general health ... of the community throughout the province and dominion is even more favourable than it has been during the periods of prosperity in past years," the doctor reported. "This may be due to a plainer, more sensible even if somewhat restricted diet made necessary or unavoidable because of the prevailing economic depression."<sup>36</sup> Belying such expert characterizations were the Depression-era experiences of especially working class women, who went to extraordinary lengths in ensuring their families had something to eat, let alone something approaching basic nutritional standards.<sup>37</sup> Social welfare advocate Harry Cassidy noted in 1943, for example, "it is probable that at the outbreak of the war at least one-third of the Canadian people, urban and rural, were too poor to purchase diets recommended by the nutritional authorities."<sup>38</sup>

32. See Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 154, 27–34.

33. Ostry, *Nutrition Policy*, 101.

34. Struthers, "How Much," 45.

35. Strikwerda, *Wages of Relief*, 80–82.

36. Quoted in Strikwerda, *Wages of Relief*, 82. See also Harry Cassidy's description of pre-1930s welfare in Canada in "The Canadian Social Services," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 23 (September 1947): 191, 194; Strikwerda, *Wages of Relief*, 35–42.

37. See, for example, Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression*, trans. Yvonne Klein (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 102–140. See also Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 202–203; Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 117–119.

38. H. M. Cassidy, *Social Security and Reconstruction in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943), 50.

## Nutrition: The Fuel of War-Related Industrial Production

AT THE OUTSET OF WORLD WAR II, military and civilian leaders were once again alarmed at high recruit rejection rates for medical reasons. In Canada, as elsewhere, it is difficult to determine the basis for each rejection; some individuals may have faced rejection due to age or physical size or respiratory problems or any number of physical or even psychological deficiencies. But, as Mosby notes, “many of the specific reasons for rejection appeared to be directly related to diet.”<sup>39</sup> To professional nutritionists’ eyes, the listed medical reasons for rejection—from stomach ailments to tuberculosis to abnormal bone growth—certainly pointed to dietary shortcomings. The editorial board of the *Canadian Public Health Journal* agreed that poor diets seriously undermined men’s fitness to serve, both at home and abroad. “Continued subsistence on such mediocre diets,” it noted in 1941, “causes lower vitality, decreased working ability, and subnormal resistance to infection.”<sup>40</sup>

The implications were serious indeed. How could Canada meet its wartime obligations if so many young men were so routinely failing to reach basic fitness standards, let alone their full health potential? “No people can keep up the gallant fight ... on empty bellies,” US Surgeon General Thomas Parran told a receptive audience of Canadian nutritionists in October 1941, “nor on a diet lacking in the vital elements necessary for full strength and morale.” Healthy and nutritious foods, he asserted, were essential for victory. As vital as nutrition was on the front lines, it was at least equally so on the home front. With good nutrition, “we shall have the power to build a nation of people more fit, more vigorous, more competent; a nation with better morale, a more united purpose, more toughness of body and greater strength of mind.”<sup>41</sup> Canadian nutrition experts agreed with Parran. In the summer of 1941 the editors of the *Canadian Public Health Journal* pointedly remarked, “The preservation and improvement of the health of every Canadian is a vital part of the war effort; health cannot be maintained without adequate nutrition.”<sup>42</sup> Alberta senator Frederick William Gershaw noted in a June 1942 letter to the *Strathmore Standard* that “production will be at the maximum only if we have healthy active people at work. ... To maintain the war effort in the strenuous days that are ahead, better nutrition of the Canadian people is an important factor.”<sup>43</sup> Nutrition, the *Canadian Public Health Journal* editors argued in the summer of 1941, was nothing less than an “essential part of the war effort.” Not only

39. Ian Mosby, “Making and Breaking Canada’s Food Rules: Science, the State, and the Government of Nutrition, 1942–1952,” in Iacovetta, Korinek & Epp, eds., *Edible Histories*, 416.

40. Defries et al., “Need for Action,” 317.

41. Thomas Parran, “Health, Nutrition, and National Defence,” *Canadian Public Health Journal* 33, 3 (March 1942): 99–104.

42. Defries et al., “Need for Action,” 317.

43. “F.W. Gershaw Writes from Ottawa,” *Strathmore Standard*, 4 June 1942.

did attention to nutrition "make men available for the armed services," they noted, "but it also served to "accelerate industrial production" and "prevent the loss of time through illness."<sup>44</sup> Nutritional health was essential to ensure a strong and able military abroad, a reliable and efficient labour army at home, and an illness-free general population that would pose no threat to the nation's productivity. But just as healthy bodies and minds could help win the war, so too could poor nutrition, hunger, and malnourishment be put in the service of nefarious ends. "Metabolic starvation," Parran warned, "is the most potent of all methods to control a population. It is an inexpensive, automatic Gestapo" that in Nazi hands would lead only to "the new order of slave caste and master race."<sup>45</sup>

As alarming as these concerns were in the context of the early 1940s, they only threw into stark relief a worrying trend that professional nutritionists had already identified before the war. In 1937, a series of nationwide surveys purported to show conclusively that Canada was in the midst of a malnutrition crisis. Canada's entry into World War II, and especially the war's requirements for fit soldiers and productive workers, exacerbated the sense of crisis, contributing to a cauldron of concern over the diets of the nation. The National Council of Women of Canada at its annual meeting in May 1941, for example, called on Ottawa to establish a centralized national educative body equipped to offer "immediate instructions in food values and efficient meals in every home in Canada ... as an urgent war measure."<sup>46</sup> The Nutrition Committee of the Canadian Home Economics Association endorsed the National Council's resolution in July. So too did the Canadian Dietetics Association, the Catholic Women's League of Canada, and the Red Cross. Added to these voices was continued pressure from the League of Nations Mixed Committee on Nutrition, which had since the late 1930s been actively urging member states to establish their own national nutrition authorities. And while the Canadian government had announced in November 1937 the creation of a national council of nutrition, this body had no staff, was peopled by volunteers, and was engaged primarily in information collection rather than intervention. News had also emerged the year before that the Americans had begun a national nutritional program of their own. Canada's lack of a similar program was fast becoming politically awkward.<sup>47</sup>

In November 1941, Minister of Pensions and National Health Ian Mackenzie announced the creation of a central nutrition body—the Nutrition Division—to be housed within his portfolio, aimed at improving the nutritional health

44. Defries et al., "Need for Action," 318. See, more generally, Mosby, *Food Will Win*.

45. Parran, "Health, Nutrition," 102.

46. Alana J. Hermiston, "'If It's Good for You, It's Good for the Nation!': The Moral Regulation of Nutrition in Canada, 1930–1945," PhD thesis, Carleton University, 2005, 95.

