

Class, Gender, and Region:

Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology



Edited by Gregory S. Kealey

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St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History

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Introduction

Gregory S. Kealey

In late August 1985 Richard Ericson, on behalf of the *Canadian Journal of Sociology's* editorial board, asked me if I would be willing to edit a special issue of *CJS* on recent research and developments in Canadian social history. I responded enthusiastically to this generous initiative because I have felt for some time that social historians and historical sociologists could benefit a great deal from more exposure to each other's work. Far too much energy has been invested, on both sides of the disciplinary divide, in a narrow-minded dismissiveness of the differing approaches. Indeed, in the attempt to further such discussion, we are also publishing this *CJS* special issue as a book, *Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988).

The call for submissions to the special issue went out in the spring of 1986 and many excellent essays were sent to me for consideration. Space constraints meant that I could only choose six of these and, indeed, the *CJS* editors graciously have given me more pages than we had originally agreed on to allow the six essays to appear. The articles which follow are the products of four sociologists, one historian, and one geographer, thus partially achieving the interdisciplinary mix I was hoping for. In addition, unlike many Canadian essay collections, the contributors and their subjects cover the country from Newfoundland to British Columbia with forays into Cape Breton and central Ontario. No central Canadian dominance here.

In the spring of 1986 when submissions were solicited, I chose two themes for this special issue. The first, "theoretical/methodological pieces on the relationship of social history and sociology, and specifically on Canadian developments in these areas," generated far fewer contributions than the second. Of the six essays published here, Jim Conley's and perhaps Ian McKay's come closest to pursuing theme one. The second theme, "empirical studies of class and class conflict with special emphasis on work that reflects on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and region with class," succeeded in attracting the bulk of both the submissions and the published essays. Both McKay and Conley, of course, speak to theme two as well to theme one, and Darroch, Creese, Muszynski, and Overton, all pursue class and class conflict in its nuanced interaction with gender, ethnicity, and region.

This introduction is not the place to engage in an analysis of the history of

historical sociology in Canada. Recent scholarship has commenced the process of coming to terms with the Canadian sociological tradition, with emphasis on the contributions of scholars at Toronto and McGill (Harrison, 1981; Hiller, 1982; Campbell, 1983; Shore, 1987). In addition, the role of social scientists in the formulation of state policy has also received considerable scrutiny (Owram, 1987; Granatstein, 1982). It also seems inappropriate here to review the growing number of books considering the relationship of sociology and history (Abrams, 1982; Burke, 1980; Skocpol, 1984; Tilly, 1981; 1984). Instead I shall outline briefly the development of Canadian social history in the last twenty years focussing on the themes of this volume.

I think it is safe to say that Canadian historical writing on class, gender, ethnicity, and region has been transformed dramatically in the last twenty years. The emergence in the late 1960s of the "new" social history with its various satellites — women's history, working-class history, urban, ethnic, family, etc. — has received considerable historiographic attention. The early enthusiasm which greeted its arrival has given way to considerable skepticism and, in some cases, to a reactionary nostalgia for an academic golden age that myth claims existed in Canadian universities and history departments before the "troubles" of the 1960s. Such concerns find reflection in as even-handed an observer as Carl Berger, whose second edition of *The Writing of Canadian History* closes with a chapter on "Tradition and the New History." In his conclusion, he notes:

The diversification of historical writing and experimentation in many fields were greeted by some historians as a liberation from stultifying formula, an exciting new beginning. Few of them regretted that the historian had been at last released from the burden of constantly performing as some kind of national sage. Others who stood closer to the tradition that stretched back from Creighton to George M. Wrong were apt to regret the excesses of revisionism and the fact that a substantial proportion of contemporary history was more likely to raise painful questions of guilt and grievance rather than provide positive perspectives on the major currents of national life. (Berger, 1986: 320)

The confusion evident here between the demands of critical, scholarly inquiry and the self-appointed mission to create a positive, national mythology lies at the heart of Berger's analysis of Canadian historical writing. The degree to which reaction has re-emerged to reassert the need for a "positive" unifying national history can be seen by contrasting the views of J.M.S. Careless in 1969 and in 1980. In 1969, Careless enthusiastically embraced Ramsay Cook's earlier call for the study of region, class, and ethnicity in Canadian history in the fiftieth anniversary issue of the *Canadian Historical Review* (Careless, 1969). By 1980, however, he had serious doubts:

Ten years after one might well ask if there is any positive balance of satisfaction with Canada now left at all when he considers the strenuous chorus of dissatisfactions voiced from Newfoundland to British Columbia.... There has been a massive outpouring both in popular and scholarly writings on regional interests and inequities, on cultural discords and demands, on class disparities and stresses, and such things as national concerns are by and large passed over or discounted. In this situation I feel a little like

the farmer in the midst of the flood when he declared: Lord, I know I prayed for rain — but this is ridiculous. (Careless, 1980)

As I hope this volume suggests, such plaintiff Toronto cries to date have not been able to dam the flood of critical scholarship on class, gender, and region. Indeed the impact of such scholarship is spreading and the research results have started to transform our view of Canada's past.

The origins of such historical writing and of the increasing convergence between history and sociology lie in the 1960s. By then, Canadian historical writing had reached what many of its major practitioners felt was a dead end. The post-World War II move away from economic interpretations of Canadian history had led to little more than a succession of political biographies and a series of narrative histories celebrating the emergence of the Canadian nation. While muted compared to the celebratory excesses of American consensus school historiography, Canadian historical writing in this period was cut from the same cloth. Macdonald, Brown, King, and even Arthur Meighen stepped forward in multi-volume, award-winning biographical studies, which not only swept the field of history but also generally won Canada's major literary awards. The fact that some of these biographies were commissioned and, in one case, involved the active participation of the subject seemed to cause reviewers no pause. The voices of dissent were few in these years and sufficiently marginal that they provoked little notice. The late Clare Pentland and Brough Macpherson were political economists; Stanley Ryerson was a Marxist. (Kealey, 1979; 1982). Need more be said?

The slackening of the Cold War, third world liberation struggles, the expansion of higher education, rising working-class militancy, and the events of 1968, all translated in Canada, as elsewhere, into a search for new intellectual tools and a re-examination of the country's cultural, intellectual, and, above all, social history (Hobsbawm, 1970). The introductory sections of Ian McKay's article nicely capture one aspect of the debates that surfaced in those years. Canadian nationalists of the left celebrated Innis and the political economy tradition and sought historical explanations for Canada's dependent capitalist economy. Other scholars turned instead to the British Marxist historical tradition for inspiration and coupled that example to the work of American scholars such as Herbert Gutman and David Montgomery, who had also been deeply influenced by their interaction with Edward Thompson and other British Marxists (Gutman, 1976; 1987; Montgomery, 1967; 1979; 1987; Kaye, 1984; Kealey, 1985; Palmer, 1980; Berlin, 1987). Such work has frequently been published in the journal, *Labour/Le Travail*, which began publication as an annual in 1976 and became a semi-annual in 1980. As the official publication of the Committee on Canadian Labour History of the Canadian Historical Association, the journal maintains no specific ideological line or preferred methodological approach but has become the publication vehicle of many of the younger scholars whose work has been influenced by the research trajectories of 1968 and beyond.

Women's history in Canada shares similar roots, although as elsewhere the re-emergence of feminist perspectives from within the new left generated considerable tension. Nevertheless the feminist historical trajectory combined with developments in the field of family history and demography to produce an entire new focus not only on women's paid work but also on women's unpaid labour. Such new emphases, captured in this volume in the essays by Conley, Creese, and Muszynski, has led to a broadening of research into the realms of consumption and reproduction (Bradbury, 1979; 1984; 1987). Concepts such as the family economy and the family wage have deepened our understanding of the nature of both working-class accommodation and resistance.

Considerable work has also been done on patterns of mobility (both horizontal and vertical), inequality, and demography, all through the pioneering use of large-scale quantitative data analysis projects, involving the use of manuscript census, property, assessment, and other such records. Initiated in Canada by Michael Katz and Charles Tilly, both of whom spent time in Toronto after Harvard and before returning to the United States, these projects proved controversial among historians. Katz's Hamilton project, which produced two books, numerous articles, and a vast data bank, came under criticism from more conventional urban historians, who felt Hamilton did not figure as a place in his work and worried about representativeness; and from working-class historians, who, initially called for class analysis and criticized his use of modernization theory and, subsequently attacked him for an over-simplified, two-class model and for underestimating working-class self-activity and resistance (Katz, 1976; 1983; Palmer, 1976; 1984). Less controversial, but highly productive projects working with analogous data sets have been the Michael Ornstein and Gordon Darroch project at York analyzing the 1871 manuscript census, of which Darroch's article in this volume is a component, and Gérard Bouchard's ongoing, vast study of the Saguenay region of Quebec. (Darroch, 1981; Darroch and Ornstein, 1980; 1981; 1984; Bouchard, 1976; 1977; 1980; 1981).

Region became a major part of historical discussion at approximately the same time as class and gender, again with material as well as intellectual roots. The new social history orientations led to the legitimation of local and community studies. Simultaneously the growth and development of the regional Canadian universities meant that for the first time a broad spectrum of Canadian academics found themselves living outside the metropolitan centres of Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal. Both factors, combined with the explosion of regional political sentiment, led to a remarkable growth of regional historiography. Perhaps the best example occurred in eastern Canada where the journal *Acadiensis* emerged in 1971 and commenced the process of a total rewriting of Atlantic Canadian history. This regional assertiveness enunciated a similar impatience with the older traditions of Canadian historical writing. P.A. Buckner, *Acadiensis*' founding editor, argued:

Perhaps it is a sign of our basic insecurity and of our immaturity as a nation that our historians are still obsessed with the great "national" themes and that local history, despite a recognition of its importance,

is more talked about than written. (Buckner, 1971:3)

The impatience mentioned by Berger and articulated by Careless addresses itself as much to this regional revolt as it does to writings concerned with class and gender.

The essays that follow fill different slots in Theda Skocpol's schematic chart of research strategies in historical sociology (Skocpol, 1984: 363). None of the essays in this volume fit into the category of which she is most critical, namely applying general models to explain historical instances, although James Conley's essay might be read by some in this way. I would argue that such a reading is wrong because his "model" arises not from the application of a general model to a historical case, but rather from his rigorous empirical study of Vancouver. Skocpol's second category, "interpretive historical sociology," perhaps best characterizes McKay, Creese, and Muszynski, while Conley, Darroch, and Overton come closer to her preferred path, the analysis of causal regularities in history. My difficulty in applying her categories raises doubts in my mind about their utility. Nevertheless her attempt to delineate research strategies in historical sociology does help us to think more clearly about our methods in analyzing the past. Historians too often take their method for granted, applying it with little explanation of what they are doing. The strength in such an approach lies in its accessibility; its weakness stems from its deceptive simplicity and the ensuing delusion that history is easily understood and written. Moreover, all too often historians are reluctant to draw out the import of their findings, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. When a sociologist-reader does just that, however, the historian is infuriated by the perceived reductionism of the reading.

To a considerable degree, the essays that follow avoid these particular difficulties. They also all reflect primary research, something which has often been lacking in historical sociology. In 1981 Charles Tilly expressed the following hope: "I prefer that there be no disciplinary division of labour: simply both doing social history." This volume suggests that this aspiration is being pursued actively by Canadian scholars.

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The crisis of dependent development: class conflict in the Nova Scotia coalfields, 1872-1876*

Ian McKay

Abstract. This article analyzes the social and economic crisis of the 1870s in the Nova Scotia coalfields. The roots of this crisis can be found in the mercantile export-oriented character of the industry and the limited "enclave" character of the capitalism associated with it. After a consideration of some of the theoretical and methodological issues involved in the study of workers in the Maritimes, the analysis turns to the distinctive character of the export economy dominated by the British-based General Mining Association. This is followed by a closer examination of the social relations of production in coal mining in the years preceding the upheaval of the 1870s, with particular reference to the emergence of a capitalist labour market, changes in the labour process, processes of social control, and the transition from class conflicts reflecting the "dispossession of the peasantry" to those reflecting a maturing labour/capital antagonism. The essay concludes with a description of the events of 1875 and 1876 in Cape Breton and an analysis of the restructuring of labour, capital, and the state which followed, and was profoundly influenced by, this deep crisis.

Résumé. Cet article fait l'analyse de la crise sociale et économique de 1870 dans les champs minières de la Nouvelle Ecosse. A la base de cette crise fut le caractère commercial orienté vers l'exportation de l'industrie et le caractère "enclave" limité du capitalisme qui y fut associé. Après avoir considéré quelques questions théoriques et méthodologiques que soulèvent l'étude des travailleurs des Maritimes, on analysera le caractère spéciale de cette économie basée sur l'exportation dominé par la General Mining Association. On examinera ensuite les relations sociales de la production dans l'industrie minière pendant les années qui précédèrent le soulèvement de 1870 en s'y référant tout particulièrement au marché de travail capitaliste qui émergeait, au changement dans le processus du travail, au processus du contrôle social, et à la transition dans le conflit des classes qui reflétait la dépossession des paysans à un conflit qui reflétait un antagonisme travail/capitale qui mûrissait. On termine en décrivant les événements de 1875 et 1876 au Cape Breton et en analysant la restructuration de la main-d'œuvre, du capital et de l'état qui suivèrent et furent profondément influencés par cette crise.

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In 1876 the editor of the *Halifax Citizen* sounded the alarm.

Here are men of uneasy and restless temperament and of diabolical disposition, who persuade their fellows that they have no right to suffer with the capitalist and others who feel the pinch of hard times, induce them to cease work and then be guilty of violence against those who take their places.... But that is not the worst. The same ringleaders, who feel so keenly the wrongs of the working man, deliberately plan and proceed to execute murder.... This strike and its attendant circumstances should be a warning to our miners and labourers generally, of the character of those who are foremost in endeavoring to promote the interests of the workingman by irregular and illegal means. At the same time it is a warning to the community at large of the dangerous character of some of the elements in our midst, elements that want only opportunity without provocation to fly out into rapine and murder.

The Maritime region in the 1870s was engulfed in serious social conflicts. In Saint John, New Brunswick, antagonism between merchants and longshoremen over wage reductions had reached the point of explosive violence in 1875. One merchant was struck down by an unknown assailant; in response, his fellow merchants raised an enormous fund of \$108,500 with which to smash the militant labourers' union, and the city's labour movement came to the verge of declaring a general strike. In Chatham, New Brunswick, a 700-member "club of stevedores" struggled against employers and special constables. In Charlottetown, PEI, and in Springhill and Pictou County, Nova Scotia, workers conducted several strikes and demonstrations against wage reductions from 1874 to 1876. In Londonderry, Nova Scotia, an attempt to reduce wages sparked a major riot in February 1877 which ended with the fatal shooting of worker Daniel McDougall by an agent of the company, as well as the dispatch of 50 men of Her Majesty's 97th Regiment. Men of "uneasy temperament" seemed to be everywhere in the region from 1874 to 1878 (*Citizen*, 2 August 1876, 7 and 14 January 1876; Forsey, 1982: 70-79; Rice, 1968: Ch. 3; *Morning Chronicle*, 19 July 1875; *Evening Express*, 11 May 1874; *Pictou Colonial Standard* 19 July 1875, 18 January 1876; *Morning Herald*, 27 February 1877).¹ Not until the 1920s, and then, arguably, not to this extent, was social life throughout the region thrown into such disorder and underlying assumptions open to question.