47. Hermiston, "'If It's Good for You,'" 96.

of Canadians. For nutritionists, a national nutrition body could hardly have come soon enough. "By the fall of 1941," a later Division report noted, "the Government was confronted with the problem of the necessity of a still greater production program and had to take steps to make this possible. There was," it continued, "an ever growing problem of tired workers, inefficiency, and absenteeism. These had to be combated in every way possible."<sup>48</sup> The Division, the *Globe and Mail* reported on 8 November, had two principal means to help solve the problem. First, it would offer advice to housewives, including "advantageous purchasing, choice of foods and methods of preparation." And second, it would inspect both on-site and off-site restaurants and cafeterias catering to industrial workers "to check the nutritional value of foods planned for the workers, and to suggest improvement where possible."<sup>49</sup> The first of these means reinforced widespread assumptions about women's primary and nurturing role of looking after their families. But it also enlisted women in the broader project of ensuring that especially male workers were as nutritionally fit as possible. To women fell the monumental (though largely unremarked on) tasks of ensuring not just the thoughtful gathering of foods (by shopping with a mind to the family's nutritional needs), but also their preparation (by cooking with a mind to ensuring essential nutrients would be retained) and finally ensuring that their families actually consumed them.<sup>50</sup> Equally unremarked on in any substantive way was the fact that increasing numbers of women were at the very same moment entering the paid labour marketplace. They were also simultaneously shouldering a heavier share of wartime-related hardships on the home front, including looking after family finances, arranging for child care, and engaging in volunteer activities.<sup>51</sup> But while women's contributions to the war effort garnered wide praise, their growing influence, status, and (potential) economic and social mobility prompted much apprehension and worry over the effects those contributions might have on established gender roles.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, linking responsibility for family nutrition to women as

48. *Nutrition in Industry*, report, August 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

49. "Nation-Wide Diet Campaign to Open Soon," *Globe and Mail*, 8 November 1941.

50. See, for example, Mosby, *Food Will Win*, esp. Chap. 3. The Red Cross had run nutrition classes exclusively for women beginning as early as 1929, on the assumption that women were primarily responsible for their families' diets. See Hermiston, "If It's Good for You," 74. Linda Ambrose has similarly noted that Women's Institutes in Ontario offered women courses in meal planning, family health, and diet. See Ambrose, *For Home and Country: The Centennial History of the Women's Institutes in Ontario* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1996), 120–124.

51. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners*, 147–148.

52. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners*, 146. It is important to bear in mind circumscriptions to women's influence and status in this context. First, women workers became a "temporary" form of cheap labour during a period of severe labour scarcity. It was, in this sense, capitalism's (and the state's) needs that opened up opportunities for women. At the same time, Ellen Scheinberg argues, "one cannot ignore the role that patriarchal actors such as company managers, male

wives and mothers was not just convenient; it was essential to maintaining the traditional and long-standing patriarchal order. The second aim—improving the diets of industrial workers—called mainly on employers to recognize the vital role nutrition played in ensuring efficient production. Just how employers were to transform this recognition into action turned mainly on a combination of the nature of their industry, the number of workers in their employ, and their own sense of their workers' needs. For the most part, employers were broadly willing to accept the premise that well-nourished workers enhanced production. They were generally less willing to go too far out of their way to facilitate better nutrition or, say, to increase workers' pay packets so they could afford more and better foods.

Beginning early the following year, nutrition-related advertisements and notices inundated Canadians on streetcars and at bus stops, on billboards and flyers, in grocery stores and government offices, in films, on the radio, and in print media exhorting them to eat better and to pay greater attention to their nutritional health.<sup>53</sup> Prominent among these efforts, for example, was the development of Canada's Food Rules in the spring of 1942, a simplified six-category illustration of so-called protective foods that Canadians ought to consume daily.<sup>54</sup> In similar fashion, National Film Board productions like "When Do We Eat?" and "Thought for Food" stressed nutrition's critical role in wartime production and suggested proactive steps that workers, their families, and their employers should take to ensure a healthy diet.<sup>55</sup> The films, like prescriptive advice doled out by the Nutrition Division and the popular press more generally, assumed women were in the main responsible for their families' nutritional health. Nutritional health as a matter of public policy and popular advice had never before reached such heights, nor reached so many Canadians.<sup>56</sup> Nor had so many (especially) women taken up the task of improving the nation's nutritional health. Women's organizations like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the Women's Institutes, the

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union members, and the state played in supporting this discriminatory structure." Scheinberg, "The Tale of Tessie the Textile Worker: Female Textile Workers in Cornwall during World War II," *Labour/Le Travail* 33 (Spring 1994): 155–156.

53. See Mosby, *Food Will Win*, 51–58; Durand, *Nourrir la machine humaine*, esp. Chap. 7.

54. Mosby, *Food Will Win*, 21.

55. "When Do We Eat?," produced by Evelyn Spice, National Film Board of Canada, 1944. Running at just under fifteen minutes, "When Do We Eat?" features tips for women in preparing their families' breakfasts and lunch pails. But it also recognizes that women, too, were often workers. In one scene, a husband skips breakfast because his wife is still in bed after working the night shift. The film offers the man advice in how best to prepare his own breakfast. The film similarly offers advice to single men without a woman at home to help prepare food. See also "Thought for Food," Stanley Jackson, National Film Board of Canada, 1944.

56. Product advertisements also routinely invoked "motherhood" as a special category responsible for the nation's nutritional health. See Hermiston, "If It's Good for You," 124–127.



Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, the Women's Canadian Club, the Victorian Order of Nurses, and many other local women's organizations dedicated a good measure of their advocacy and educational work to nutrition.<sup>57</sup>

Nutrition Division staff also aimed much of their focus at employers in war industries. "In the stress of rapid expansion for war production," an early Division report explained, "many plants have neglected the health factor; but peak production cannot be attained or maintained if the health of the workers is not adequately considered."<sup>58</sup> Malnourishment, the report continued, negatively affected workers' efficiency, their attitude to work, and the "general atmosphere of the plant." Division staff inundated industrial plants with so-called war information kits containing posters, pamphlets, information bulletins, recipe cards, cookbooks, and other reference materials.<sup>59</sup> The Division had made so many war information kits available to industrial plants by 1944 that its "Foods for Health" posters and its "Nutrition in Industry" pamphlets had nearly run out.<sup>60</sup>

And for the most part, employers proved receptive audiences. By September 1944, for example, industrial plants nationwide requested nearly four million informational flyers, 89,000 "Wartime Victory Lunches" inserts, and nearly 5,000 caterers' bulletins. Employers were appreciative, too. "The writer has read with interest your various bulletins," a Toronto factory manager wrote the Division in the spring of 1942, "and feels certain that the guidelines contained therein will be of great benefit to our employees and particularly to our cafeteria supervisor." An assistant general manager in Hamilton thanked Division staff for sending informational leaflets, noting that "we are very much impressed with the idea and with the message it carries." A manager in Peterborough was "very pleased to receive your suggestions and literature which has to do with the furthering of the welfare of our employees." Informational leaflets, suggestions, and literature, however compelling to managers on the shop floor, were only effective if workers heeded their messages. "Your winter campaign on nutrition was helpful," the women's personnel supervisor of a Kingston factory wrote the Division in 1942, "but there is need for repetition of these facts with individual employees. It is my opinion that poor health due mainly to improper dietary habits is the greatest personnel problem we have in plants

57. See Hermiston, "If It's Good for You," 101–104.

58. Industrial Nutrition Report prepared for the Industrial Section, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, n.d. [1944], RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

59. "Recommendations on Training and Duties of a 'Food Service Manager' in Industrial Feeding," n.d., table 5, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC. Distribution of printed matter to Canadian war plants on request only to September 1, 1944. The Nutrition Division described its "war kits" as "a sample of all available industrial nutrition publications."

60. Marion Harlow (assistant director, Nutrition Services) to P. J. Brook (Industrial Division, Wartime Prices and Trade Board), 8 March 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.



doing shift work."<sup>61</sup> Especially popular with many employers was the Division's nutrition score card, a heavy construction paper booklet allowing individuals to calculate their own daily food-value rating. H. E. Bongers, factory manager at the William Wrigley Junior Company in Toronto, for instance, wrote the Division asking for 500 copies. "These score cards appear to the writer to have considerable merit," he wrote in early March 1944, "in that it creates sufficient interest by the average individual to measure up for themselves the value of the food which they take in day by day."<sup>62</sup> Encouraging workers to chart their own progress along the path to greater nutritional health required no significant employer cost or intervention. But the potential associated material benefits accruing to employers, in terms of both increased worker productivity and cost savings, were substantial.

More costly for employers was making provision for onsite food accommodation. And for some employers, the expenditure involved in ensuring that workers reached maximum nutritional health was not worth the trouble. Ontario aeronautical machinist Charles F. O'Brien, for instance, asked the Division to intervene in an ongoing labour arbitration over his employer's continued provision of an onsite canteen. "We are having trouble in our plant over canteens," he wrote to Pett in February 1945. "Management claims they are worthless and a waste of time," O'Brien continued, noting that although workers had enjoyed onsite canteens "in one form or other for approximately three years now," management had lately removed them. The union had retained a medical doctor from the University of Toronto's Household Science Department, but hoped Pett would also intervene in the dispute.<sup>63</sup> Some days later, Pett offered just such a statement: "There is no doubt that properly operated industrial canteens can be very valuable in maintaining good health among employees. This, in turn, is reflected in better morale, fewer accidents, less absenteeism. Assistance from plant management in regard to industrial canteens is now taken as a matter of sound business practice by many Canadian industries."<sup>64</sup> Workers at the Steel Company of Canada were, according to the Victorian Order of Nurses, similarly enthusiastic about having a nutritionist give nutrition talks at the Hamilton plant, but "interest dissolved" when company officials "tabooed the idea and refused to have the company's time used."<sup>65</sup> To Pett, such attitudes were short-sighted. "Fatiguability [*sic*], eye-strain, lowered resistance to infections, are all being combated by dietary

61. "Industrial Feeding Report," c. March 1942, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

62. H. E. Bongers to Nutrition Division, 9 March 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

63. Charles F. O'Brien (financial secretary, Aeronautical Lodge 717, International Association of Machinists) to L. B. Pett, telegraph, 10 February 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

64. L.B. Pett to Charles F. O'Brien, 12 February 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

65. "Report on Interview with Miss Davis, Hamilton V.O.N., Nutritionist, by Miss Bedford and Miss Lock," 3 July 1944, RG 29, vol. 263, file 386-1-5, Nutrition Services – Reports, LAC.

means in war industries in England,” he wrote the manager of the Canadian International Paper Company in April 1942. “Many companies, even in peacetime, have found that it pays in dollars and in production and in morale to watch the food their workmen consume.”<sup>66</sup> Good nutrition benefitted workers, too. Ensuring that their families ate “the proper kind and amount of food” would guard against disease and protect workers’ loved ones, of course – but, a Canadian Medical Association pamphlet reminded industrial workers, it would also enable the workers themselves to remain on the job. “Working time lost through sickness,” the pamphlet advised, “usually means a smaller pay envelope.”<sup>67</sup>

Still, Pett was wary of dealing directly with workers. Over the course of the Nutrition Division’s work with industry, Division staff not infrequently received inquiries from local labour groups for assistance in developing nutrition programs independent of larger plant operations. On one level, it ought not be surprising that unions might wish to improve their members’ nutrition as a strictly health measure unrelated to production. But Pett was suspicious. “As you know,” he wrote Deputy Minister of Health Robert Wodehouse, “most of our contacts with actual unions have been such that the food services were being used as an excuse for causing trouble or gaining members rather than real interest in the employees’ welfare. For this reason we have avoided all these contacts as much as possible.”<sup>68</sup> Weighing in on the matter the following day, C. F. Blackler, acting chief of the Division of Industrial Hygiene, also urged caution when dealing with organized labour: “Lately labour is becoming more interested in health services and it was suggested by some of their leaders recently that this Division should contact key men in different plants with the idea of selling to them the value of health supervision,” he wrote Pett on 7 March 1944. “I am a bit afraid of this myself,” he continued, “and am marking time feeling that the welfare of the worker is no less the problem of labour than it is of this Department.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, supporting employers with a view to enhancing worker productivity and industrial efficiency was a legitimate use of Division resources. Supporting organized labour with a view to enhancing unions’ relationships with their members was not. Nor was, it seems, supporting organized labour with a view to enhancing the welfare of the worker more broadly.

Perhaps more difficult for Division staff were the effects of nutrition promotion on increasingly scarce wartime resources and the activities of other branches of government. Less than a month after the Division’s creation, the

66. L. B. Pett to J. C. Monty, 7 April 1942, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

67. Canadian Medical Association, “Food for Health in Peace and War: What Canadian Doctors Suggest for Wholesome Meals at Low Cost” (1940).

68. L. B. Pett to Dr. Brown and Robert Wodehouse, 6 March 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

69. C. F. Blackler to L. B. Pett, 7 March 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

powerful new chairman of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB), banker-turned-government-man Donald Gordon, alerted his boss, Finance Minister James Ilesley, to the potential problems. "It has come to my notice," he wrote Ilesley in December 1941, "that a National Nutrition Campaign is being sponsored by the Department of Pensions and National Health. ... I do not know the details of the campaign, but it is quite possible that it could clash very definitely with our price ceiling policy."<sup>70</sup> Gordon recognized that the promotion of Canadians' nutritional health was a laudable project. But that project, cast even as it was as an important war measure itself, must not interfere with efforts either to contain inflation or to secure Canada's food supply. Writing Ilesley some days later, Health Minister Mackenzie hit back hard. Reminding the finance minister that the Division's function was to "improve the nutrition of the people of Canada," he noted that "the nutrition of the people of Canada is one warranting immediate concern." Under no circumstances, Mackenzie stressed, should the Nutrition Division's work be undermined. "I strongly resist," he charged, "any suggestion that the requirements of the Price Board are to supersede the nutrition of our national population at such a time of trial as this."<sup>71</sup>

In the end it took Wodehouse, the congenial deputy minister of health, and John Taggart, the coordinator of Foods Administration for the WPTB, to defuse what was fast becoming a distraction from Canada's wider wartime aims. By the following summer, Wodehouse and Taggart had smoothed the situation over sufficiently to establish an advisory committee on nutrition – including representation from the Departments of Agriculture, Munitions and Supply, Fisheries, and Pensions and Health – within the Foods Administration section of the WPTB. Thereafter, wartime policy would subsume nutrition matters into a much wider set of food interests, broadly considered. Neither were the committee's terms of reference particularly aimed at promoting nutrition among war workers. In fact, its central function, Associate Deputy Minister of National War Services T. C. Davis stressed in a letter to Gordon in March 1942, would be to avoid confusing Canadians by giving the "consuming public different advice at the same time."<sup>72</sup>

But there was more to the jurisdictional dust-up between the nutrition experts and the WPTB. And in some ways, it struck at the very heart of ongoing debates among professional nutritionists about whether, given Canada's wartime needs, the collective national goal ought to be securing optimal nutrition or settling for merely sufficient nutrition. On one level, as Mosby's work has shown, Nutrition Division staff would countenance nothing less than