In this article, I want to illuminate this very specific moment of social crisis in the Maritimes by telling the story of the struggle of Cape Breton coal miners against the General Mining Association in 1876, the first of many steps taken by Cape Breton miners for labour organization, and the very strike which sparked the indignant denunciation of the editor of the *Citizen*. But my aims go beyond the description of this one event, significant though I believe it was. I want to look at the ways in which events like this one have been treated too simply by labour historians and neglected altogether by theorists of development, and argue for a new way of looking at the history of workers in the Maritimes that combines two quite distinct ways of analyzing regional society. To do this I will first situate this essay

1. All newspapers cited were published in Halifax unless otherwise noted.

the disorders of 1876.

Political economy and the new labour history in the Maritimes

Over the last decade two major schools of critical thought have grappled with the difficult problems posed by the social history of the Maritimes. Regional political economy, developed mainly within sociology, has drawn on Latin American models of dependency and underdevelopment and on the theories of structural Marxism. The key problem posed within this framework is that of Maritime underdevelopment, analyzed in terms of a spatial division of labour originating in national capital and labour markets, or in the effects of the structural articulation of two modes of production within the region. The principal foci of research have been primary producers and resource industries. The new social and labour history, on the other hand, while also influenced by the Marxist tradition, has tended to draw on European and American models of class and class consciousness and on the traditions of Marxist humanism. The key problem here is that of periodizing and explaining the course of class struggle in the Maritimes, which is analyzed in terms of the cultural background, organizational history, and strategic effectiveness of workers and working-class communities. Regional labour historiography has principally focussed on coal miners and urban workers. While these two schools, sharing as they do a "conflict" perspective on social classes and inequalities under capitalism, are housed within a common Marxist paradigm, this has not led to their creative fusion, but at best to a kind of polite co-habitation. Although more closely linked together a decade ago, now each has developed largely in isolation from the other, within the usual disciplinary walls of the modern academy, and largely content to pursue their respective research problems.²

However "natural" such a division may appear to be in today's academy, it stands in the way of a successful critical re-interpretation of Maritime development. Both schools represent partial breakthroughs in transforming our understanding of the region's historic evolution, but both are vulnerable to the criticisms of the other. From the standpoint of labour historians, regional dependency theory frequently appears ahistorical, reductionist, and implicitly elitist: rather than seeing development as a process shaped, not only by such impersonal external forces as national labour and capital markets, but also by men and women within the region, dependency theory in the Maritimes has tended to fall into the same abstract emphasis on external forces that tended to characterize its earliest applications in Latin America. Ideally, dependency analysis should be the study of the dynamics of individual societies through the concrete forms of articulation between "external factors"

2. For some of the major articles of the labour history school, see Frank (1976: 161-184); Reilly (1980: 56-77). For a general overview, which draws connections between development and labour, see Frank (1985: 135-47). The classic statement of a structuralist approach within regional political economy is Veltmeyer (1979: 17-35). For helpful overviews of the regional political economy school, see Barrett (1980: 273-286); Cannon (1984: 65-86); and Sacouman (1981: 135-150).

(the general determinants of the capitalist system) and the "internal factors" (the specific determinants of a given society). In practice, however, the predominant emphasis on the concentration and centralization of capital within regional sociology has meant that the interplay between external and internal factors is cursorily treated and the process of underdevelopment reduced to the inevitable result of economic laws over which Maritimers could have little or no influence. This forceful eviction of politics, culture, and conflict from the heart of critical analysis implicitly returns theory to the economism of the Second International, minus, however, its mobilizing myth of progress. This impasse is widely recognized, but not easily transcended.³

Equally strong criticisms, however, can be made by sociologists of development of the new labour and social history. In contrast with the theoretical range and ambition of the sociologists, the new social history has preferred to proceed empirically and cautiously on a case-by-case basis. While such careful local research has not evaded theory, it has been eclectic in its theoretical borrowing. As a consequence, while a decade of the new history has uncovered an entirely hidden history of class conflict and resistance, and thereby made it far more difficult to interpret the Maritimes in terms of an unchanging conservatism, it has not led to a comprehensive re-interpretation of the development of the region using the category of social class. It has failed to account for the contrasting trajectories of the labour and popular movements in the Maritimes and to assess their impact on economic development itself. Regional labour historiography has generally applied the same models of class and class consciousness that have grown out of the study of far more developed capitalist societies, and has thus failed to register, let alone account for, the distinctiveness of the Maritime situation. If regional political economy has failed to recognize the decisive historical role of workers in Maritime history, regional labour historiography has failed to generalize beyond the level of the community and has thus left unanalyzed many of the major questions of Maritime socio-economic development.⁴

In this way, both approaches have paid for their relative isolation by failing to generate determinate abstractions through which regional social development can be interpreted. An increasingly abstract and formal political economy, focussing on structures of accumulation and relations of dependency, founders when it attempts to generalize from its structural economic history to a general history of regional society or to explain *why* the laws of capital should have required that production be consolidated and centralized in central Canada rather than the Maritimes. An empirically rich but theoretically underdeveloped labour historiography, focussing on moments of resistance and on the workers' primary experience of the social

3. Matthews (1983) resorts to "voluntarism" in his response to this impasse, but in essence restates rather than resolves the dilemma.

4. See, in particular, Michael Clow's (1984) critique of both the "labour history" and political economy schools.

world, proves inadequate to the task of explaining the defeat of popular movements, particularly since 1925, or to explain what difference the struggles of workers and struggles of workers and primary producers made for the social development of the region. Maritime political economy has failed to acknowledge the historical role of workers and primary producers in the evolution of regional society; Maritime social history has seemed incapable of advancing much past fragmented community studies to develop a general explanation of the pattern of regional development.

The regional impact of the Naylor-Clement thesis is a good example of the general problem. This thesis posits that industrial capitalism in Canada was thwarted, or at the least significantly retarded, because the dominant nineteenth-century mercantile bourgeoisie derived its wealth and power from the export of staples for an international market, and not from the pursuit of industrial development. As a consequence of this skewed pattern of development, the country was unable to escape dependence on the export of staples to international markets (see Naylor, 1975; Drache, 1977: 25-49; Clement, 1977). This thesis was heavily (and convincingly) attacked by labour historians impressed by the evidence of a mid-nineteenth-century transition from mercantile to industrial capitalism and unimpressed by the scientific credentials of staples theory.⁵ This debate represented a somewhat idiosyncratic Canadian version of the international debate between those who conceptualized the history of capitalism in terms of the market and those who defined capitalism in terms of whether society was based on the work of "free labourers" working for wages.⁶ The success of those who defined capitalism in terms of its relations of production and argued for a mid-nineteenth-century transition across Canada poses a serious problem for students of nineteenth-century Maritime development. It is by no means easy to "operationalize" such definitions of stages in the development of national capitalism in terms appropriate for a dependent region. On the one hand, "industrial capitalism," in the "fundamentalist" sense of the generalization of the wage relationship, was highly developed in many parts of the Maritimes from the 1830s to the 1850s, both with respect to the large international pool of wage labourers serving the transatlantic and coastal sailing fleets, and in such land-based staples industries as timber and coal.⁷ On the other

5. See Kealey (1980); for a recent installment in this long-running polemic, see Palmer (1986: 47-84).

6. See Blömlstrom and Hetne (1984) and Palma (1978: 881-924). See Clow (n.d.) for a stimulating analysis of the parallels between the Canadian and international debates.

7. As William K. Carroll (1985: 29) points out, from a consistently "fundamentalist" perspective, the mere fact that wage labour is concentrated in the production of unprocessed goods has nothing to do with Marx's basic criteria of industrial capital. For Marx, industrial capital is capital engaged directly in the generation of surplus value, *any* process in which wage labour is purchased and consumed in the production of new use-values, whose exchange brings to the industrialist a reflux of surplus value realized as profit, including capitalistically organized farming, resource extraction, manufacturing, and transportation. The relevance of this approach for the analysis of nineteenth-century shipping — for from this perspective "transportation" by definition pertains to industry — shipbuilding, and resource extraction in the Maritimes is readily seen.

hand, this emergence of a proletariat occurred within a variety of limited export enclaves, dominated (whether by formal ownership or unequal exchange) by merchants' capital in the developed world, the beneficiary of mechanisms of capital accumulation and exchange within the world-system (Amin, 1975).

Mid-nineteenth-century merchants' capital in the Maritimes was thus a highly ambiguous phenomenon.⁸ It can be seen preparing the preconditions of full industrial capitalism, through the primitive accumulation of money wealth and the dissolution of pre-capitalist modes of production. However, the tightness with which merchants' capital was tied to the world's pre-eminent industrial power, the extraordinary depth and thoroughness of its penetration of the economic and social life of the Maritimes, and the diversity of modes of production which it exploited without necessarily transforming, gave merchants' capital a relative immunity from the social pressures which undermined its hegemony elsewhere in mid-nineteenth-century British North America.⁹ At a certain point, according to Marx, genuine development requires that the production process absorb circulation into itself merely as a third, concluding, moment of its circuit. If, for whatever reason, this does not occur, a country whose economy is based on trade (such as Holland) will decline vis-à-vis a country whose economy is increasingly based on industry (such as England). Merchants' capital could pave the way to full capitalism if it brought into being the four essential conditions for the transition from feudal society to capitalism — the growth of commodity production and a sufficient level of development of the forces of production, an accumulation of money wealth, the generation of a class of free labourers, and the protection of the state — but if it failed to stimulate such conditions and achieved a full independence of productive capital, it could and did throttle fuller development (Marx, 1981: 440-444). Elaborating on Marx's conception, Geoffrey Kay suggests that because merchants did not make their profits by revolutionizing production, but rather by controlling markets, and because the greater the control they were able to exercise the higher their rate of profit, merchants' capital tended to centralize and concentrate itself into monopolies even faster than productive capital. One characteristic feature of merchants' capital prior to the advent of industrial capitalism was that it eschewed the principle of *laissez-faire* and sought state support for rigidly enforced monopolistic privileges (Kay, 1975: 96-97).

The consequences of this were doubly depressing for the underdeveloped world: merchants' capital repressed general economic development in proportion to its

8. See Larry McCann's (1981: 29-64) suggestive contribution which, from a political economy perspective, narrows a debate concerning the social relations of production into a description of the relative position of manufacturing. From a "fundamentalist" standpoint, Pictou County was already "industrialized" in the 1860s precisely to the extent that it had a relatively large proletarianized mining population working in heavily capitalized mines.

9. Gordon Laxer (1985: 86) usefully stresses the need for nascent industrial capital to recruit allies among the popular classes in order to seize "the levers of the state."

own independent development and entailed the reorganization of whole economies and societies according to the requirements of external economic interests, through the exploitation of coerced or relatively autonomous peasants, or through the organization of production in plantations and mines employing wage labour. Such enclaves of industrial capitalism did not, however, create the conditions under which an indigenous industrial capitalism could grow. It was because capital in the underdeveloped world existed in the form of independent merchants' capital that it bolstered up archaic political and economic forms. Forced to try to increase its profits abroad through ever-more unequal exchange, merchants' capital found the possibilities to increase the rate of exploitation were severely limited.

In the last analysis, the rate of exploitation in any society depends upon the productivity of labour, which industrial capital continuously strives to increase by revolutionising the methods of production. But merchant capital, locked up in the sphere of circulation, has no power in these areas. Plantation production and mines run with cheap labour bear few resemblances to modern industrial production, and certainly offered merchant capital no way out in the long run. In fact the situation of merchant capital was doubly jeopardised; for not only did it find itself losing profits to industrial capital as its prospects of increasing exploitation in the underdeveloped world ran out; but as capital it was driven by its very nature to accumulate and this meant not merely maintaining profits but actually increasing them. (Kay, 1975: 123).¹⁰

Neither political economists nor labour historians in the region have yet directed sustained attention to the problem of merchants' capital in the Maritimes. If T.W. Acheson is correct in his view that the industrialization of the Maritimes under the import-substitution policies of the National Policy was limited by the economic and social structures of the mercantile past, it is this problem that holds out the greatest potential for establishing the historical reasons for the region's uneven decline before the forces of central Canadian capitalism in the period 1880-1920 (Acheson, 1985: 200-201).¹¹ Research on such sectors as forestry, fishing, and agriculture, while not explicitly pushing comparisons with central Canadian patterns of development, suggest that mid-nineteenth-century merchants' capital entailed monopoly control over prices, significant levels of the direct involvement of the British state in the exploitation of natural resources, high levels of debt bondage, the

10. For similar views of "merchants' capital" as parasitical on the old order, or as existing in an extended interplay with feudal structures, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese (1983: 5) and Alan Greer (1985: Ch. 8).

11. See also Acheson (1972), which borrows from growth-pole theory in its emphasis on the absence of a regional metropolis, from determinist variants of staples theory in its emphasis on geographical fragmentation, and from Schumpeter in its stress on entrepreneurial *mentalités*. Many of these phenomena could be better conceptualized as the social consequences of the exploitation of widely dispersed resource enclaves by local and international merchants' capital.

12. See Rosemary Ommer (1981: 107-123) and Roch Samson (1986) on the "truck system" and merchants' capital in fishing; Andrew Hill Clark (1968), G.N.D. Evans (1969), and I.R. Robertson (1977: 227-240) on "neo-seigneurialism" in agriculture; and T.W. Acheson (1985: 165-189) for merchants and the tariff.

imposition of quasi-seigneurial forms of land tenure, and the resistance by local merchants to tariff policies of import substitution.¹² One working hypothesis on regional development which might be formulated on the basis of this empirical work is that a major key to Maritime regional underdevelopment is to be found in the nature of the region's links to the world capitalist economy in the period of merchants' capital (c.1750-1870), which focussed development in dependent export enclaves, undermined the socio-economic potential for integrated and balanced growth, and retarded the development of a home market. The survival of essentially pre-capitalist relations and a paternalist politics retarded the full development of capitalism in the crucial period between the fall of the old mercantile system and the formation of the Canadian state, leaving a fragmented and dependent region vulnerable to rapidly expanding central Canadian capital.

Yet if this emphasis on the importance of the links between the world-system and local export sectors is not to become a simple reversion to the outdated external focus of the "development of underdevelopment" model, with its simplistic denial of the developmental opportunities within Maritimes capitalism, it must be based on a far more subtle sense of the interplay of external and internal forces, "forming a complex whole whose structural links are not based on mere external forms of exploitation and coercion, but are rooted in coincidences of interests between local dominant classes and international ones, and, on the other side, are challenged by local dominated groups and classes" (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979: xvi). How best to conceptualize this dynamic of challenge and response is relatively unexplored theoretical terrain. Certainly the export sectors of the nineteenth-century Maritimes depended very heavily on wage labour, which gave rise to powerful if fragmented movements. Transportation workers, for example, although isolated from one another and incapable of building a unified workers' movement under merchants' capital, were by no means incapable of resisting.¹³ But, following important suggestions by Latin American labour historian Charles Bergquist, it is crucial to remember the very different social structures of accumulation inherent in the various export economies of the region when we come to analyze this history of resistance. No two of the various export economies dominating the Maritimes were alike in terms of capital, labour, or technology requirements. Where capital requirements were high, "foreign capital was favoured over national capital in the struggle for control over the means of production, capitalist relations of production tended to predominate over pre-capitalist ones, and concentrated rather than dispersed units of production were more likely to prevail." The structural variables defining each export economy and influencing its relative capacity to promote economic development over time tended to combine in patterned ways. Structural conditions such as foreign ownership and concentrated production favoured the

13. See Judith Fingard (1982) for an outstanding exploration of resistance as well as coercion in the vital sphere of merchant shipping; see also Ian McKay (1986: 17-36).

development of class-conscious labour organizations, whereas national ownership, limited capital and technology demands, and diffuse geographical production systems inhibited labour organization in the export sector at the same time as they encouraged economic development through positive linkage effects on other sectors of the economy. The two principal dependent variables derived from export structure—the potential for broadly based economic development and the potential for labour organization—may interact historically in such complex ways “that they may in fact reverse the direction of the initial causal connection, and transform the independent variable into a dependent one” (Bergquist, 1986: 12-14).¹⁴ Marxists paying exclusive attention to the full or incomplete development of capitalist relations of production may have been inclined to overlook the immense significance of export structure for the relative success or failure of workers’ movements.