70. D. Gordon to Hon. J. L. Ilesley, 23 December 1941, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

71. Ian Mackenzie to Hon. J. L. Ilesley, 29 December 1941, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

72. Hon. J. L. Ilesley to D. Gordon, 14 March 1941, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

the “somewhat utopian ideal of optimum nutrition.”<sup>73</sup> But on another level, nutritionists on the advisory committee settled for sufficient nutrition and worked to justify food restrictions and rationing. At its first meeting, on 28 July 1942, for example, the committee agreed to reduce minimum food requirements (vitamins and minerals) for Canadians to 70 per cent of the National Research Standards earlier adopted by the Canadian Council of Nutrition.<sup>74</sup> Little more than a month later, the committee reduced food requirements even further, noting that “while the recommended amounts were desirable the Committee should undertake some downward revision ... in view of existing conditions.”<sup>75</sup> By March of the following year, the advisory committee agreed to a Foods Administration proposal to reduce meat consumption through rationing measures by 10 to 15 per cent below earlier allotments, though this step remained in the planning stages until early the following year.<sup>76</sup> In practical terms, this meant a reduction to two pounds of meat per person per week. The committee considered the “nutritional justification for differentials of meat allowances to workers in heavy industry,” but concluded such a measure was “unnecessary from the viewpoint of nutrition.”<sup>77</sup> The advisory committee similarly considered differential rationing based on age, sex, and occupation to be unnecessary for eggs, milk, butter, vegetables, fish, poultry, sugar, tea, and coffee.<sup>78</sup> War industries workers, despite their apparent importance to Canada’s broader war effort, could expect no special consideration in terms of greater quantities of nutritionally rich foods. The business of the Foods Administration’s advisory committee, it seemed, was to justify sufficient nutrition policies for war workers, even while it employed the expansive language of optimal nutrition.

For their part, war workers had little regard for the WPTB’s rationing policies.<sup>79</sup> The Stratford local of the International Association of Machinists wrote

73. Mosby, *Food Will Win*, 44.

74. Advisory Committee on Nutrition Report to the Foods Administration, 28 July 1942, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

75. Advisory Committee on Nutrition Report to the Foods Administration, 1 September 1942, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

76. Stacey J. Barker, “Feeding the Hungry Allies: Canadian Food and Agriculture during the Second World War,” PhD thesis, University of Ottawa, 2008, 306–307.

77. Advisory Committee on Nutrition Report to the Foods Administration, 30 March 1943, RG 29, vol. 929, file 386-3-2, LAC.

78. Canada generally followed in lock-step with American rationing policies. See Christopher Robb Waddell, “The Wartime Prices and Trade Board: Price Control in Canada in World War II,” PhD thesis, York University, 1981, 433.

79. Waddell notes that the Foods Administration was certainly aware of the potential for complaints: “I am inclined to think that we should give more study to the problem. If any other commodities become rationed we will probably be forced to do something for the heavy workers.” Ration administrator, 23 January 1943, quoted in Waddell, “Wartime Prices and

Prime Minister Mackenzie King in April 1943 asking the federal government "to do all within its power to improve the intolerable situation with which is actually confronted the Canadian worker by the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and induce the Board in acknowledging the priority of the worker's needs in the pursuit of the war effort of the country and increase the workers' quota of foods vital to their subsistence."<sup>80</sup> In a letter published in *Saturday Night* in May 1943, one worker reported that "it is difficult to make appetizing lunches with such a low minimum of butter and meat. ... [T]here is considerable grumbling in the Vancouver shipyards, where 85% of workers eat out of tin boxes because of lack of cafeteria accommodation." A Nutrition Division survey of industrial workers' lunches supported this contention. Less than 20 per cent of packed lunches, the survey reported, contained sufficient proteins, vegetables, fruits, and milk. By contrast, 43 per cent of bought lunches boasted sufficient quantities of these food items.<sup>81</sup>

In fact, the workers' concerns about cafeteria options for hungry wartime workers appeared to be one area in which Nutrition Division staff might have some authority unencumbered by interdepartmental competition. Only two years earlier, the federal cabinet approved Privy Council Order 1550, an extraordinarily broad and far-reaching document authorizing Health Department agents to ensure that any workplaces holding war contracts were meeting, among other things, "the nutritional and other standards specified by the Minister with respect to any foods which are or may be provided."<sup>82</sup> In terms of reach, PC 1550 offered Nutrition Division workers impressive access to wartime plants. By the end of 1944, Division staff had inspected a total of 584 plants, representing more than one-quarter of the total number of war contract employers and nearly half of all war workers in Canada.<sup>83</sup>

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Trade Board," 454.

80. Barker, "Feeding the Hungry Allies," 318.

81. Food and Nutrition Board, National Research Council, "The Nutrition of Industrial Workers," *Second Report of the Committee on Nutrition of Industrial Workers*, National Research Council Reprint and Circular Series 123 (Washington D.C., September 1945), 10.

82. L. B. Pett & Margaret E. Lock, *Nutrition in Canadian Industry*, August 1945, n.p., RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, vol. 2, LAC. The order went much further, compelling owners to satisfy ministry-directed sanitary, lighting, heating, ventilation, and toilet facilities, as well as to provide worker access to medical and nursing services, under threat of fine or imprisonment. A wartime report explained the nature of the order: "The purpose of these inspections of feeding facilities in industry is to help Canada's war workers to be well-fed. With this all-embracing object in mind more than just the presence of a cafeteria is considered; a comprehensive industrial nutrition programme is being developed, and will continue in the post-war years on a voluntary basis. By 'inspection' is meant that a trained nutritionist from Ottawa visits the plant, and obtains answers to all the questions on a form. The management is contacted by letter before the visit. The medical services are often very much interested in the feeding of the employees, so that this contact is found to be valuable."

83. "In-Plant Feeding in Canadian War Industry as of December 1944," RG 29, vol. 976, file

Despite its wide-ranging authority, however, the Nutrition Division relied only lightly on PC 1550 to compel wartime employers to improve their food services. Assessing the order's use near the end of the war, Division staff noted that "legal proceedings [under PC 1550] were rarely instituted, and no actual fines were finally necessary. Persuasion, however, was often used."<sup>84</sup> Division staff pointed to employer cooperation and compliance with inspectors' recommendations as "proof" that mere education and information were sufficient to secure "improvement of facilities of plants inspected." According to Division figures, for instance, only 28 per cent of men's cafeteria lunches and 17 per cent of women's cafeteria lunches could be classified as "good" in 1942, when Division inspectors conducted a first-round visit to industrial plants. Fully one-third of all cafeterias the Division inspected were, according to Pett's measurements, "not good enough," and "only ten per cent of these have dietitians to plan the meals."<sup>85</sup> When Division staff inspected the plants the following year, the percentage of "good" men's cafeteria lunches had jumped to 46 per cent, and women's to 36 per cent.<sup>86</sup>

Workers' concerns about food conditions told a different story. In mid-August 1944, for example, Anglo-Canadian Pulp and Paper Mills worker Michel Landry wrote the Division asking department inspectors to investigate sanitation conditions in the plant's food service: "The kitchen should be closed because it is dirty and the food is not properly prepared. Moreover, worms fall from the second storey into our plates. This is none too clean."<sup>87</sup> In October, New Brunswick timber worker Jos. St. Pierre wrote the department with similar complaints about conditions at the Fraser camps at Iroquois: "As far as the food is concerned, it is terrible and there is much sickness caused by the food." The camp cooks had a habit of storing beans in old tomato cans between meals, souring the beans and causing verdigris to form on the inside of the cans. As a result, St. Pierre asserted, workers simply skipped lunch entirely and sustained themselves on their evening meal alone. "The camps are not any too clean," he concluded. "Please send an inspector."<sup>88</sup> Although both workers' concerns appeared to fall well within the authority that PC 1550 afforded Nutrition Division workers, Pett declined to intervene, asserting that workplace sanitation was a provincial responsibility. This hesitance to make

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388-7-10-3, LAC.

84. "Development of Food Facilities in Industry during the Second World War," August 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10-3, LAC.