These two broad theoretical ideas — that the epoch of merchants’ capital holds a significant key to the problem of regional dependency and underdevelopment, and that one of the decisive aspects of this epoch was the creation of distinct export structures within which workers and primary producers struggled to solve their grievous economic and social problems through organization and struggle — suggest a new way of integrating the methodologies of regional political economy and social history in a more dynamic and dialectical way than that afforded by either conventional labour history, drawing its insights mainly from more developed capitalist regions or countries,¹⁵ or by a political economy focussing narrowly on either the articulation of modes of production, the adaptation of the region to national capital and labour markets, or regressive movements of stubborn peasants resisting “modernization” and capitalism. It suggests a basis on which the history of workers and primary producers could be analyzed comparatively, from one export sector to another, and placed within a more comprehensive international pattern. It also underlines the centrality of politics, not just in terms of the external imposition of the Canadian state, but in those of conflicting and contradictory political programs adopted by classes within the region.¹⁶

Merchants’ capital and dependent development of Maritime coal, 1828-1876

With this theoretical background we can bring new insights to our interpretation of the events of 1876. The coal industry of Nova Scotia is a clear example of

14. See, for a more “dependency-oriented” approach, Hobart A. Spalding (1977), and for a brilliant case study of dependent development in Peru, Norman Long and Bryan Roberts (1984).

15. There is a striking divergence, for example, between the position of urban craftsmen in central Canada and the Maritimes. Confronted with the high levels of surplus labour characteristic of dependent economies, urban craftsmen in the Maritimes generally relied on the building up of defensive walls against rural and unskilled labour, whereas they are seen to have played a more progressive role by historians of nineteenth-century labour elsewhere.

16. Clow (1984) also argues for a reading of Maritime development which includes politics as a crucial variable, but then treats Confederation as a purely “exogenous” force imposed from without, rather than emerging from a complex interplay of forces both internal and external to the region.

development (entailing an increase in the productive force of social labour and in the socialization of labour) and of *dependence* (entailing a mainly reactive economy animated from without, restricted to limited enclaves, and therefore not entailing the progressive deepening of capitalist social relations through the development of the home market). This is readily apparent when we consider the manner in which the coal resources of Nova Scotia were first integrated with the world economy.

The distinctiveness and originality of the Nova Scotia labour movement lay in the special experience of workers in the coalfields. Coal was, of course, a major element of nineteenth-century industrialization, and together with the province's unrivalled shipping facilities, was thought to guarantee its industrial future.¹⁷ Nova Scotia's bituminous coal resources were mainly located in the three northern counties of Cumberland (where one finds the coastal Joggins-Chignecto and the interior Springhill coalfields), Pictou, and Cape Breton (where the Sydney coalfield lies at the eastern extremity of the island.)¹⁸ Coal, a commodity with a low value in relation to its bulk and readily available in Europe, could not be cast in the traditional east-west mould of such staples as fur and timber. Its markets were to be found primarily in North America.

In contrast with many American coal deposits, most of the Nova Scotia seams did not have to be "discovered," since they were prominently displayed on the coast and had been exploited since the eighteenth century under both the French and British regimes.¹⁹ Apart from incidental development under the French regime, including the opening of a small mine by New England merchants dependent on Acadian labourers hired on a seasonal basis in the 1730s, the coal resources of Nova Scotia were left unexploited throughout most of the eighteenth century. To open a local coal industry conflicted explicitly with the mercantilist orientation of the dominant Board of Trade in London, which feared a local coal industry would lead to the rise of a manufacturing industry in Nova Scotia (Clark, 1968: 358). While Cape Breton did gain permission to raise limited amounts of coal, the Treasury Board and Board of Trade permitted only short-term leases of no more than seven years' duration and the restriction of output to the immediate requirements of nearby towns; as a consequence, the coal mines of the island were in 1820 in much the same underdeveloped condition they had been in 1784.

While mercantilism, which codified the inherent tendency toward monopoly of merchants' capital, thus restricted local development of the resource, it played a far more direct role when, in 1788, King George III granted the mines of Nova Scotia to his son, the Duke of York. This grant was forgotten until 1825, when the impecunious Duke, under pressure from his creditors to settle his debts, dug the neglected grant out of the Patent Office and used it to settle a jewellery debt with the London jewellery merchants Rundell, Bridge, and Rundell. (Suggestively

17. For the importance of coal in the industrial revolution, see particularly Michael W. Flinn (1984).

18. For useful overviews of Nova Scotia coal, see Gilpin (1880) and Macdonald (1909).

19. For the early history of coal, see Martell (1945-46: 156-171).

enough from the standpoint of dependency theory, these merchants had already invested in mines in Colombia and Brazil [Brown, 1899].) They formed the General Mining Association and capitalized it at £400,000 to exploit their new Nova Scotian minerals, which they vainly hoped would include precious copper deposits. The GMA exercised monopoly control over the coal and other minerals of the colony between 1827 and 1858, and continued to be one of the province's largest coal producers until 1900.

Thus the GMA bears all the tell-tale marks of merchants' capital as analyzed by Kay. Born of a highly unusual (and some would later say, unconstitutional) use of the royal prerogative, with a powerful mandate to enforce its monopoly power over the coalfields, the GMA had many of the mercantilist traits of much older chartered companies, such as the Hudson's Bay Company. Its acquisition of the mineral resources of Nova Scotia (including those of Cape Breton, even though the latter was a separate colony at the time of the Duke of York's original grant) was patently not the result of competition in the free market, but exemplified the role of the British state in assisting British mercantile interests to plunder the far-flung wealth of the world (Andrews, 1984).

The GMA's whole orientation was consistent with monopolistic mercantile domination. The GMA fought against any attempts, by colonial entrepreneurs or political reformers, to break its absolute legal monopoly over Nova Scotia coal. Such "adventurers," GMA partisans argued, should not be permitted to endanger an export trade in which the interests of the entire province were at stake.²⁰ This export trade was the GMA's exclusive focus. "The chief object of the General Mining Association," wrote Richard Brown of the founding strategy, "was to establish an extensive trade with the United States, which at that time derived their principal supplies of bituminous coal from England..." (Brown, 1899: 68-69). This meant that the GMA's fortunes were largely dependent on developments in the United States, where adverse tariffs, the opening of new bituminous and particularly anthracite mines, and the increasing monopolization of the coal trade in such cities as Boston and New York entailed lower dividends for British shareholders and wage reductions for Nova Scotia colliers. This was made plain by Samuel Cunard, who in a petition to the Lieutenant-Governor in 1842 called attention to the imminent destruction of the GMA's American trade because of the imposition of a \$1.75/ton duty, which, he complained, left the Association with no profit for "the large Capital embarked in the making of the Mines." Fearing that unless the government reduced the royalties, "all Foreign Trade will be totally destroyed, the Association [will be]

20. See Public Archives of Nova Scotia [hereafter PANS], RG 1, Vol. 459, No. 51, Petition of Abraham Gesner to Major-General Sir Colin Campbell, 6 February 1838; No. 62, Petition of Abraham Gesner to Sir Colin Campbell, 24 September 1838; No. 107, Petition of Abraham Gesner to Lieutenant Governor Viscount Falkland, 1844; Vol. 461, No. 60, Abraham Gesner to Joseph Howe, 26 December 1853; No. 59, Samuel Cunard to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Gaspard LeMarchant, 14 November 1853.

confined to the trifling supply of the Provinces," Cunard did note one further remedial step: "I have given my best attention to the only means of effecting this reduction, and am now preparing a reduced scale of wages, which I will endeavor to arrange with the colliers, although Your Lordship is well aware of the difficulty which attends a measure of this nature."²¹

The GMA can be reasonably seen as deepening the region's situation of dependency upon an unstable international marketplace, yet a one-sided emphasis on dependency should not blind us to the extent to which it also fulfilled many of the criteria of development.²² In the first place, it smashed older, pre-capitalist modes of production in the coalfields both by forcibly evicting small-time artisans from legitimate operations in the industry and by driving into illegality an old tradition of treating mineral and coal resources as public resources held in common by the people.²³ The state had attempted to stop illicit traffic in coal in the 1790s by declaring vessels carrying coal away from the cliffs without authority to be liable to forfeiture, but its efforts to curb this trade were feeble and ineffectual (Brown, 1899: 47). The GMA waged a far more intensive battle against such "common resource" strategies. Richard Smith of the GMA chased vessels smuggling coal and noted the existence of no fewer than 11 "smuggling Coal Mines" in 1832.²⁴ The Association pressed the authorities to issue a proclamation forbidding persons from digging coal without authority, and entered prosecutions for theft against those they caught.²⁵ In 1849 it sent to the authorities the fascinating report of its spy, one Matthew Roach, who submitted a list of those he knew to be digging coals in Cape Breton, many of them his own neighbours and kin. Roach advised the GMA that these people were

21. PANS, RG 1, Vol. 459, No. 104, S. Cunard to Viscount Falkland, 22 December 1842.

22. Discussions of dependence inspired by Gunder Frank (1979) have somewhat one-sidedly depicted mining as a prime instance of surplus drain from a satellite to a metropolis, in an unbroken tradition of capitalist penetration going back at least to the eighteenth century. The approach favoured by his critics, which would interpret industrial capital as *any* process in which labour is purchased and consumed in the production of new use-values, and by dismissing the entire preoccupation with staples vs. finished products as an "empiricist" commodity fetishism, would necessarily see the history of mining (and many other spheres of the Maritime economy) as one of expanding industrial capitalism from the time in which the waged labour was first directly subsumed by capital (i.e., with the first experience of capitalist mining in the eighteenth century). It is striking that both approaches, abstractly conceived, thus end up by homogenizing the development of an industry that the historian cannot but see in terms of fundamental discontinuities between one phase and the next.

23. For the dispossession of the small producers in Pictou County, see J.M. Cameron (1974: 16-20); on the elimination of usufruct in grindstones, see C. Bruce Fergusson (1972). For parallels with the French peasantry, see Donald Reid (1985: Ch. 1). Reid documents the extent to which coal played a vital part in a large peasant economy as a source of fuel and of additional income for peasant households.

24. PANS, RG 1, Vol. 458, No. 159, Copy of a Letter from Mr. Richard Smith of Sydney Mines, 27 July 1832.

25. PANS, RG 1, Vol. 459, No. 42, Richard Smith to Sir Rupert George, 4 January 1833.

in poor circumstances, and that they are unable to pay even a moderate penalty, and would be ruined by the infliction of a fine of £20. Therefore he would, if possible, gladly avoid coming forward a sevendence for that purpose. He states that they used no caution to prevent his witnessing their operations, because the persuasion is universal among them that the taking away of coal is not illegal.... He also adds that the people use no caution to conceal their proceedings, being satisfied that the law cannot touch them. He has a supply of coal always ready at the pit kept open by the Association, at the price of 2/6 the load, or 7/6 the chaldron, but that for two years past scarcely any has been sold, because the people dig it where they please, without payment or permission.

The loads brought by these poor folk contained only about twelve bushels, but the GMA feared the "bad example and precedent" they represented.²⁶ Down to the late 1860s the correspondence of the Richard Brown, former agent of the GMA, documents the perennial difficulties of regulating access to the coal seams and to the company's coal heap, a favourite target of those Brown disparagingly termed the "Lazy Town thieves."²⁷ Outrage over the GMA's attack on customary rights seems the likeliest motive for the attempt to destroy the mines in Pictou by fire in 1833.²⁸ The GMA's brusque eviction of the common people from what were popularly construed as commonly held resources was an essential step if primitive accumulation and the stabilization of capitalist social relations were to take place.

Second, the GMA unquestionably transformed the forces of production in the province's coalfields. The first railway in the region, the first major application of steam power to mining, the first transatlantic voyage by a ship entirely powered by steam: these were what contemporaries thought of when they reasonably acclaimed the GMA as the engine of Nova Scotia's industrial revolution. Ten years after its arrival in Nova Scotia the GMA had on its payroll, in foundries and mines at Albion Mines, Bridgeport, and Sydney, no fewer than 1,500 men. This represented a massive concentration of workers by contemporary British North American standards, and was completely out of proportion with the rest of the Nova Scotia economy.²⁹ Yet this "industrial revolution" was concentrated in coastal export enclaves, obtained most of its capital and labour inputs from abroad, and aggressively thwarted local schemes which would have tied coal resources to the development of local manufactures or other resource industries. The changes it initiated in Pictou and Cape Breton were not generalized to produce a transition to industrial capitalism across the province.

26. PANS, RG 1, Vol. 461, No. 30, Report of H. Boggs (1849).

27. PANS, MG 1, Vol. 151, file "1866," R. Brown Sr. to R. Brown Jr., 2 February 1866; file "1868," R. Brown Sr. to R. Brown Jr., 5 December 1868. Hereafter this correspondence is cited simply as "R. Brown," followed by the date: in all cases, except where explicitly indicated, the reference is to a letter from Richard Brown, Sr., to his son, and can be located in the file of the year in which it was written.

28. PANS, RG 1, Vol. 459, No. 42, Richard Smith to Sir Rupert George, 4 January 1833.

29. Larry McCann (1981: 30) notes that as late as 1861 the structure of colonial manufacturing was dominated by staple processing and commerce-serving industries. The largest manufacturing enterprise of the period, an iron works at Londonderry, employed fewer than 40 men and turned out only about \$40,000 worth of iron products.

Finally, the GMA brought Nova Scotia into contact with the most developed capital market in the world. Its shares were traded in the London market, and for all that it owed to an earlier mercantile model of the chartered monopoly, it was also the product of a thoroughly industrial dilemma — that of the English capitalist with vast accumulations of capital burning a hole in his pocket, and looking for somewhere, a dubious railway or a mining speculation in South America, to put it. Much of the capital invested elsewhere during the mining craze of 1825 which gave birth to the GMA was invested without a trace (Hobsbawm, 1968: 113). Shareholders in the GMA did significantly better. It was true that GMA shares fluctuated wildly in anticipation of changes in American tariff policy, but its approximately 300 shareholders could congratulate themselves on having invested in a company which had obtained, very cheaply, extremely valuable real assets.³⁰ The Association always noted the fact that it had been unable to declare any dividends in its first two decades of existence; not only was this not particularly unusual in the initial years of a mining operation, but it also overlooked the classic investor's trade-off between dividends and capital growth. It also overlooked the high salaries paid to the GMA's agents and board members.³¹ Thus backward Nova Scotia was directly linked to extremely well-connected financial interests in London, whose access to large pools of capital and political influence made the GMA the most significant firm in the colony.

It would be difficult to think of a more graphic illustration of the new international correlation of forces which tied workers in Nova Scotia into a direct dependence on the capitalist world-system. That the GMA, the province's first major capitalist enterprise, was directly influenced by movements on the London stock market, which in turn registered each new rumour concerning American tariff policy, highlighted the two-sided character of this mercantile venture in coal mining. Importing capital, technology, management, and skilled labour, the GMA represented a qualitative change in the Nova Scotia coal industry. At the same time it closed alternative paths of development, such as attempts to combine Nova Scotia's coal and iron to initiate steel shipbuilding in the 1820s, plans to develop the manufacturing of coal byproducts in the 1850s, or less spectacular efforts at small-scale mining in the interests of local artisans: and this monopolization of the

30. Shares of the GMA fluctuated according to investors' perceptions of American tariff policy. In 1848, for example, the GMA's £20 shares sold at 65 percent of their value in the London market.

31. Evidence on this point is most abundant for the later period. In 1868 Richard Brown noted the benefits his son derived from his position in Sydney Mines: "...you have £500 a year — a house + furniture worth £100 a year — as much land as you can cultivate — fancy carriages — man servants — in all I say worth £700 a year — in short one of the very best situations in the Colonies" (R. Brown, 22 May 1868). R.H. Brown's salary was £450 in 1871 (R. Brown, 11 March 1871). The directors were paid £100 a year for meeting once every fortnight (R. Brown, 3 June 1871). The General Manager and Mining Engineer's salary was £900 and £1000 was paid out to Cunard and Morrow for their commercial work (R. Brown, 17 June 1873). This perhaps helps explain why the GMA would persist in Nova Scotia despite frequent cries of distress from its shareholders.

resource led to a major struggle against the GMA in the colony.

The monopoly of the GMA was broken through a prolonged struggle waged by colonial politicians and entrepreneurs, who attacked the GMA for its monopoly pricing power, its disinterest in economic development outside its 44 main bases in Pictou and Cape Breton, and its interference in domestic politics. The most significant break came in 1848, when, in response to a dramatic campaign waged by scientist and promoter Abraham Gesner and others, the GMA was forced to open a small colliery in Joggins in order to retain monopoly control over coal seams on the mainland.³² The GMA's monopoly was formally broken in 1857-8 by a joint Imperial/Colonial committee, which guaranteed the Association's assets and left it with the control of very significant coal areas, but also opened the door to other companies. Although the state was instrumental in breaking the monopoly, it assumed no long-term responsibility for patterns of investment in the industry. Thus began the epoch of competitive coal mining which culminated in the economic and social disaster of the 1870s.

In 1850 Nova Scotia's exports of coal went chiefly to the United States, (notwithstanding an *ad valorem* import duty of 24 percent) and constituted about half the total quantity marketed. During the decade of reciprocity between Canada and the United States in 1854, exports of coal increased 385 percent and in the last year of the treaty, 1865, no less than 73 percent of the total sales of coal went to the United States. The mid-1860s would be remembered as the "harvest time for our new collieries," when Nova Scotia coal penetrated markets as far south as Washington (Macdonald, 1909: 23). Abrogation of reciprocity and the \$1.25/ton American duty imposed in 1866 ended this dramatic phase of export-led growth, but the traditional American market for Nova Scotia coal was problematic in any event because new American anthracite and bituminous mines were able to take over the niche once occupied by exports from Nova Scotia, and because the critical gas coal markets in New York and New England were increasingly controlled by railway combinations (*Mines Report*, 1877: 26).

The agreement between the General Mining Association and the provincial government ushered in an ultra-competitive phase in the coal industry, with scores of new mining companies scrambling to develop the best seams. When, in the 1870s, Great Britain and the United States were alike affected by a wave of financial depression, the coal dealers of those countries sought relief through export of their surplus production. Nova Scotia, struggling to develop and retain markets in the West Indies and South America, found itself overpowered by more powerful competitors controlling return freights. As shipping also suffered with other industries, the decline in freights left Nova Scotian exporters with a diminished cost advantage over more distant competitors. English coal once again entered New

32. PANS, RG 1, Series "A," Vol. 7, File "Coal Mines, 1848, Reports and Returns," J. McCully to G.R. Young, 21 March 1868.

England and even competed fiercely for the custom of the St. Lawrence ports. The fierce competition prevailing in the industry meant that it was no longer possible to regulate production by the demand, and hence impossible to maintain prices in a drastically softened market.

Fluctuations in international markets in the 1860s and 1870s reverberated loudly in Nova Scotia. The period 1858 to 1865 was one of expansion, prosperity, and exploration. Robert Drummond, later leader of the major union of the coal miners, noted that in 1864 applications for licenses to search covering 1,200 square miles, a greater number applied for in any other year in the nineteenth century (Drummond, 1912). In response to high prices for coal during the Civil War, production in the Cumberland County field reached a record high of 21,063 long tons in 1865, as both local and American entrepreneurs, enticed by the prospects of 100 percent wartime profits, opened new mines, developed the county's first railway, and improved its coal shipping facilities. Most of these mining ventures had collapsed by 1870, leaving the pits to flood and the coal miners to their own devices (see McKay, 1983: 28-33).

The far larger boom-and-bust sequence of the 1870s had a similar genesis in unbridled competition and uncontrollable international market fluctuations. In 1872, an unusual international correlation of forces created a sudden boom in the markets for Nova Scotia coal. This was partly a result of the new American tariff bill, which reduced the duty on all bituminous coal and shale to \$.75 per ton and that on slack coal or culm to \$.40 per ton. Of greater significance, however, was a steep increase in the price of British exports, which permitted Nova Scotia shippers to compete in North American markets from which they had hitherto been excluded (*Mines Report*, 1872: 2). Nova Scotia coal companies responded immediately with dramatically increased levels of production and employment. As one analysis of the time noted,

In 1872 all kinds of business were active, manufacture was stimulated and thereby the demand for coal greatly increased. England could not supply her own wants, and the price rose with the foreign demand. In the United States the stocks held were small and urged by the stimulated condition of the general trade unusual activity prevailed, and dealers, going to the other extreme, gave large orders so that the supplies in the summer of 1873 were excessive. Then came the panic in October, and the reaction that set in affected all trades, checked manufacturing, and reduced the demand for coal. The result was an overstock in the spring of 1874, and a sluggish trade throughout the year. (*Mines Report*, 1874: 3)

As a result of this deepening crisis of oversupply and shrinking demand, coal was sold to consumers at record low prices.³³ And, as one authority noted in 1876, Canada's continued reliance upon transatlantic staples trades also worsened the prospects for diversified industrial development on the basis of coal.

Cheap fuel is recognized as the great lever of the age, but, unfortunately, although favorably situated for the importation of raw materials and the exportation of manufactured products, these very same

33. This draws on an excellent economic analysis of the crisis in Province of Nova Scotia, *Annual Report on the Mines* [hereafter *Mines Report*] (1878: 8-9).

facilities militate at present against the establishment of manufactories in Cape Breton, since the balance of trade is against Canada. An excess of tonnage being required to export her timber and grain and coal, the less bulky and more valuable articles of commerce are brought into the country at merely nominal rates by vessels seeking outward freights. Even such bulky articles as salt, coal, and iron are carried at very low rates. (*Mines Report*, 1876: 24, 27)

Coal brought across the Atlantic from Cardiff was sold at \$.44 less freight than it could be taken from Pictou up the Gulf.

From 1873 to 1878 these reverses in the marketplace meant a wrenching crisis in the coal industry. In an 1873 petition to the provincial government, the coal miners noted that over the past ten years more than \$7 million had been spent in the opening and extension of collieries, and twelve important establishments had been brought into active operation. This expanded sector now confronted not only the American import duty, but also a serious challenge on the home market "by the importation of American coal which is admitted to all parts of the Dominion free," and the additional burden of a \$.10 per ton provincial royalty. Because of these circumstances and the general depression, the coal trade of the province had been brought "almost to a stand and a state of things prevails which is perhaps without parallel in the coal trade of any other country." Some mines had been compelled to cease operations entirely and others had not been able to work for more than half time.³⁴ J.R. Lithgow of the Glace Bay Mining Company later noted the dramatic worsening of fortunes faced by the coal companies: in 1865 from a shipment of some 84,000 tons, a dividend of \$75,000 was paid; in the following year, when the Reciprocity Treaty was terminated and a duty of \$1.25 gold per ton imposed on foreign coal, the stockholders received not a cent (Lithgow, 1877: 4). From 1867 to 1872, remarked H.S. Poole, the inspector of mines, the record told "of one unbroken series of efforts, on the part of the mine owners to contend against low prices and an irregular demand consequent upon the close competition which has hitherto existed for the trade of a limited market." During the period, he contended, and it appears to be only a slight exaggeration, not a single coal company had paid a dividend (*Mines Report*, 1872: 1).³⁵ When conditions improved in 1872, and it appeared that a greatly improved output might be required to meet the demand, Poole doubted operators would make the necessary investments, having had to wait so long for dividends (*Mines Report*, 1873: 3). This moment of prosperity lasted just long enough to tempt more British capital to invest, before it was wiped out by the recession. In 1875 the GMA earned a profit of only £2300 on an capital of £248,000 (R. Brown, 11 July 1876).

The Nova Scotian response to this crisis was a profoundly colonial one. Rather than questioning the whole course of export-led competitive development initiated

34. PANS, RG 21, Series "A," Vol. 12, 1873, Memorial of Coal Owners, Managers, and Agents of Coal Miners, to Honorable P.C. Hill, Provincial Secretary.

35. Actually, the GMA declared a dividend of 15/- a share in 1867, but this was on the basis of its 1866 fiscal year.

by the state in 1857, the crisis provoked a search for new markets for unprocessed coal in Canada. Such schemes no more represented the development of a "home market" and the "manufacturing condition" than continuing to sell coal to the Americans. The leading orientation of such prominent pro-Confederate coal promoters as Charles Tupper and W.A. Hendry was to unload coal properties in which they had substantial interests onto British investors at a handsome profit. Theirs was a strictly *rentier* orientation. J.P. Lawson, one speculator in coal properties, condemned the movement to repeal Confederation not because of its political purpose but because it was "Keeping capital out of the Country."³⁶ The entry of the provincial government as a major actor in the industry stabilized licenses to search as a form of private property and began to give direction in terms of mine safety, but neither initiative can be seen as a departure from its underlying *rentier* interest, which was simply the maximization of its royalties and the attraction of foreign capital (McKay, 1983: 76-81). While the Intercolonial Railway offered the long-term prospect of a domestic market for coal and spurred the development of manufacturing and other industries, it left virtually intact a mercantile, staples-oriented coal industry which only very slowly oriented itself to the new domestic market.

The position of the coal industry in the 1870s is brought out most strikingly by the frank and illuminating correspondence between Richard Brown, Agent of the GMA in Sydney Mines until 1864, and his son, Richard Henry Brown, who succeeded him in this position. No one could read the correspondence between Richard Brown and his son without acquiring a vivid insight into the concrete, direct ways commerce and coal mining were interrelated and mutually dependent. These fascinating and candid letters show that the GMA reoriented its trade strategy in the competitive 1860s by placing its Halifax agents, Cunard and Morrow, on a commission basis, improving its harbour facilities, aggressively pursuing markets in Cuba, Newfoundland, and Montreal, hoping for increased business in the event of a Franco-Prussian war, and employing its own steam tug in addition to the vessels chartered through the agency of Bird and Perkins (R. Brown, 1 July 1870, 17 June 1869, 20 May 1871). The fierce competition among the mines for the vessels was described by Richard Brown Jr. in a discussion of why the Association should continue to retain the *Dolphin*, its steam tug.

Then as to the "Dolphin" she should certainly be retained if any coal is to be shipped at all, for the following reasons. Vessels now a days will not charter to load coal at Lingan, or Glace Bay +c. expressly, but take open orders giving them the choice of either Mine. When they arrive off Flint Island or Glace Bay, they are at once beset by three Tug Boats, Poole's, Glace Bay's, and Lingan's; and the tug that offers them the best terms and assures them that there are few vessels ahead of them to cause delay in loading, carries them off in triumph. I saw this with my own eyes the evening I arrived at Lingan, three Schooners appeared, and the three Tugs boarded them some 5 miles off the land, the "Dolphin"

36. PANS, RG 21, Series "A," Vol. 5, File "Coal Mines, 1868, Correspondence," J.P. Lawson to Hendry, 26 March 1868.

got one of them.... Early next day I saw the three Tugs overhaul 4 vessels more, but they got none, as all were bound to North Bar for us.... You see therefore that if Lingan had no Tug she would get no vessels at all.... (Richard Brown, Jr. to Richard Brown, Sr., 27 August 1870)

The Brown correspondence undermines any dogmatically held positions concerning the separation of production and circulation, "landward" and "maritime" investment strategies, coal mining and shipping. The very scheduling of work in the mines was discussed in terms of the availability of shipping. Supporting his son's proposition that operations be suspended in the pit through the winter and the colliers be placed on double shift in opening out new works, Richard Brown notes first the importance of the strategy in maintaining the GMA's labour force through the winter, and second the commercial implications: "...unless you have a stock of 2,000 tons in the spring and can then only raise 500 tons per day, vessels will have to wait a long time for turns and be driven to the other mines.... If you can only ship 500 tons per day many of them will have to wait a fortnight for their turns to be had — Whereas if you have a stock on the Bank you can despatch them all in a week" (R. Brown, 11 December 1876). Even in the 1870s, production was geared to the appearance of vessels in the harbour: "At Pictou," we read in a letter of 1871, "they can do literally nothing for want of vessels." "It is very unfortunate," we read in a note from the same year, "that vessels are so scarce as it keeps your men idle and with such great demand for labour must induce them to leave you" (R. Brown, 21 November 1871, 17 June 1871). The letters also reveal that Cunard and Morrow, although ostensibly only the merchants of the GMA's coal, exercised in fact an extremely wide and somewhat controversial influence over a wide range of policies.³⁷ One of these was preferential treatment for large purchasers, who gave guarantees for payment, over small coasting vessels purchasing coal and marketing it themselves.³⁸ This limited the local "forward linkages" associated with coal, while the GMA's continuing reliance on supply ships from England for virtually all mining supplies other than horses and timber restricted the mining export sector's "backward linkages" (see R. Brown, 29 June 1871, 16 July 1870, 26 February 1871).

The Brown correspondence also suggests the depths of the GMA's uncertainty

37. R. Brown, 4 September 1876, reflects that Cunard and Morrow were decisive in persuading the Board in London not to offer a reward for men who had attacked company property; and R. Brown, 10 September 1870, reports complaints about the "absurdity" of Cunard and Morrow having anything to do with strictly mining matters. "My idea is that since the Cunards have become Coal Dealers they are pressing for superior coal for their own advantage," writes Brown on 2 October 1876.

38. R. Brown, 13 August 1870. He estimated over £1034 had been written off the year before in bad debts to coasting vessels. Incidentally, the GMA's policy may have a great deal to do with the very limited participation of Sydney investors in the shipping industry, as documented by Rosemarie Langhout (1985: 53-69). The implication may be that the external focus of the GMA's strategy restricted the forward linkage effects of coal mining. However, far more work is required on the relations between coal mining and shipping.

after the abrogation of reciprocity. Everything — dividends, the number of colliers employed, the retention of the tug boat — was connected with the American duty. Brown even made a direct connection between the renewal of reciprocity and his son's salary: "If the Reciprocity Treaty is renewed and the agents can make sales it will put them [the Board in London] in good spirits and make them liberal — you cannot be surprised that they are despondent just now," he wrote in 1869 (R. Brown, 15 January 1869). Shares he purchased for his son in 1866 were bitterly regretted in 1869, at a time when the GMA's £20 shares were being quoted at £8 on the stock exchange: "The purchase of the G.M.A. shares was an unfortunate speculation for which I blame myself," he notes, "but they *were* paying so well that I thought you could not do better. If the Reciprocity Treaty is renewed they will all come right again" (R. Brown, 27 August 1869).