85. "Few Lunches of Workmen Rated 'Good,'" *Globe and Mail*, 4 June 1942.

86. "Development of Food Facilities," LAC.

87. Michel Landry to Department of Health, Ottawa, 18 August 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10-3, LAC.

88. Jos. St. Pierre to Department of Health, Ottawa, 3 October 1944, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10-3, LAC.

full use of PC 1550 met with harsh criticism from some on the political left. As part of the Dominion Communist-Labor Total War Committee submission to the National War Labor Board Inquiry into Labor Relations, none other than Tim Buck charged that "PC 1550 gives the government practically all the power needed for an effective Industrial Health Wartime Program, but as yet there has been no forceful application of this legislation."<sup>89</sup>

In the end, the Nutrition Division's wartime record remains mixed. On the one hand, its very formation illustrated an emerging understanding of links between healthy eating and efficient industrial production. And many of its activities, from its nutrition score cards to its information literature, clearly emphasized workers' responsibility for their own nutritional health as well as women's role in ensuring their families consumed healthy foods. In neither instance did the Division challenge broader capitalist assumptions or patriarchal structures. On the other hand, however, the Division was willing to sacrifice its commitment to optimal nutrition in the face of broader wartime needs. Equally, it was unwilling to make full use of its regulatory authority to enforce its own industrial nutrition goals. In both cases, the Division betrayed a disconnect between its rhetoric and its actions and ultimately laid bare the limits of its influence.

### **"Food Is the Power behind Manpower"**

POSTWAR, AS THE EXIGENCIES of the world conflict and its associated wartime regulations and restrictions slowly dissipated, so too did the patriotic rationale behind the Nutrition Division's activities. In its stead, Division workers freely offered industry their advice and expertise as a national service, effectively substituting a nationalistic and capitalistic rationale for the earlier wartime patriotic one. "This section now operates an advisory and consultation service," announced a Nutrition Division information missive sent out to Canadian employers after the war, "and is prepared to assist in any problem connected with employee feeding that may arise. A request to the department is all that is necessary in order to obtain the services of a qualified nutritionist."<sup>90</sup> On offer, Division staff maintained, was specialized knowledge on industrial feeding strategies, individualized and workplace-specific advice on the benefits of serving different meals in different industrial contexts, and solutions to potential problems employers might encounter in initiating industrial feeding schemes in their plants, factories, and camps. Explicit was the claim that a strong, scientifically sound industrial nutrition regime promised employers greater productivity and efficiency and profits on the factory floor. Explicit too

89. Tim Buck, "A Labor Policy for Victory," Dominion Communist-Labor Total War Committee submission to the National War Labor Board Inquiry into Labor Relations, 28 May 1943, 71.

90. Pett & Lock, *Nutrition in Canadian Industry*, n.p., LAC.



was the Division's less quantifiable claim that good nutrition improves morale and contributes to an atmosphere of good feelings between management and worker. Implicit, perhaps, was the promise that such good feelings inevitably led to a greater sense of industrial peace.

### **Greater Productivity**

Ensuring healthy, reliable worker-bodies was as critical to efficient production in peacetime as it was in wartime. Maximizing workers' productive capacities in a general sense required employer attention to long-standing industrial practices, including worker discipline, organization, and overall workplace rationalization. Attention to worker nutrition, Division staff emphasized in this context, ought not be neglected. "Food is the power behind manpower," a 1946 Nutrition Division report asserted. "It is a quite literal fact that the potential energy of the working population is limited by the quality and quantity of the food supplies available to it."<sup>91</sup> In turning this potential energy into actual energy – and, of course, profitability – Nutrition Division workers stressed that it was not sufficient for employers merely to recognize the benefits of healthy eating. The clear connections between nutrition and human health, Division staff imagined, already enjoyed wide currency. But employers must also take an interventionist role in setting the conditions for workers to enjoy greater nutritional health, both on and off the job. "If optimal physical condition is to be promoted, and high per capita production made possible, management must assume an active responsibility in the matter of worker-nutrition," the Division counselled. "For management to do so is wise self-interest rather than philanthropy, since it is definitely to the advantage of industry to have well nourished workers."<sup>92</sup> Employer interventions into workers' nutritional health need not be overly extensive (or expensive) to be effective. A 1947 research note in the Department of National Health and Welfare's *Industrial Health Bulletin*, for instance, recognized that full cafeteria or dining services were wholly unpractical for many smaller industrial plants and workplaces. In such cases, making milk or other dairy products available for workers to purchase on-site would serve as a welcome supplement to their breakfasts and lunches consumed at home and would help stave off hunger and the resulting fatigue while on the job. Similarly, employers could advance their own production goals by ensuring that workers had access to nutrition-related educational materials.<sup>93</sup> Making available pamphlets, such as *The Lunch Box Is On the Move* and *If You Eat*, as well as installing posters such as *Canada's Food Rules, Meal Patterns*, and *Good Third Meal* would, Division staff suggested, go some considerable distance in alerting workers to the importance of healthy eating.

91. L. B. Pett, Margaret Lock & Helen Wilson, "Trends in Industrial Feeding in Canada since the War," RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10-3, LAC.

92. Pett, Lock & Wilson, "Trends in Industrial Feeding," LAC.

93. "Food Is a Tool," *Industrial Health Bulletin* 2, 7 (April 1947).

Reaching workers in these indirect ways was critical, given that the vast majority of Canadians were employed in smaller industries where on-site feeding arrangements made little sense. According to Division-produced statistics, about half of all Canadian workers brought their own lunches to work, and some 30 per cent more went home for lunch. "For this reason," Division staff noted, "any nutrition education program must reach the home to be of any benefit to industrial workers as a whole."<sup>94</sup> Often, though, workers lacked the means to ensure healthy foods even at home. "A great many young men and women are living in rooms in Cities where it is impossible to cook food," Pett explained to the general manager of Industrial Caterers' Limited. For too many of these young workers, Pett lamented, the difficulties in securing healthy foods meant that they were "going without proper nourishment. ... Such habits affect their nerves, skill and health, eventually causing absenteeism from the plant." Inattention to workers' access to food resulted only in "financial loss to both the employee and the plant."<sup>95</sup>

Equally important was nutrition's role in maintaining worker energy levels, to avoid worker fatigue-related accidents.<sup>96</sup> The *Industrial Health Bulletin* warned employers in December 1948 that industrial illness and accidents were no small problem. They threatened to "interfere with production in any plant, irrespective of size," and robbed employers of, on average, no less than nine days per worker per year. Evidence appeared to bear out such claims.<sup>97</sup> In one example, Division staff compared accident incidents before and after an unnamed Canadian factory installed a lunchroom on-site. First aid treatments in that case declined by 27 per cent, from 3,000 to 2,130, and represented a reduction of 14 per cent in terms of lost time. The Division readily admitted that "other factors may have been involved" in the figures, but it noted that the "only change in major operations" was the factory owner's introduction of a lunchroom.<sup>98</sup> Anecdotes from the field supported the connection between hungry workers and industrial accidents. In November of that year, for example, a Winnipeg ironworks' industrial nurse wrote the Division seeking information she could use to persuade management to establish a canteen. She had noticed that workers tended to be more accident-prone in the latter half of the mornings and afternoons. Some sort of employer-provided food before and after lunch, she reasoned, might invigorate the workers and tide them over

94. Pett, Lock & Wilson, "Trends in Industrial Feeding," LAC. In March 1945, the Canadian International Paper Company (CIP) at Gatineau hosted a "nutrition evening" for workers' wives, including a lecture and two nutrition-related filmstrips. The company repeated the event in July.