The Brown letters finally shed light on the destructive cut-throat competition for American markets initiated in the late 1860s and further exacerbated by the influx of foreign capital. In 1868, Brown reported that the American-owned Block House Mines were shipping their coal at a dead loss, having contractors deliver it in New York at \$7 (U.S) per ton while it cost them \$8.50 (R. Brown, 9 October 1868). When the International Company won a contract with the Manhattan Gas Co. for 7,000 tons at \$1.50 per ton, Brown philosophically noted that at the least this would prevent the company from interfering with Sydney Coal in other markets (R. Brown, 22 April 1871). The Board of the GMA authorized the sale of coal at prices too low to ensure a profit, in order "to keep their customers until the Duty is taken off when they will be able to raise the selling price," Brown noted in 1871. "The years' shipments are very disappointing. Unless a great improvement in the trade takes place this year we shall be obliged to sell Sydney Coal at a much lower rate or else we shall be driven out of the market by the New Mines" (R. Brown, 25 January 1871). Unless his son could guarantee a good quality coal from Ligan, whose reputation had suffered because of impurities, it would be driven out of the gas coal market, since the competing Block House and Glace Bay companies had agreed to rock-bottom prices to supply the Manhattan and the New York Gas Companies that could only be justified on a very large sale (R. Brown, 25 March 1871).

Brown's letters sceptically documented the arrival of the highly speculative British companies, most of which he accurately predicted were bound for bankruptcy. "The Shares of his [a British promoter's] Company £5 are selling for £7. Somebody will lose money by them that's certain. The object seems to be to puff them up in the market and let the purchasers in for a heavy loss" (R. Brown, 8 September 1871). Of the new "Cape Breton Company" representing the merger of companies which had already expended £309,000 in capital and issued £125,000 in debentures, Brown remarked, "They are trying to raise £291,000 more.... They calculate upon selling one million tons per Annum. I think they will want that amount of sales to make the concern pay any profit" (R. Brown, 27 January 1874

[filed under 1875]). When a new Cape Breton coal company brought out a "flattering but not very truthful" prospectus which prompted London investors to buy up all its shares and raise them to 1.5 times their premium, Brown could only remark, sarcastically, "How easy it is to gull the English capitalists!" (R. Brown, 11 February 1871).

There can be no doubt that, however impressive the statistics on the growth of output and the capital invested by various companies appear, none of this amounted to a qualitative transformation of the coal industry. Undermining the "monopolistic" side of merchants' capital did not, in itself, change its essence. Industrialization under its aegis was closely confined to coastal enclaves. To the market uncertainties experienced by the GMA in its years of monopoly control were added the perils of hyper-competition, which could wipe out profits even if Nova Scotia coal entered the American market duty-free. This had a direct impact on the way coal was produced. Whatever claims may be made for the GMA's role as a conduit of capital into the region in the 1830s and 1840s, the Brown letters reveal a company anxious to practise the closest economy, unwilling to invest in steamships to carry the coal to market, or to change the fundamental seasonal contours of the trade which, by restricting favourable freights to six months of the year, placed Nova Scotia coal at a disadvantage with its year-round American competitor, and which also entailed a depreciation in the quality of coal through indiscriminate banking.³⁹ "Whatever you do pray don't order a single article in future that you can possibly do without," Brown cautioned his son in 1871 (R. Brown, 26 February 1871). The mercantile context imprisoned industrial development in the perpetual realm of the short-term. The GMA neglected the exploration of the province's mineral resources, even to the extent of disregarding the immense inland coal reserves it controlled in Springhill, which it considered out of reach because they could not be reached by vessels. John Rutherford, inspector of mines and later the GMA's general manager, underlined in 1866 the consequences for production itself of the mercantile orientation:

The facility with which the coal has been reached in all the districts, as compared with other Mining countries in which, from the exhaustion of the seams near the crop, expensive sinkings become necessary to reach the underlying coal, and consequent great skill and carefulness are required in properly opening out the Mine; this freedom from an expensive preliminary outlay, instead of enabling an effective winning of a large tract of coal to be made before commencing the regular working thereof, seems to have engendered an indifference to future operations, and allowed the desire for an immediate profit to supersede the necessity of a judicious arrangement of the mode of working. (*Mines Report*, 1866: 65)

The very shape and nature of the mines, the seasonal rhythm of their production, and their impact upon regional society was directly influenced by commercial structures and commercial mentalities. Dependent development, and an industrialization

39. R. Brown, 20 May 1871; *Mines Report* (1874: 5-6). The project of a railway to Louisburg was raised in 1872 but fell victim to the recession of the 1870s. See the *Cape Breton Times*, 5 October 1872.

still fundamentally controlled by merchants' capital, placed the coalfields and all within them between the worlds of commerce and industry.

The world of work in the export sector in the 1870s

The structure of the coal export economy bore similarities to other export economies dominated by British merchants' capital in this period. As was the case with the Jersey merchants who dominated many fishing communities along the Gulf of St. Lawrence, development by externally focussed merchants' capital entailed resource enclaves tied tightly to the metropolis in Britain but very loosely tied to each other, and the consolidation of surplus, decision-making, and long-range planning in the British core. Both structures originated, to a large extent, in the eighteenth century.

On the other hand, such export sectors were also dissimilar, and it is this dissimilarity which explains the very different trajectories of the popular movements which arose within them. To compensate for the inherently low costs of entry in fishing, the Jersey merchants limited entry to the industry through the truck system and debt bondage; the need for only a very limited investment in a land-based infrastructure gave them no incentive to "develop" the coastal enclaves they utterly dominated, either by diversifying the economy or by raising the social level of their workforce (Ommer, 1981). The internal structure of the coal export economy was markedly different. Both the policies of the British Crown and the high initial capital costs of mining favoured foreign over local capital for control over production; capitalist rather than pre-capitalist relations of production swiftly became the norm with full monopolization after the 1820s; and production took place in concentrated rather than in dispersed units of production. In important respects, then, the Jersey-dominated fishery and the London-dominated coalfields suggest polar types of export economies, whose distinctiveness lies in the interplay of external and internal forces.

In contrast with the fishery, coal mining required the presence of a large working-class population densely settled in close proximity to the mines. The Nova Scotia mining labour force numbered 3,043 in 1866, declined steadily to 2,509 in 1871, then grew by over 70 percent in two years to reach a level of 4,362 in 1873. (If we take into account dependents, according to a contemporary memorial of coal mine owners, the population dependent upon waged labour in the mines was approximately 18,000, while if we also include the labour force of 23,000 on the 3,500 vessels engaged in the transport of coal, we arrive at a dependent population of 51,000, although how many of the merchant seaman were employed regularly in the coal fleet is not specified).⁴⁰ Some Scottish and English immigrants arrived in the coalfields in the 1860s, but the majority were Maritimers (Muisse, 1980: 79-84). In Sydney Mines, there was a strong Irish element; at least half the men observed St. Patrick's day in 1874 by staying off work, which suggested both their ethnic traditions and their independence of the company.⁴¹

This large working-class population became a working class only with difficulty within so dependent an export sector. That industrial growth was confined to coastal export enclaves meant that there was a limited interchange of ideas between workers in one coal village and another, and throughout this period there was no common organization which would unite coal miners across the province. The seasonality of production, the trademark of a coal industry still dependent on sea-borne trade, made it necessary for companies to "carry" coal-mining families over the winter months. At the Joggins colliery in Cumberland County in 1858, 14 to 16 coal cutters were usually employed "during the shipping months," but little was done in the winter season; in Cape Breton in 1880, 1.5 percent of production took place in the winter quarter, 20.3 percent in the spring, 49.1 percent in the summer, and 29.1 percent in the fall (*Mines Report*, 1858: 383; 1880: G).

In Nova Scotia, as elsewhere in Canada, seasonality was the kernel around which grew a complex and potent system of paternalism.⁴² Like fishermen, coal miners were at least partly under the sway of a truck system. Prior to the GMA, "All the workmen of the [Sydney] establishment,... in addition to their wages, whether by the day or by contract, were allowed rations of beef, pork, bread, and molasses, which were given out weekly," we learn from Richard Brown's published study. There were two pay-days in the year, one for the men hired for work during the four busiest shipping months and the other for men hired year-round. The men, who lived in two barracks or apartments, with often (according to Brown) as many as 40 in a single room, were not furnished with any account of their wages or purchases at the store, and generally found that they had very small balances to receive once deductions were made for clothing, stores, rum, and so on (Brown, 1899: 52-53). The GMA inherited both this tradition of the company store and brought its own schemes for company housing directly from England (Muisse, 1980: 79). Control over credit, housing, and fuel⁴³ potentially gave the GMA an opportunity to dominate the social life of the export enclaves it had developed in Nova Scotia, and it used this

40. PANS, RG 21, Series "A," Vol. 12, 1873, Memorial of Coal Owners to P.C. Hill, Provincial Secretary.

41. RG 21, Series "A," Vol. 38, No. 10, Diary of R.H. Brown, 1874, entry for 17 March 1874.

42. On paternalism, see Bryan D. Palmer (1983: Ch. 1).

43. From one remark in the Brown letters ("By this time I should think the matter has been settled one way or other as you would have to notify any Colliers you now take on that they would in future have to pay Rent and Fuel") it appears that colliers received housing and fuel either *gratis* or at nominal prices of \$.40 to \$2.00 per month for houses and \$.15 a load per hauling for coal before 1876. R. Brown, 11 July 1876. This letter is somewhat confusing because Brown seems both to imply that rents and fuel had been provided free, *and* that the GMA had charged small sums for each. Most colliers appear to have been paying rents at the time of the 1876 strike, for we read in a letter of John Rutherford's that "As no change has been made in house rents and the complaint was only by some men who have agreed to pay a higher rent for a better class of house they were satisfied on this point. The use of house coal was limited last year to 32 loads free p.man p.annum a fair allowance" (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 3 July 1876).

power to the fullest in the course of mid-nineteenth-century strikes.⁴⁴ Manager Brown felt entitled to call upon the services of the resident clergy in order to exhort his employees to work more faithfully (Brown Diaries, entries for March 1880). Some flavour of the company's attitude, and of the minutiae of class relations in so paternalist a setting, emerges from a comment Brown Senior made at the height of the crisis of 1876: "I am glad to see you have stopped giving any portion of large coal to the Colliers. It will be sensibly felt in the Working Cost. Slack Coal is quite good enough for such discontented fellows — and is what formerly they used to get" (R. Brown, 12 June 1876).

Yet just as it would be a mistake to interpret the economic history of coal solely in terms of external exploitation, so too would it be misleading to present its social history one-sidedly as one of unchallenged paternalist authority. The breaking of the GMA's monopoly had the unintentional consequence of gradually enabling workers to reap the rewards of their relative scarcity by playing off one coal company against another. In the period of expansion, the companies bid fiercely against each other for colliers, who therefore enjoyed a considerable degree of workplace power. "It is painful to learn that you will be compelled to advance wages or lose your men," Richard Brown wrote to his son in 1871. "It cannot be helped and I suppose you will have to do as others are doing or else come to Harm. The New Mines I think must at the wages they are paying be losing money and must come to grief." While suspecting that the concession to the men would simply set the stage for further wage demands, Brown concluded, "This may be so but in the meantime if they get nothing you may lose them all" (R. Brown, 8 September 1871). When these further demands evidently did materialize, Brown still counselled his son to "submit to circumstances," although he noted the Board's opinion that it would not be advisable to concede further increases in wages for the purpose of getting colliers from the other mines to supply the large orders of Job and Perkins (R. Brown, 25 September 1871). Competition for colliers between the GMA and the new mines was stiff. The new mines advertised for colliers by offering "reasonable levels" of work in the winter, and took colliers from each other — "I would not be very scrupulous about taking Colliers from Routledge's or the other Mines — they don't deserve the slightest consideration," counselled Brown. "I would take all I could get and let them have a leaf from their own book" (R. Brown, 10 October 1871). Competition for colliers predictably entailed radically improved wage levels, which rose 20 to 25 percent from 1871 to 1872. Some men earned a staggering \$80 per month in 1872 for three months in succession, although a more normal wage level was that reported for July 1874, of about \$39 per collier per month. Taking only the month of July into account, Brown found that the price of underground labour had

44. In the GMA's first major strike in Cape Breton, in 1864, the eviction from the company houses was the crucial moment of the struggle. See PANS, MG 100, Vol. 1356, Nos. 11-11a, H. Doyle to the Military Secretary of the Home Guards, 12 May 1864 and PANS, RG 1, Vol. 274, No. 54, Samuel Macdonnell to Charles Tupper, 24 May 1864.

increased \$.277 per ton from 1871 to 1875, while the price of surface labour had increased \$.098 per ton over the same period, amounting to an increase per ton of \$.375, or a total of more than £7500 per 100,000 tons (*Mines Report*, 1872: 3; R. Brown, 24 February 1874, 30 May 1876). With a total cost per ton which reached \$2.58 in one of the GMA's costlier pits in 1870, and a selling price which could reach as low as \$1.50 for its largest shipper, it was small wonder that its Board in London pressed Brown to make any possible reductions, but unilaterally to reduce the colliers' wages was to risk losing them to competitors (R. Brown, 24 September 1870, 22 April 1871).

Not only were colliers able to win dramatic wage increases in the early 1870s, but they also exercised a considerable degree of discretionary power within production. As many scholars have pointed out, the organization of work within nineteenth-century collieries diverged markedly from the stereotype of industrial labour. Colliers resembled craftsmen in their ability to control many aspects of their workplace. One crucial aspect of this was the system of payment by cubic yard, which was thought to be one reason why colliers had "no inducement to keep the Coal clean and free from slack and dirt, but just work all they can" (R. Brown, 5 November 1870). Predictably one finds no hymns of praise to colliers in the Brown letters, but one may fairly infer from the GMA's panic over losing colliers and its emphasis on the colliers' influence over the quality of the end product an implicit concession of the skilled colliers' indispensability. Even narrowly technical questions were seen within a framework in which the GMA and the colliers were seen as having objectively different interests. "I am glad to see you have not overlooked the fact that if you reduce the width of the Screens the Colliers will be the gainers and the Association losers thereby," Brown told his son in 1878. "I think it would be best not to alter the Screens. The Assn will lose nothing as they only pay the Colliers for screened coal — Customers will get a better quality of Coal — and the Slack will be much better also — it is evidently in the interests of the Association to continue to use 1/2 inch Screens" (R. Brown, 5 November 1870, 25 March 1871, 31 January 1878).

By the early 1870s, and in the context of a tight labour market in a competitive industry, the GMA was no longer in the position to exercise complete control over colliers. Although the GMA had operated a company store earlier, by the early 1870s it no longer did so — something which Brown revealingly hoped would make the GMA look more attractive to colliers at the "new mines" which evidently did have company stores (R. Brown, 29 June 1871). The role of the company store was filled by the coal miners' own cooperative association, which in times of strike was not directly susceptible to management pressures (cf. *Morning Herald*, 23 June 1876). The GMA eventually revived its company store, when the labour market was slack, and the GMA Board's explicit intention was that of disciplining middle-class sympathizers of the coal miners.⁴⁵

In the coal enclaves of the 1870s one therefore finds a subtle interplay of internal

and external factors which made the coal miners' position a far cry from powerless dependence on a system completely governed from outside. Yet, in another way, the events of the 1870s were to show that power in the workplace ultimately hinged on events in the world economy.

The level of direct coal mine employment in Nova Scotia declined relatively gradually after 1873 to 3,036 in 1879. However, these province-wide statistics are somewhat misleading, for they include the rapidly expanding industrial coalfield in Springhill, tightly integrated with the Intercolonial Railway. If we look only at Cape Breton, we can obtain a much better measure of the acute crisis of the mercantile coalfields of the 1870s. Here 1,748 workers were employed by the industry in 1866, which level dropped steadily to 1,430 by 1871. From 1871 to 1873, the size of the workforce increased by 78 percent, rising to 2,540 persons. Then came the collapse of 1875, which halved the level of employment of the year before, and represented a 58 percent decline in the numbers employed from the levels of 1873. These statistics suggest the catastrophic impact of the crisis of the 1870s upon the Cape Breton working class. Yet even so they *underestimate* the gravity of the situation, for in 1875 coal was drawn from the pits only on 136 days out of 300 working days, and the total number of days labour performed was less than the previous year's total by 175,839 man-days, representing a total reduction in wages of almost \$200,000. Most men worked only four days a week (*Mines Report*, 1875: 9).

Men who had flocked to the mines during the brief boom of the early 1870s now confronted industrial Cape Breton's first massive crash.

The reduction of ten per cent., which the tables show the trade of Cape Breton to have suffered beyond that of the previous year, would not of itself have been sufficient to occasion the present distress among the mining population of that county, had it not been that the great decline of the previous season followed a year of active trade, which had induced additional men to settle about the collieries, and had given the color to the impression that new pits could, with profit, compete in the trade with those already established. Then the winter of 74-75 drew so heavily on the personal credit of the miners, that they were unable to restore it during the past season, one which they were unwilling to believe would prove as dull as the preceding; but it was more so, and consequently the local traders were unable again to make advances, and furnish supplies for the present winter. (*Mines Report*, 1875: 6)

The main victims, according to an analysis by H.S. Poole in 1878, were Cape Breton farmers who had let their land run to waste in order to work underground (*Mines Report*, 1878: 10).

By the mid-1870s, then, an externally induced labour shortage had become an acute labour surplus. In August 1875, the Cape Breton Company notified stockhold-

45. "In the course of conversation about all the sympathy being on the side of the men," Brown reported to his son in 1876, "I casually remarked that the Association could punish the Storekeepers by opening a store of their own." To Brown's surprise, a number of the Board members enthusiastically supported the idea, even though Brown remembered an earlier GMA store as "a source of endless trouble and ... lots of bad debts..." (R. Brown, 11 July 1876). Despite such misgivings, the company store became a reality in 1878 (R. Brown, 12 November 1878).

ers of their intention of winding up the concern — “a result which might have been expected from their reckless expenditure,” remarked Brown acidly; “the sad result of which will be to leave many a poor family entirely dependent on a charitable public for the means of support during a long and dull season as there are already more laborers and mechanics seeking employment than can find it,” added the *Cape Breton Advocate* (R. Brown, 9 August 1875, *Cape Breton Advocate* [Sydney], 1 July 1875). By the following April the mines of the company were allowed to flood, there being no money for their continued upkeep. “‘No work’ possesses a significance to-day in Cape Breton, perhaps never before realized in the history of the Island,” wrote the *Herald* (*Morning Herald*, 16 April 1876). By December 1,355 people were reported needing aid; coal miners “destitute of the necessities of life” flocked to Sydney for help, which was funnelled through a Miners’ Relief Committee.

There is still a great amount of suffering and want at some of the outlying mine districts, and it is no uncommon sight to see poor men and women half starved, half naked, walking in ten or twelve miles for a few pounds of flour, a little sugar and tea. To see these poor creatures, as your correspondent saw some to-day, especially one poor woman pale and emaciated, without a shoe to her foot, trudging through the mud and rain for a few articles of food, doled out to her by the hands of charity, or the overseers of the poor, is enough to make one’s heart bleed.... (*Morning Herald*, 16 April 1876)

Once it perceived that labour was “superabundant,” the GMA lost no time in considering wage reductions. The idea of a wage reduction was first discussed by the GMA Board as early as 1873, when the boom seemed to be weakening, but the proposed reduction of \$.02 per ton for the winter months would have amounted to a savings of only £100 stg., which Brown thought was “not worth the risk of unsettling the men’s minds and perhaps would lead to a demand for an advance when they saw a favourable change” (R. Brown, 24 February 1874). In November, 1874, the GMA imposed a 10 percent wage reduction and further reductions were being planned in September 1875. Brown provides us with a fascinating portrait of the various forces and arguments that shaped the GMA’s wage reduction strategy.

Mr. [C.G.] Swann [Secretary of the GMA] has recommended the Board to make a reduction in the wages all round now that labour is so superabundant in C. Breton.... Swann talks of a reduction of 25 per cent. I think that is too high and even if it could be effected the men would retaliate on the first opportunity and with some justice as they would naturally say the Company had taken an unfair advantage of them. If a reasonable reduction is made it might be maintained.... At these rates they would still earn \$32 a month which is a good wage. Great reductions have been made here and more are expected as many of the Coal Owners are working at a loss. Drivers Shiftmen and Deputies could bear 12 1/2 per cent, but Pit labourers seem reasonable enough. If a general average of 12 1/2 per cent can be made it will amount to something worth while....

An average of 12 1/2 all round on your present output (11258 tons) would amount to about \$2100 per month.

The next and most important question is — Do you think the men will submit to such a reduction or strike against it? Considering that you will be able to ship 150,000 tons next year, it would be a great misfortune if your Works should be thrown idle, perhaps for months, by a strike and all the expected profits on such a large scale swallowed up.

If such a strike were sure to follow an attempt to reduce wages I must say that in the face of such a misfortune it would be better to go on at your present rates of wages, because, now that you are recovering your old customers and in a fair way of driving some of your competitors out of the market, the suspension of your works consequent upon a Strike would afford them an opportunity of resuming operations and of supplying your customers.

...I told the Board when they were talking over the subject on Friday I thought 25 per cent was far too much, and that even if carried at the cost of such a strike as we had in 1864, 'the game would not be worth the Candle.' (R. Brown, 21 September 1875)

This provides us with a telling glimpse into the London Board's insights into the interplay of external and internal forces within its distant export enclave. Failure to impose the reduction meant financial losses, but forcing through a reduction could mean losing colliers to the new mines, which could prove disastrous if international trade suddenly revived.⁴⁶

The GMA cannily imposed a reduction of 20 percent on the colliers' wages on 1 January 1876, when none of the other mines would be hiring on new workers. If the GMA were compelled to make an advance in the spring, it would have a margin of 7.5 percent to bargain with. The Board also planned to bank some coal in preparation for the strike they expected in the spring (R. Brown, 2 November, 16 November, 30 November 1875). Inspired by the GMA, perhaps, coal companies throughout Cape Breton, Pictou, and Springhill imposed a similar reduction in 1876. Although these reductions were answered by short, spontaneous strikes by workers on a strictly local basis, none were longlasting (*Herald*, 24 June 1875, 4 December 1875; *Eastern Chronicle*, 9 December 1875; *Citizen*, 14 January 1876). In this way, a decision in London concerning trade in the United States had a direct and immediate impact on workers in Nova Scotia.

The founding of the Nova Scotian working-class movement, 1876

The situation in the GMA's collieries at Sydney Mines, however, was quite different. Since 1874, the colliers had been organized in a committee that increasingly assumed many of the functions of a trade union. R.H. Brown's diaries record his negotiating with committees dispatched by the colliers "to ask about being charged for Coal on those idle [*sic*] days in Feby," to which Brown replied that "I must have some means of making them work steadily, and those who objected would be given the privilege of going away" (Richard Brown Diary, 1874). Such stern dismissals had not deterred the trade unionists, whose demands in 1876 outraged the Browns: "To think of their dictating whom you were to employ to haul their Coal! If you give way in such things as that you may give up the management of the Mines to their Union at once. The only way to save future trouble is to be firm with them now and let them see nothing will frighten you from your duty to the Assn." (R. Brown, 24 January 1876).

46. As Brown put it, "If you have a long strike it will give encouragement to the New Mines which will carry off a lot of your men before your works begin again." R. Brown, 13 December 1875 [note added 14 December 1875].

By February 1876 the Browns had concluded that most of the employees in Sydney Mines were disaffected. They considered but rejected the idea of establishing a friendly society to draw off supporters of the union. "If the Union men are bound together by oath," counselled Brown, "you would not succeed in drawing off any of them — and it would not be worth while to form a Society for 14 or 15 men" (R. Brown, 21 February 1876).

Contrary to the GMA's well-laid plans, the strike was precipitated one month early by John Rutherford, the General Manager and Mining Engineer. This gave the colliers additional bargaining power, for they could close the season one month before the usual time. They went on strike on 9 December, and returned one week later on the basis of a reduction of 14 percent (R. Brown, 13 December 1875; *Eastern Chronicle*, 30 December 1875). The Board accepted this compromise at its meeting on 7 January 1876, but instructed its Nova Scotia representatives to press for 15 percent "if possible and politic." This reduction — which brought the approximate level to about \$.13 or \$.14 per ton — the men accepted in February, evidently on the condition that they be guaranteed four or five days of work per week through the winter.⁴⁷ Brown then proceeded to discharge the leaders of the strike, over the hesitant policy of the London Board, which feared that further blacklisting would spark another strike (R. Brown, 21 March 1876). "I expected the Colliers would 'try it on' at the beginning of the season," remarked Richard Brown Sr. on 30 May, "They will surely not be such fools as to strike for I am convinced the Board will not give them a single fraction of advance whatever may be the Consequences. Indeed it is more likely that they will insist upon further reduction." To Brown, in England, it was apparent that, having just reduced the price of coal \$.25 per ton in order to obtain a larger sale, and having made virtually no profit for the past two years, the GMA would never consider restoring the old wage rates, and that rather than doing so, it would be preferable to let the mines simply stand idle (R. Brown, 30 May 1876; see also 12 June 1876). Unknown to him, a general strike at the colliery had already started the day before.

Where December's strike had been quiet and orderly, that of the spring and summer of 1876 was, from the beginning, marked with violence — although whether this was the violence of men driven to desperation in a collapsing economy or a calculated protest against the victimization of union members is difficult to say. Among the men there was the conviction that the company had reneged on an agreement to restore the wages it had taken away in December-January. The coal boys or 'drivers' were the first to rebel. During the first three days of the strike the waggon-loaders continued at work preparing the coal for vessels, but on the fourth day (1 June 1876) a deputation of five men, "acting as a kind of committee," asked

47. R. Brown, 11 January 1876; 21 February 1876; *Morning Herald*, 24 June 1876 (letter of John Rutherford). It should be noted that Rutherford asserted the men had agreed to accept a 15 percent wage reduction in December, on the basis of a guarantee of work; the likeliest chain of events is that they accepted the additional 1 percent reduction in January on this basis.

that the loading be stopped, and on management's refusal to negotiate the point, a crowd of strikers attacked the loaders (*Morning Herald*, 23 June 1876). On 13 June 1876, John Rutherford of the GMA attempted to entrap others for whom warrants had been issued when they came to pick up their pay at the company's offices, but this failed when the arrested parties quickly escaped from the North Sydney lockup. His course was candidly one of provoking the men to violence: "A force must be used and action taken that will either silence the agitators or excite to acts that will require the aid of other power," he wrote to the GMA's Halifax agent. "We cannot give way or we may as well hand over the Mine...."⁴⁸

Court proceedings began against the strikers, but on 15 June the union, acting through its lawyers, made a rather remarkable offer: arbitration. The court proceedings were suspended, but the GMA's agents, looking (as Rutherford put it) "for their coming in a contrite spirit and a desire to be allowed to start work on the same terms as they left off," were startled when the miners "coolly asked for the prices paid last year and said that was the decision of the men" (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to J.A. Morrow, 19 June 1876). From London, Brown remarked, "What an idea it was of the Lawyers Hearn and Dodd to submit the dispute to arbitration. The Directors laughed at the idea. They know and any one may see by the printed accounts of last year's work that it would be absurd to go on working the Mines unless reductions can be carried out" (R. Brown, 11 July 1876). On 16 June the court proceedings were resumed, but of twenty-two men charged, only two were convicted to thirty days imprisonment. So strongly was public opinion running on behalf of the strikers that the magistrate, in passing sentence on one of the leaders, scandalized the GMA by remarking that although his sympathies were with the men he was obliged to punish lawbreakers. "A fit man to visit on the industry!" Rutherford exclaimed bitterly. (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 3 July 1876) "The Civil authorities have acted shamefully.... By this Time I trust they have sent you Troops or at any rate a gunboat from Halifax," stormed Brown in London (R. Brown, 27 June 1876). The union, acting through its lawyers, made another offer to have an arbitration of the dispute, but mediation by the local MLA on such questions as rents, fuel allowances, and dockage failed to resolve the central question of the strike: the wage reduction. The GMA continued to view the strike as being led by a cohesive conspiracy of about 50 men bound together by secret oath and intimidating men through threats of violence from loading coal. It saw the strike as depending upon a powerful leadership, "the leadership of the disaffected" in Rutherford's words, who could intimidate and cajole their fellow workers.⁴⁹

In view of the sympathies of the local magistrates, the GMA saw itself as holding three remaining cards: eviction from the company houses, further legal proceed-

48. Dalhousie University Archives, DAL MS 2 2235, Rutherford Papers, File A. 10 [hereafter Rutherford Papers], Rutherford to Morrow, 14 June 1876.

49. Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 14 July 1876. The notion of "50 men" is based on the number of those who were subsequently blacklisted as ringleaders.

ings on the question of intimidation, or armed force. As for consideration of the union's offer of a return to work on the basis of a \$.02 advance in wages, the correspondence merely notes the GMA's pleasure that "There is dissension among [them] but apparently not yet of sufficient strength to show in their councils" (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 14 June 1876). Evictions began on 6 July, with the men offering no resistance; a community of tents was established nearby, and Rutherford expressed his hopes that the spirit of the men would begin to crumble "when they experience the discomfort of the miserable camps they have or rather are providing" (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 7 July 1876). "It is quite clear you can expect no help from the Magistrates — the only chance now of bringing them to their senses seems to be a residence of a few weeks on the road sides which will soon tire them out," wrote Brown from England (R. Brown, 24 July 1876). Yet even this did not turn out as the company hoped. "The false sympathy which is shewn is not helping to end matters for notwithstanding they have constructed camps very few are occupied, shelter being given in the barns and other places by the people in the neighbourhood," Rutherford reported a week later (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 14 July 1876). As for legal proceedings, appeals were launched to the Supreme Court, and affidavits prepared substantiating the claim that men anxious to go to work had been dissuaded by threats of violence. Finally, there was the militia; Rutherford by early July had asked the authorities if "the force is ready to protect the men who may be induced to go to the heap" (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 3 July 1876). Work was resumed on 26 July 1876 with 11 men filling waggons from the bank; armed volunteers arrived on the ground the day following, and strikebreakers were brought on board the Cunard steamship *Delta*, who, since they were from outside the community, were thought to be less fearful of reprisals. Even so, some of the strikebreakers refused to work once they arrived in Sydney Mines (Rutherford Papers, Rutherford to Morrow, 7 July 1876; *Citizen*, 29 July 1876; *Morning Herald*, 28 July 1876). On 29 July it was reported that the coal miners had offered to return to work at the old rates, providing the union leaders were not victimized, but the GMA, smelling victory, refused to negotiate (*Citizen*, 29 July 1876).