95. Pett & Lock, *Nutrition in Canadian Industry*, n.p., LAC.

96. "Recommendations on Training and Duties of a 'Food Service Manager' in Industrial Feeding," December 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10-3, LAC.

97. "Food Is a Tool," *Industrial Health Bulletin* 4, 3 (December 1948): 1.

98. "Recommendations on Training," December 1945, LAC.

between meals. She aimed for something modest – a “mid-morning and mid afternoon coffee and perhaps a doughnut to the employees because they have no break at present.”<sup>99</sup>

Most industrial employers, Nutrition Division staff believed, readily understood the economic and productive benefits of ensuring their workers had access to healthy, nutritious foods on the job. “Many requests have been received for information on expansion of food service in Canadian industries,” boasted a 1947 Division report. The supervisor of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada’s welfare department, for instance, wrote the Nutrition Division in July 1948 seeking information on providing cafeteria services to its 500 mine workers at Kimberley, British Columbia. He was especially interested in the ways cafeteria service can “lower labour and operating costs.”<sup>100</sup> Pett replied, praising the idea and laying out the cost-saving features of cafeteria services: “The greatest advantage in cafeteria service in large operations is that less staff is required to serve the food and if the food is properly served from the counter there is a tendency to be less food waste as any left-overs may be stored immediately and used later.”<sup>101</sup> In August 1949, the Steep Rock Iron Mines Limited at Steep Rock Lake, Ontario, wrote the Nutrition Division reporting on its food procedures, as well as its weekly food costs. The mine had been operating a buffet-style meal service during the war, but had switched to cafeteria-style feeding in October 1948. According to the mine’s secretary treasurer, “it was difficult to get the men to accept the idea but now that they have the advantage of the certainty of receiving hot food as well as being able to select their food and pay for as little or as much as they want, there have been no demands for a return to the old type of service.”<sup>102</sup>

Such employer-driven interest in workers’ nutritional health, Division workers argued, was clear evidence of employers’ “growing realization that to obtain optimal production workers must have the opportunity of obtaining a good mid-shift meal.”<sup>103</sup> On-site nutrition programs had proved their worth to management and workers alike, asserted a 1947 report on industrial feeding trends since the end of the war. “The number of canteens (meaning the chances of getting a good meal) in Canadian industries is increasing on a voluntary basis today without the influence of a national emergency or the guidance of any outside campaign or interest.”<sup>104</sup> However, actual figures describing employer

99. Pett, Lock & Wilson, “Trends in Industrial Feeding,” LAC.

100. Mr. C. W. Guillaume (supervisor, Welfare Department, Consolidated Mining & Smelting Co. of Canada) to L. B. Pett, 21 July 1948, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

101. L. B. Pett to Mr. C. W. Guillaume, 3 August 1948, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

102. Steep Rock Iron Mines Limited to Department of National Health and Welfare, Nutrition Division, 9 August 1949, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

103. Pett, Lock & Wilson, “Trends in Industrial Feeding,” LAC.

104. Excerpts from a Report on Industrial Feeding Trends in Canada since the War, 1947, RG



**Mrs. Sven Sorenson serving lunch to the men of Camp No. 6 during the construction of the Steep Rock open-face mine.**

R1196-14-7-E, ref. no. e000761904, National Film Board of Canada, Library and Archives Canada.

interest were much more modest. Between the end of the war and the spring of 1947, the Division canvassed some 1,500 employers to ascertain their interest in the Division's industrial services. Less than half replied. And of those 700 employers who did respond, less than one-third actually asked for Division or provincial assistance or advice. Not surprisingly, figures varied widely nationwide. The Division did not issue a survey to Prince Edward Island, for instance, given that province's small industrial sector. Fully 62 per cent of industrial workplaces in Nova Scotia had no food services, and most of the remaining plants offered only small snacks, mainly, the Division noted, because most

plants were small and community-based, allowing workers to eat lunch at home. The situation was similar in New Brunswick, where 71 per cent of plants offered no food service, and where most plants “are small or situated in communities where the worker can go home for his mid-shift meal.” Also not surprising were stronger industrial feeding numbers in Quebec, where only 21 per cent of plants offered no food services, and Ontario, where only 14 per cent offered no food services. Similarly modest were the numbers of responding employers offering on-site hot canteen services. Division-produced survey results indicated a small postwar increase in the number of plants offering hot canteen services, but a much larger increase in the numbers of plants offering milk delivery services. Still, the survey results also showed a clear decline in the percentage of plants offering cold canteens and mess halls, as well as an overall decrease in the percentage of plants offering any food facilities.<sup>105</sup>

A Nutrition Division survey conducted at an unnamed industrial plant nearly two years later revealed similarly troubling figures. Fewer than half of the plant’s workers were regularly consuming sufficient amounts of fruits, vegetables, and cereal grains. And although most workers ate enough meat and meat substitutes, roughly a third of workers were not drinking enough milk. More alarming still, fully 63 per cent of workers reported never eating vegetables, and one-third of workers reported never eating cereal or bread. The survey, conducted as it was at an anonymous plant in an anonymous location at an undisclosed time and by a government entity with an agenda, most certainly lacks scientific rigour. Still, publication of the survey’s results in the *Industrial Health Bulletin* reveals clear Division intentions to prompt industry into action. When workers were not at their nutritional best, industry suffered in terms of lost time and lost productivity. But, according to commentary accompanying the survey data, the results signalled an opportunity rather than a problem for industry. Here was an ideal chance for employers “to provide those foods which are missing from the usual diet. When brown bread sandwiches, whole milk, fresh fruit or fruit juices and raw vegetables are available in the plant canteen,” the commentary suggested, “the between-meal snack can become a valuable supplement to the daily diet.”<sup>106</sup> Employers could also profitably make use of Division-produced posters and pamphlets to further educate workers on the importance of healthy eating at home. Other surveys, with murky origins of similar opacity, made the same point. In one case, for example, an examination of 828 “carried lunches” that workers brought from home revealed that only 19 per cent achieved a grade of “good.” In another, a study of 1,029 “bought lunches” showed that 43 per cent achieved a grade of “good.”<sup>107</sup> Left to their own devices when it came to organizing

105. Excerpts from Report on Industrial Feeding Trends, LAC.

106. “What Employees Eat,” *Industrial Health Bulletin* 4, 1 (October 1948).

107. Food and Nutrition Board, National Research Council, “Nutrition of Industrial Workers,”

10. The report identifies the survey results as Canadian. According to the report, “good” meals

their own midday meal, in other words, industrial workers' lunches tended to fall short of even adequate nutritional requirements. Industrial employers' interventions in organizing workers' lunches, by contrast, tended to markedly improve workers' consumption of nutritional foods.

Division workers were doubtless pleased, then, when the American-owned Canadian International Paper Company's (CIP) pulp and paper mill at Temiskaming, Québec, sought out the Division's advice in establishing staggered cafeteria accommodation for between 100 and 200 shift workers per sitting.<sup>108</sup> Especially helpful from a controlled nutrition perspective was the fact that Temiskaming was a company town, giving CIP much greater potential control over workers' diets than employers in other industrial contexts.<sup>109</sup> By February 1946, Division staff had provided the company with detailed industrial food services plans, including specifications for everything from flooring and counter space to food preparation, cleaning, and storage facilities. That summer, CIP officials were sufficiently impressed with the whole idea that they sought out further Division advice on extending cafeteria services to the company's whole operation, including its mills at Gatineau, Trois-Rivières, and Dalhousie in New Brunswick. Certainly the idea of on-site feeding facilities resonated with employees. Internal surveys revealed that fully 80 per cent of the company's more than 1,500 workers at its Gatineau operation indicated that they would "patronize a Cafeteria on a year round basis." Of these, nearly all preferred full-course meals to something simpler like sandwiches. The company recorded similar survey figures from its Trois-Rivières, Temiskaming, and Dalhousie mills.<sup>110</sup> T. H. Robinson, manager of industrial relations for CIP, moved ahead with the project, but stressed that the company

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meant "a) a sandwich or plate lunch containing a protein food such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, or beans, b) a vegetable, other than potatoes, or a fruit, c) milk, preferably as a beverage."