It is in this context of an adroitly conducted, but highly uneven, struggle for power in a declining market that the violence that so marked 1876 must be placed. The strikebreakers who began work on 26 July were fired upon, allegedly by miners concealed in the nearby bushes, and one bullet passed "in unenviable proximity" to Brown himself. That evening twenty-eight coal waggons were emptied and a mowing machine destroyed. As the train carried strikebreakers and militia reinforcements from Baddeck, it was fired upon, and one Nicholas Tobin was shot in the back of the neck. That he was standing beside Rutherford prompted much speculation that he had been the target of an assassin. Vacant company houses were vandalized and a cannister of powder thrown into the home of a strikebreaker named Stewart.⁵⁰

Like the Saint John disturbances of 1875 and the Londonderry bloodshed of 1877, the Sydney Mines strike was a watershed civil upheaval, something quite unprecedented in the history of the community in which it occurred. The violence was not, of course, random. To the extent that it was directed personally at Brown and Rutherford it bore the marks of the paternalism against which it was so vigorous a protest. The strike was broken in the first week of August, with Brown proclaiming it "a great moral triumph" (R. Brown, 21 August 1876). For the men who headed the GMA, it would long provide their men and their errant middle-class sympathizers with a salutary lesson in obedience and decorum. "I expect they have got such a lesson as they will not forget for years to come and that all those who have encouraged them have learned something also," Brown exclaimed to his son with obvious relish. Now began the difficult business of compiling a thorough blacklist of those considered to be the "chief offenders," although to the GMA's displeasure these men did not leave the Island but settled instead at nearby Little Bras d'Or (R. Brown, 7 and 21 August 1876). While the press had never expressed much sympathy with the strikers, the violence pushed it into a stance of violent denunciation: it was "another beautiful illustration of ... the value of strikes," according to a scornful *Morning Herald*, while the *Citizen* remarked, drawing a parallel between the Cape Breton strikers and the Molly Maguires, "We are always loath to believe in the existence in our country of the grosser evils with which other countries are cursed, but it would seem as if we are liable to outbreaks very similar in kind, (if less in degree) to those which have for some time past made certain districts in Pennsylvania a haunt of outlaws" (*Citizen*, 3 June 1876; *Morning Herald*, 5 August 1876). In late August, two barns of hay belonging to the GMA were destroyed, almost certainly by incendiaries. Brown wrote to his son, "This must keep you in constant dread as there is no knowing what they will do next" (R. Brown, 4 September 1876).

That the workers were defeated in 1876 was, given the imbalance of class forces in the coalfields, perhaps inevitable; what was more significant, in the long term, was the fact that they had mounted such a massive strike in the first place. From the viewpoint of labour history, this strike deserves far more attention than it has been given, for it launched the miners of Nova Scotia into their role as the central figures in the working-class movement. One of the most suggestive features of 1876 was that, in response to an evident unity on the part of capital in enforcing reduced wages, workers also began to unite in their struggles to fight back. "Delegates from the men are now travelling through the other collieries seeking assistance to enable

50. *Morning Herald*, 28, 29 July, 2 August, 1876; *Citizen*, 29 July, 2 August, 1876; *Eastern Chronicle* (Pictou), 3, 10 August 1876; R. Brown, 21 August 1876. Brown Sr. considered it most likely that the shots had been fired at his son merely as a way of intimidating strikebreakers, not as a failed assassination. Given Rutherford's earlier explicit advocacy of a strategy of provocation, one wonders if someone within the GMA might not have taken his counsel seriously — a question we are unlikely ever to have answered.

them to continue the strike until their demands are complied with," noted one report in 1876. "They have even gone to Pictou for assistance from their brother miners there" (*Morning Herald*, 16 August 1876). This was an interesting sign that workers were beginning to break the fetters of an older structure of isolation that had stemmed from export-oriented enclave development. Within three years a further attempt to impose a wage reduction would be defeated by the workers of Springhill, who were able to capitalize on their position within the first coalfield to be integrated with industry, and within five years, delegates would be going from the mainland to Cape Breton, laying the basis of a trade union movement which has continued from 1879 to this day. The events of 1876 became a mobilizing legend of the 1880s, the memory kept alive through the remarkably vindictive blacklisting of leading activists by the coal companies (*Trades Journal*, 21 July 1880). Yet it may have even greater significance for the political economy of the Maritimes, for it suggested that the balance between external and internal forces had shifted under the impact of the immense international crisis of the 1870s. This shift partly reflected British capital's departure for more lucrative investment fields — Argentina, for example — but it also reflected the emergence of a new political economy of import substitution, to which those most afflicted by the difficulties of export production made a significant contribution.

The turn to the new economy, 1872-1878

In the 1870s a long, complex process of restructuring began, a concentration and consolidation of capital whose regional significance was immense. This was by no means a strictly "economic" process, determined by laws immanent within the economic base. While the crisis which gripped the coal industry was a textbook illustration of capitalism's inherent contradictions on both the world scale (the international recession) and the local level (the phase of hypercompetition and overproduction), merchants' capital bequeathed to the "industrial" coalfields a significant anomaly: state ownership of, and heavy dependence upon, the coal resource itself. This gave the resolution of the crisis a directly political character it did not have elsewhere. Capital, labour, and the state must, beginning in the 1870s, be seen as three interrelated forces in the restructuring of Nova Scotia coal.

Looking first at capital, the 1870s initiated three major structural changes: a momentous shift from London to Montreal as the financial and organizational headquarters of the industry, a shift from the American to domestic markets, and a growing consolidation and concentration of capital. The first change was a gradual and partial one, for British investors continued to play a significant role in the coal and steel industry until the 1920s. However, the initiative clearly lay with Montreal. The GMA hung on to Sydney Mines until 1900, when it finally received a handsome pay-off for its investment in Nova Scotia, and enjoyed profitable years in the 1880s and 1890s. However, outside Sydney Mines, the GMA followed a general policy of disinvestment. The Brown letters suggest discussions of selling of all the GMA's

Nova Scotia properties in 1871, and the sale of Albion Mines and its undeveloped Springhill property left the GMA with its Cape Breton holdings by the end of the 1870s (R. Brown, 13 July 1871; 2 October 1876). This pattern of withdrawal takes us to the second point, the changing markets for coal. Exports to the United States and the world market continued as important elements of the industry, but again the balance began to shift, in the 1870s, to the domestic market, especially the St. Lawrence Valley and the Intercolonial Railway. "The results are too palpable to be overlooked," R. Brown would say in 1872 of the disappointing experiences of coal masters in the American market.

They plainly show that the General Mining Association must look chiefly to the British provinces for a market for their Sydney coal, where its character is well known and appreciated, and that they will find it to their interest to foster the trade by selling at low prices to regular customers, thereby securing a fair profit on their outlay, perfectly free from fluctuations, and consequent losses, attendant upon a foreign trade, liable at any moment to be suspended by a hostile tariff. (Brown, 1899: 71)

Brown's attitude was not representative of the entire GMA, however, and his Board was far less interested in pursuing the industrial markets developing in Canada in the period after 1871. Its strategy cannot be explained strictly in terms of economic rationality. Cut-backs were understandable in the uncertain 1870s, and Brown attributed to the GMA's sale of its Pictou properties in 1872 to Sir George Eliot's Halifax Company (despite its name, a subsidiary of a vast British mining complex) its ability to survive the difficult 1870s without suspension or bankruptcy. By 1877 the Sydney Mines operation was earning a profit and in 1878 the GMA Board felt able to declare a small dividend (R. Brown, 17 October 1876). Significantly, however, the GMA chose not to extend its investments in Nova Scotia by developing Springhill coal: it had, in effect, already begun to withdraw from the province.

For Montreal industrial and finance capital, in contrast, the coal resources of Nova Scotia became one of the principal avenues to a hegemonic presence within the Canadian economy, and by 1900 virtually all of the industry was in their hands. From 1880 to 1900, Montreal completed the transition to industrial capitalism in the coalfields that London had only started. It tied the coal industry directly into industrial capital (the railway system, Montreal's factories, and so on) and frequently achieved the vertical integration of the coal, steel, and transportation industries. A national industrial bourgeoisie had emerged which could integrate the far-flung resources of the country in a massive program of industrialization based on tariff protection of the home market. From the standpoint of the region, of course, this central Canadian program of industrialization merely intensified dependence upon an externally controlled resource and redirected the flow of surplus from London to Central Canada. "I don't think the new Govt. can do you much good," Brown wrote in 1878 of the new conservative government. "They will not be able to impose a Duty upon American coal against the influence of the Upper Canadians" (R. Brown, 25 October 1878). It was as succinct a summary as any of the limited

protection the National Policy would afford the coal miners.

The state's position was also changed by the crisis of the 1870s, at both the provincial and federal level. A remarkable analysis in the *Mines Reports* even visualized the local government as a type of corporation owning mining property and leasing it to others to work (*Mines Report*, 1876: 16). The state gradually became more and more dependent on the coal resource to meet its fiscal needs. This was why, starting in the 1870s, the provincial government pursued an ever more direct role in the industry: promoting it, attempting to put together deals with external capital to develop it yet further, tightly regulating the processes of mining, down to the finest details.

The state drew labour into an ever more intensive participation in the politics of the industry. On the provincial level, the organized workers were able to extract concessions well in advance of those obtained by other Canadian workers. On the federal level, organized workers in the export sector began to agitate for the National Policy and home manufacturing, so much so that Liberals seeking their support concealed as far as they could their party's stand on free trade. In 1876, in response to a speech delivered in the House of Commons by J.W. Carmichael, Pictou's Liberal M.P. and a devout free-trader, coal miners marched on New Glasgow, carrying Carmichael's effigy and banners inscribed with critical sentiments.⁵¹ From then on, no account of the impact of the National Policy can safely overlook the internal dynamic through which it became, far more than Confederation had been, the mobilizing slogan of popular Toryism.

Formed by, but also resisting, deeply rooted patterns of development first established by merchants' capital; as united by their position within a structurally distinct region of Canada as they were divided by culture, geography, and sector: workers and primary producers in the Maritimes fashioned a complex history which is only now beginning to be understood. The analysis of regional society requires a full exploration of the class forces which made it, and the understanding of those class forces requires close attention to their position within the world as well as the national economy. Maritime sociology and social history will succeed to the extent to which the theoretical and empirical issues raised by this history are made the central issues of analysis and debate.

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Class in nineteenth-century, central Ontario: A reassessment of the crisis and demise of small producers during early industrialization, 1861-1871.

Gordon Darroch

Abstract. Sociologists and historians have tended to accept a simple historical thesis that small property owners, especially farmers and artisans, were a fading social class after mid-century in central Canada. This assured demise of the petite bourgeoisie has given warrant to the focus of analysis on the development of capital and labour and on the emergence of the familiar urban and industrial institutions of the twentieth century. Conventional Marxist and non-Marxist accounts converge in this respect. A first detailed study of patterns of labour force shifts and of property-holding in central Ontario between 1861 and 1871 questions these assumptions. Farm small-holding was not in decline; the acquisition of petty property and homeownership were surprisingly common even among labourers and especially among artisans. The ownership of small property and of homes was perpetuated, possibly fostered, amid the conditions that engendered proletarianization.

Résumé. Sociologues et historiens tendent à accepter la thèse historique simple affirmant que la classe sociale des petits propriétaires fonciers a décliné dans la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle dans la partie centrale du Canada, surtout parmi les agriculteurs et artisans. Cette mort certaine de la petite bourgeoisie a servi de justification à une concentration de l'analyse sur le développement du capital et des ouvriers et sur l'émergence des institutions urbaines et industrielles courantes du vingtième siècle. Les textes conventionnels marxistes et non marxistes s'accordent sur ce point. Une première étude détaillée des tendances d'évolution du monde ouvrier et de la propriété foncière dans le centre de l'Ontario entre 1861 et 1871 jette le doute sur ces hypothèses. Le nombre de petites fermes n'a pas décliné; l'acquisition de petites propriétés et résidences était étonnamment répandue, même parmi les ouvriers et particulièrement chez les artisans. La petite propriété foncière et résidentielle s'est perpétuée et a peut-être même augmenté au milieu des conditions qui ont engendré la prolétarianisation.

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Introduction

The history of small producers, the *petite bourgeoisie*, is largely taken for granted. Arno Mayer suggested over a decade ago that it was time to stop thinking of them primarily, indeed, often exclusively, in terms of other classes: "Instead of ignoring, disparaging, or dismissing the world of the *petite bourgeoisie* as transient, insipid, and counterfeit, intellectuals should examine and understand that enigmatic universe for what it has been, for what it is, and for what it is constantly becoming" (Mayer, 1975: 410-411).

In one respect, the complaint that the history of small producers has been written off prematurely can be taken as a critique of Marxist theory. In conventional form, Marxist theory has seen the *petite bourgeoisie* as squeezed from the historical stage and consciousness by the twin pincers of the concentration of capital and the march of proletarianization. But in this regard, conventional Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives share important ground, and are sometimes indistinguishable. Both mainstream sociological and historical thought, it seems to me, commonly accept the thesis that small property was in crisis after mid-century and that its certain demise gives warrant to simply focusing attention elsewhere — to the growth of commerce and industry, to urbanization, and to an emerging working class.

In this analysis, I first briefly review the treatment accorded small property, especially landed small holders, in Ontario in the period of Confederation. I then assess new evidence taken from the manuscript censuses of 1861 and 1871 for a large region of central Ontario. The evidence questions the dominant assumption that agrarian small-holders were diminishing as a class in this crucial period. The data also bear on the directly related questions of the extent and character of proletarianization and the condition of artisans and small manufacturers.

The sociology and history of Ontario's small producers

In mainstream sociological thought the significance and fate of the *petite bourgeoisie* has attracted scant attention. Sociological convention largely accepts the inevitability of a marginal condition for small property owners and the absorption of their sons and daughters into the ranks of the white-collared middle of advanced, industrial society (Bell, 1973).

Canadian sociological and political analysis has largely reflected the dominant position, with the important exception of a number of studies of farmers' movements as a force in regional, populist politics and the rise of third parties, especially in the Canadian West in the early part of this century (Conway, 1981; Macpherson, 1953; Morton, 1950). Even these cases tend to reinforce the dominant assumptions of crisis and demise, since the farmers' movements are taken to be historically exceptional, regionally unique, and unstable.

More telling still is Canadian sociology's treatment of the nineteenth-century backdrop to their mid- and late-twentieth-century focus. In this case the convergence of conventional Marxist accounts and sociological orthodoxy is virtually

complete. The occasional backward glances taken by sociologists into Canadian history rely almost entirely on a single, early portrayal of the emergence of industrial class formation by H.C. Pentland (1959, 1960). Pentland's work was pathbreaking, but has been adopted by sociologists more for the ease with which its simple periodization and relatively uncomplicated class categories can be fitted to abbreviated historical sketches than for any intrinsic interest in the historical processes. The sociological citations are used to give authority to the conventional claim that, after mid-century, the landed petite bourgeoisie was at the turning point in its slide into oblivion and the story of capital and labour beginning (Porter, 1965; Rinehart, 1975; Hunter, 1981: part 4).

Pentland's thesis centers on the timing and conditions underlying proletarianization. Two factors were considered crucial: restrictions on the acquisition of land and the influx of new labour, both skilled and unskilled. Pentland argues that after 1840 land was increasingly difficult to acquire for immigrants and for native sons (1959: 459). By 1870, the conditions were such as to create a virtual reserve army of labour (1959: 456-61; 1960: 109-110, 169-70). As for new sources of labour, Irish Famine immigrants met the requirements of urban, unskilled labour and British and Scottish workers immigrated to provide the new industrial skills. Subsequent historical research on these precise questions has been quite limited. Recent work has tended both to reinforce some elements of the account, (Gagan, 1981: ch 3) and muddled or negated others (Akenson, 1984: ch 1; Greer, 1985a).