108. Margaret Lock (supervisor, Industrial Section, Nutrition Division) to H. Emerson (personnel superintendent, Canadian International Paper Co.), Temiskaming, Québec, 6 February 1946, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC. Certainly, the CIP was well aware of the Division's work during the war. In January 1945, for example, two Division workers descended on the company's Gatineau Mills operation under authority of PC 1550. Then, Division inspector Christina M. Robertson noted in her report that the plant offered its one thousand male workers little more than a mess room with benches, together with a few hotplates for warming lunches that the workers brought from home. In the end, Robertson's recommendations remained modest, limited to suggestions for a canteen serving milk, tea, coffee, and soup, as well as the introduction of a "community nutrition educational campaign" designed to "help the employees to realize the importance of proper food in relation to Good Health."

109. Temiskaming had been a company town since its founding in 1917 by the Riordon Paper Company, and it continued as a company town after CIP assumed operations in 1925.

110. Summary of Cafeteria Study, Canadian International Paper Company, 7 March 1946, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC. At the time of the survey, most of the workers brought their own lunch to work each day.



wished to move carefully in this direction, mainly to avoid establishing what he called costly, inefficient, and underused “white elephants.”<sup>111</sup>

### ***Industrial Peace***

Nutrition Division staff maintained that enhanced workplace efficiency was only one benefit employers could expect from implementing robust and multilayered nutrition programs. Another was the potential for happier relations between management and workers. For employers in the immediate postwar years, industrial peace was in short supply. Thousands of workers were eager to regain ground lost after years of economic depression and wartime restrictions. Emboldened by the emergence of what appeared to be a new industrial regime characterized by rising union density, new collective bargaining rights, and a budding postwar prosperity, workers engaged employers in bitter confrontations over wages and working conditions.<sup>112</sup> A wave of strikes in 1946 and 1947 saw some 240,000 workers walk off the job, costing employers across Canada and across industries millions of productive workdays.<sup>113</sup> The so-called labour question – including what historian Peter McNinnis has described as “finding a solution to labour disputes and incorporating trade unions into postwar civil society” – remained one of the more pressing issues threatening to complicate state and industry hopes for a smooth national postwar reconstruction program.<sup>114</sup>

The promise of dampening labour militancy and coaxing workers into a sense of unity of purpose was no doubt an attractive prospect for many employers. “Happy workers always lead to better employee-management relations,” Pett asserted confidently in touting the advantages of plant cafeterias. “It is the wise management who sees this.” Plant cafeterias gave a worker the sense that “management is interested in his welfare and not only the products he puts out. He feels that the management looks on him as an individual and not as a machine. This employee will be satisfied; he will work harder, accomplish more, stay with the company even when something else which may look better appears on the horizon.”<sup>115</sup> Speaking to the Woodlands Section of the

111. T. H. Robinson to Margaret Lock, 24 June 1946, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-4, LAC.

112. See, for example, Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1988), 77–79. See also Peter Stuart McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

113. For figures, see Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel & Donald Fyson, *History of the Canadian Peoples*, vol. 2, *1867 to the Present*, 6th ed. (Toronto: Pearson, 2015), 291. See also Peter McNinnis’ cogent characterization of the breadth of labour-industry disputes in “Teamwork for Harmony: Labour-Management Production Committees and the Postwar Settlement in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77, 3 (September 1996): 327.

114. McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*, 2.

115. L. B. Pett to S. J. Bush, Industrial Caterers Limited, 15 June 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-



Canadian Pulp and Paper Association in January 1947, Pett similarly emphasized how nutrition-conscious employers could "develop [workers'] good attitude towards the job and keep men on the job a little longer" if they were prepared to invest in plant-sponsored food plans.<sup>116</sup> The benefits of employer attention to workers' health, noted the *Industrial Health Bulletin* in December 1948, "cannot be measured in dollars and cents," but rather in "improved labor-management relations" and the removal of "many sources of friction that might otherwise be present."<sup>117</sup> Employers, then, owed it to themselves to make provision for on-site and adequate feeding facilities, alongside broader health services, thereby enhancing production and fostering general feelings of industrial peace.

Nutrition experts were quick to lay out the wide variety of options available to conscientious employers interested in finding the way to workers' hearts through their stomachs. A December 1945 Division report, for example, suggested that simple mess rooms "can be a potent factor in good plant morale." Although mess rooms did not offer workers food per se, they nevertheless provided a "pleasant" atmosphere "for the worker to enjoy a restful and refreshing meal." Providing workers with this sort of accommodation – a pleasant and relaxing place to enjoy home-brought lunches – presumably went some distance in establishing and maintaining good industrial relations. Milk delivery services provided by a local dairy similarly contributed to the happiness and productivity of workers. Milk provision was "one of the simplest means of improving nutritional status," and "no plant, however small, should be without the means of distributing milk to its workers at least once a day." Mobile canteens, stationary canteens, or lunch counters were also ideal for plants with limited space, a dispersed workforce, or small numbers of workers. Such facilities easily accommodated milk and fruit juice services, as well as fresh fruits, sandwiches, cakes, soups, and simple hot meals, at little cost to either employers or workers.<sup>118</sup>

Full-course hot meals served at on-site cafeterias remained, however, the gold standard. Unfortunately, such services often fell well beyond most employers' expertise. Industrial employers were, after all, in the business of manufacturing and resource extraction, not food preparation. Certainly, employing the use of professional outside concessionaire services removed much of the employer effort and responsibility for providing workers with nutritious workday meals. But it also undermined employers' "control over either the lunch room or the quality of the food served, and so misses both the chance of improving the nutritional status and hence health of the employees,

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7-10, LAC.

116. "Training of Camp Cooks," March 1947, RG 29, vol. 972, file 388-5-1, LAC.

117. "Food Is a Tool" *Industrial Health Bulletin* (1948).

118. Pett, Lock & Wilson, "Trends in Industrial Feeding," LAC.

and the chance of creating the kind of good will that also affects production.” Concessionaires, moreover, ran their food services with a built-in profit model, leading to higher costs to workers than a company-operated service would be able to offer. Profit had no place in employer-organized food service delivery, because it neither improved worker efficiency nor promoted worker morale. Concessionaires, Nutrition Division workers noted bluntly, “have not the same interest as the management in the health of the employees, nor in the morale and goodwill that can be fostered or injured by the food facilities.”<sup>119</sup>

Even better were joint worker/employer-managed food services. Incorporating workers into food service delivery, Division staff suggested, “may increase the morale-building atmosphere of the food service by creating the feeling of a clubroom, and it provides the most flexible avenue for ascertaining and responding to employee requests.”<sup>120</sup> Sentiments like these were part of a much broader tradition of so-called corporate welfare programs designed to inculcate in workers a sense of “corporate family” and company loyalty as a means of achieving greater worker productivity and profit. Stretching back to the 19th century at least, employers tried to convince workers that they were engaged in a shared project of mutual gain. According to historian Craig Heron, “several companies had a tradition dating back to the 1880s of company picnics, banquets, Christmas turkeys, and the like, which encouraged a specific company’s workers to bask in the paternalist generosity of the entrepreneur who employed them.”<sup>121</sup> Such early corporate welfare practices persisted well into the 20th century. But they took on an added urgency in the context of state and industry postwar reconstruction aspirations. In this sense, Nutrition Division exhortations aimed at industry fit easily into the ethos behind both formal and informal labour-management production cooperatives intended, as McInnis has noted, to “ensure a harmonious balance in the workplace.”<sup>122</sup>

Further, plant-operated full meal services allowed for enhanced managerial control over feeding times and foods on offer, and it saved money by reducing costs (through the economical use of leftovers and bulk food purchases, for example). The focus, however, had to remain on good nutrition. “Any in plant feeding scheme that fails to benefit the health of the employees,” Division staff warned, “fails to achieve its greatest usefulness to the industry.” To this end, on-site feeding, organized and controlled by employers, afforded employers the opportunity to guide workers toward healthy foods. Workers left to their own devices might make unhealthy food choices in the form of “soft drinks,

119. Pett, Lock & Wilson, “Trends in Industrial Feeding,” LAC.

120. “Recommendations on Training,” December 1945, LAC.

121. Heron, *Lunch Bucket Lives: Remaking the Workers City* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 256.

122. McInnis, “Teamwork for Harmony,” 324. See also McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*, 4.



**Workers of the Asbestos Corporation enjoying their lunch at lunch tables provided by the corporation.**

R1196-14-7-E, ref. no. e000762335, National Film Board of Canada, Library and Archives Canada.

ordinary white breads, and packaged cakes." Employers should therefore organize the lunch hour with a view to increasing "the likelihood [*sic*] of the employee selecting a 'good' lunch." The Johnson & Johnson Company operating out of Montréal took this approach one step further, proposing an entirely employee-operated food service. The plant had recently installed what personnel manager R. Sauriol described as an "ultra-modern cafeteria" designed to accommodate 200 workers. Having informally canvassed several local industrial concerns, the company determined that its Montréal plant would "obtain the best results by having the cafeteria operated entirely by our employees under a mutual organization on a non-profit basis." This approach would ensure workers of "good meals ... served as near to cost price as possible." Perhaps even more important, Sauriol noted, "it will relieve Management of all grievances which may arise from the operation of the cafeteria as employees will realize that it is their own independent organization."<sup>123</sup> The Sonoco Products Company of Canada similarly sought to incorporate its 85 workers into a food service program. In a March 1947 letter to the Nutrition Division,

123. B. Sauriol (personnel manager, Johnson & Johnson Limited), "Industrial Feeding Questionnaire," 1 April 1947, RG 29 Vol. 971 File 388-2-6-3, LAC.

the company reported that its cafeteria “will be operated by the Plant with the assistance of the employees. We have an employee who has taken a dietitian’s course and we expect to place her in charge of the cafeteria.”<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

SOON AFTER THE WAR, the provinces began to assert their jurisdictional authority over health care, including nutrition services.<sup>125</sup> In September 1945, for instance, officials with Manitoba’s Bureau of Health and Welfare Education described their intentions for that province’s postwar industrial nutrition regime: “We feel that the nutrition service to industries in Manitoba is a provincial responsibility, naturally, and under present conditions we shall be able to take care of the existing requests.”<sup>126</sup> British Columbia’s provincial health officer had come to similar conclusions. “Fundamentally,” he wrote Pett in October 1945, “we believe that such service can be most effective as part of a local health and nutrition service.”<sup>127</sup> Other provinces, Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia among them, anticipated setting up their own nutrition sections in future.<sup>128</sup> By the early 1950s, the Nutrition Division was routinely responding to industrial inquiries with a form letter noting that “industrial health services have reverted to being a strictly provincial field of operation.”

Nutritionists at the outset of World War II benefitted from the development of nearly a century of scientific inquiries and investigations into how the human body transforms food into energy. Given the more general trend toward

124. L. H. S. Fremantle, “Industrial Feeding Questionnaire,” 31 March 1947, RG 29, vol. 971, file 388-2-6-3, LAC.

125. To be sure, Québec’s provincial government had developed its own nutrition division that functioned as a consultative service by the late 1930s. Other provinces had health departments prior to the onset of World War II, and some of those departments concerned themselves with nutrition on an ad hoc and small-scale basis. See François Guérard, “L’émergence de politiques nutritionnelles au Québec, 1936–1977,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 67, 2 (2013): 165–192.

126. M. J. Vann (nutrition consultant, Bureau of Health and Welfare Education) to Dr. F. W. Jackson (deputy minister), memo, 21 September 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

127. G. F. Amyot (provincial health officer) to Lionel Pett, 5 October 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

128. New Brunswick officials, for example, reported that “in initiating our Nutrition Services here with a staff of only Miss Florence Swan and myself, we do not anticipate being able to give much service to industry at present. We should be very glad therefore, to avail ourselves of the time and experience of the Federal Nutrition Division in this field, until such time when our facilities expand to include such services.” Jean F. Webb (director, Nutrition Services) to L. B. Pett, 25 September 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC. Officials in Alberta reported that “until such time as we have our own nutritionist, your Regional Nutritionists could be of great assistance in connection with this service.” Malcolm R. Bow (deputy minister of health) to L. B. Pett, 25 September 1945, RG 29, vol. 976, file 388-7-10, LAC.

industrialization, it is perhaps not surprising that much of this early research would focus on ways the well-fed human body could enhance industrial production. These ideas persisted well into the 20th century, as state-sponsored nutritionists put science to use in both wartime and peacetime industrial production. By the outset of World War II, nutrition science found ready use as a means to ensure effective soldiering at war and efficient industrial production at home. Nutrition scientists employed a potent combination of sociomedical rationales, economic and political persuasive tactics, and outright propaganda to encourage employers, workers, and their families to support their nutritional health-related objectives. For the most part, Nutrition Division staff treaded lightly on employers' right to manage their workplaces, wielding, for instance, PC 1550 more as an educative tool than as a coercive agent to encourage attention to workplace nutrition. Countervailing state-directed wartime regulatory measures like wage and price controls and food rationing policies also constrained the Division's activities and prompted Division workers to temper their wider nutrition-program aspirations in the face of larger state goals. Division staff assumed that women would shoulder much of the responsibility and hard work associated with family nutritional health as a natural extension of their roles as wives and mothers – an assumption that held true even where women themselves were engaged in the paid labour force. In this sense, women's continued responsibilities for maintaining their families' nutritional health tempered any threats posed by their increased participation in the paid workplace and reinforced rather than disturbed broader gendered norms.

Both during and after the war, employers tended to accept Division advice where it promised greater industrial productivity, efficiencies, and workplace morale. But they balked at the point where such advice interfered with broader workplace operations and profit. Division staff and industrial employers, in turn, expected workers to participate fully in ensuring their own nutritional health, in service both to Canada's war effort and to the nation's general postwar industrial efficiency and productivity. For their part, workers supported employer efforts at improving food services on the job even while remaining broadly skeptical of their employers' motivations and goals. Nor did they hesitate to adopt the language of nutrition to advocate for access to better food. In the end, no doubt, workers maintained an abiding interest in nutrition not to benefit their employers' productivity, efficiency, and morale goals, but rather for their own health.

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