If appeal to the Pentland thesis has provided sociologists with a convenient reference for largely ignoring small property in Canadian history, there has been unusual unanimity in Canadian historians' treatment of the question. Mainstream historical scholarship has centered primarily on debates about the form that industrial development has taken. In H.V. Nelles' (1984) formulation the dominant question has been whether Canada's industrialization is a normal variant of the Western experience of an autonomous nation or a form of distorted, dependent industrialism — the rich colony. However, each variant has at its centre the assumption of progressive, more or less linear movement from the pre-industrial past to the industrial present. The developmental models have had a characteristically Canadian emphasis — on the role of staples commodities in generating the base for further development (Innis, 1956; Watkins, 1967; McCallum, 1980) — but in each the nineteenth-century economy and, indeed, whole ways of social life, tend to be treated as first stages in the unfolding of the industrial future (but, see Greer, 1985b for a recent, penetrating analysis of the continuity of rural class relations in nineteenth-century Quebec). As an historian of Ontario's agriculture has commented (Lawr, 1972: 239), it is in the Confederation period that "rural Ontario first becomes an object of nostalgia for the historian, and a convenient foil to illustrate the progress of other, more momentous developments." In seeking the seeds of the future in the past, all developmental models must confront the inherent tendency to distort or ignore the past itself; in E.P. Thompson's (1963: 13) oft cited, but relevant

phrasing, the past is in danger of suffering "the enormous condescension of posterity."

There has also been a surprising convergence between traditional accounts of the Confederation era and the accounts of the new labour historians with respect especially to the fate of nineteenth-century smallholders. Conventionally, farmers have been treated as a vague, if numerically powerful and occasionally activated, political force lying behind emerging urban manufacturing and labouring interests. Farmers' ideology and movements have been specific subjects in Ontario history (Hann, 1975; Kealey and Palmer, 1982; Shortt, 1972; Cook, 1984). As a class, however, farmers have also typically been treated as the most diffuse and weak element of the merchant capital-labour-farmer triad, destined soon to fade from the economic and socio-political stage (Morton, 1964; Kerr, 1982). Further, in recent, revisionist social history both the new labour historians and the new urban historians of nineteenth-century Ontario (Kealey, 1980; Palmer, 1979, 1984; Kealey and Palmer, 1982; Katz, 1975; Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982) have strongly implied and occasionally argued explicitly (Palmer, 1984: 242-244) that rural small-holders were on the ropes after mid-century: as the core of the social formation of that century and of a whole way of life, it is widely assumed that rural smallholders can be safely ignored after 1860, while attention is turned to the face of the future in Canadian capitalism's nascent, urban industrial revolution. In part, the bias is simply inherent in the largely urban focus of the most challenging recent work in social and labour history (but also see Gagan, 1981 and Akenson, 1984 for studies of specific rural communities).

This paper addresses some of the elementary and unanswered questions about the experience of smallholders in central Ontario between 1861 and 1871. Several related questions are considered. First, what were the main divisions and the composition of nineteenth-century Ontario's labour force? Second, who among these groups owned property and of what kinds? Third, what were the patterns of individual mobility among major groups, farmers, artisans, wage-labourers, and small and large capitalists? Fourth, what were the differences among these occupational groups in the chances of losing or acquiring property? Specifically, after 1860 were the sons of farmers out of luck and land in their attempt to follow in their fathers' footsteps? Fifth, was the small property basis of the artisanal class already deeply eroded by proletarianization? Finally, what property did wage-labourers own, if any, and how different were they from farmers, artisans, capitalists, and proto-capitalists?

Samples, linkage, and coding

The analyses presented here are based on unusual samples of the census manuscript data of 1861 and 1871 for a large region of central Ontario. The samples represent the populations of all cities, towns, and villages, as well as the rural populations. The area includes two of Ontario's major, industrializing cities, Hamilton and Toronto.

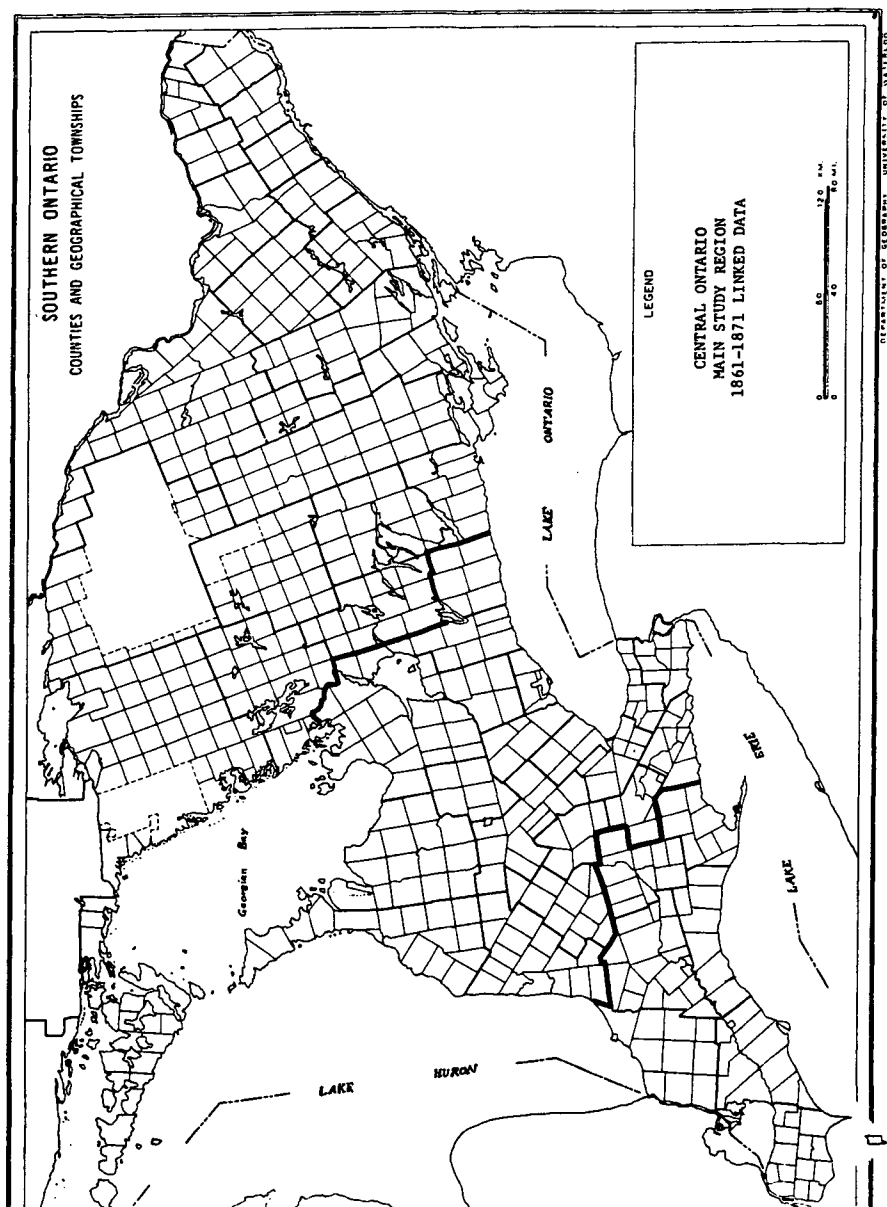
Figure 1 shows the boundaries of the area.

The data include socio-demographic information, detailed occupational listings and information on property ownership and farm productivity. The samples of individuals are based on a random selection of clusters of surnames and are representative of the enumerated populations (see Darroch and Ornstein, 1978, 1984). Surname samples were selected to permit linkage between censuses of individuals who remained in the region; surname clusters are effectively closed populations, except for emigration and mortality. The latter, of course, take a heavy toll even on the population of a large and largely rural region. Emigration to the United States in this era was quite high.

A quite complex linkage procedure was devised using both computer sorting procedures and manual linkage. The latter combined detailed decision algorithms with the pattern recognition capabilities of individuals very familiar with the data (Darroch, 1986). In all some 65,000 records were eligible for linkage. The rate of certain or highly probable links was about 55 percent for the population at risk in 1861, taking account of mortality and, for women, marriage and name changes. The large residual is a composite product of census underenumeration, linkage uncertainty, and emigration. Relying on the few other studies of error in these nineteenth-century sources (Stephenson, et al., 1979; Knights, 1971: Appendix and personal communication, 1986), we estimate the combined rate of underenumeration for the two censuses to be about 15-18 percent, considering the likelihood of significant overlap in those subject to underenumeration in both years. Linkage failure may add a maximum of another 10 percent to the total residual (Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982: ch. 3). These estimates leave some 17-20 percent of the unlinked 1861 population to emigration from the region.

The data were directly transcribed from the nominal census manuscripts. For the most part the census data are analyzed in their original, manuscript form; only occupational titles required coding for the purposes of analysis. The coding scheme specifically avoided ranking detailed occupational titles on any scale of general social standing or of status. Rather, the classification aimed to distinguish the main labour force groups in terms of differences in the labour process. Farmers and labourers were simply classified as such. In this analysis the relatively small numbers of semi-skilled workers are included with labourers. On the other hand, the artisan group includes a wide range of occupational titles that at least implied independent commodity production. This is the most troublesome census category for two reasons. First, with census data alone, we cannot distinguish journeymen (who were wage-workers) from master artisans (who were small employers). Second, there are artisanal titles, such as shoemaker, baker, tailor, or even printer and coachmaker, which suggest traditional trades, but could also refer simply to factory workers, as well as to apprentices and journeymen in small shops.¹ In one

1. I thank Greg Kealey for bringing this to my attention



systematic study of Hamilton, Katz, Doucet, and Stern (1982: 70-71, Table 2.3) tried to distinguish masters and waged workers by trade. Their evidence indicates that about 5 percent of the labour force in 1861 and 1871 were master craftsmen or manufacturers in trades, whereas the skilled workers in these trades made up 27 percent of the labour force in 1861 and 37 percent a decade later. However, for the region as a whole, independent producers would have been much more common in small towns and villages. Factory workers were still a small fraction of the working population. For non-metropolitan Ontario as a whole, the industrial workforce was just 10-12 percent of the total labour force (McCallum, 1980: 84). This analysis makes no direct assessment of the differences between masters and wage-workers, but reveals the relative property status for all those with artisanal titles in comparison to other occupational groups. Others have found that master craftsmen have distinctly greater property and tax assessments in the nineteenth century than workers in the same trades (see Smith, 1975). If artisans as a whole tend to hold property, we can assume that the regional group is largely made up of independent producers.

Three other main groups were identified in the original coding, though they are here treated as a single category: those most inclined to bourgeois, commercial, and penny-capitalist pursuits. The category combines commercial and industrial owners, including merchants, manufacturers, and shopkeepers. It also includes the penny-capitalists of all kinds, such as peddlers and hucksters. The category also contains professionals and other white-collar workers, such as clerks, who represent less than 5 percent of the regional labour force in 1861 and 1871.

Labour force shifts, population turnover, and property, 1861-1871.

Previous work in this project produced initial evidence that we should be cautious, if not skeptical, of the easy assumption regarding a crisis in small-holding in central Ontario at Confederation (Darroch and Ornstein, 1984). Using the same data assessed here, an examination of the main patterns of occupational transitions over the 1861-1871 decade indicated, first, that the occupational structure was very permeable: there was a large amount of movement between labour force groups and no evidence of major class barriers, say, between farming and labouring, artisanal work and the commercial world. Second, most occupational movement was into farming, which was also the one location that men tended not to leave: over 85 percent of the farmers in 1861 were still farmers a decade later, whereas the next most stable group were artisans and craftsmen with 65 percent retaining the titles (Darroch and Ornstein, 1984: Table 4b).

It may be noted that a more skeptical view of the crisis and demise of small producers in the late nineteenth century corresponds with the recent recognition of the historic tenacity of petty capitalists and the self-employed. For the first time there is significant, though still modest attention being paid to the capacity of small owners and producers for survival, adaptation, and social reproduction within

capitalism (Bechhofer and Elliott, 1981; Cuneo, 1984; for nineteenth-century, rural American communities, see Hahn and Prude, 1985).

Our analysis begins with another look at the occupational shifts reported earlier and considers them in the light of the migration and turnover of the region's labour force. The analysis is limited to men in the labour force, as a direct consequence of nineteenth-century census procedure. Our linked samples could only include women whose names were not changed through marriage, and, of these, less than 10 percent had occupations recorded in the census. There are enough in the sample to warrant a separate analysis than the one undertaken here. Any analysis will be particularly restricted because farm labour and female farm labour specifically were not distinct census categories. However, we can assume that all women on farms were fully productive members of their households (Ball, 1975; McGhee, 1984). The extent of the direct engagement of women in craft production within artisanal households is more problematic and the nature of the work undertaken by wives and daughters in labouring and in commercial and penny-capitalist households is still largely unknown for Canada. Bradbury (1984a) has shown how wives in working-class households survived in nineteenth-century Montreal by combining a range of marketing, gardening, and boarding activities with routine household maintenance. She has also shown that for the urban working class the most striking feature of married women's experience was the infrequency of wage labour, even if census enumerators massively undercounted the phenomenon (1984b: 124-25).

Despite the lack of full knowledge about work processes within households of all kinds, we will assume in general that the household was the centre of productive activity in the 1860s and 1870s and, hence, that the census classification of men's occupations reflects much of the social and material circumstances of all the household members. The following analysis examines both property holdings and characteristics of households under this assumption.

Table 1. Male labour force distributions and turnover, central Ontario, 1861-1871, in percentages.

	Farmers	Farmers' sons	Labourers	Artisans	Others*	Total	Number of cases
Total, 1861	31.8	14.7	26.9	17.1	9.5	100.0	9310
Losses, 1861-1871	26.6	14.3	30.8	18.1	10.2	100.0	5844
New entrants, 1861-1871	30.0	16.8	20.5	20.5	12.2	100.0	6729
Persisters, 1861-1871	52.6	7.3	12.6	16.7	10.8	100.0	3466
Total, 1871	37.7	13.5	17.8	19.2	11.8	100.0	10195

* "Other" represents merchants and manufacturers, other penny-capitalist (hucksters, peddlers, etc.), professionals and all other "white-collar" workers (clerks, etc.). The largest proportion are the bourgeois and penny-capitalist group (5-6 percent of the total labour force).

Table 1 shows labour force distributions in 1861 and 1871 for the entire sample

and components of the changes in the decade. It includes a labour force category of farmers' sons, which is essential to the analysis, especially to the question of "settlement" and farm inheritance raised by Ontario's historians. The category is a construct possible only from nominal data on household members and from inferences regarding their relations. It is a particularly important category to permit interpretation of occupational distributions in the nineteenth-century censuses. In 1861 enumerators were instructed to use the title "labourer" for the sons of farmers working on their father's farm, but in 1871 they were instructed to record the sons as "farmer." The lack of equivalence is only a problem for farmers' sons. Creating a separate, comparable category requires individual occupational information from the manuscript census and a knowledge of household composition.

The table indicates that the labour force increased in size about 10 percent overall. The clearest shift is that noted earlier: farmers increase from less than a third of the total in 1861 to over 37 percent. Artisans, farmers' sons, and all others, the catch-all bourgeois and white-collar group, stay about the same, but the labouring category shrinks from over a quarter of the total to about 18 percent. This is hardly evidence to encourage an interpretation of widening proletarianization. It is worth noting again that the samples represent an area that includes intensively farmed southern counties, the core of the early industrial growth in major cities and towns, and a northern hinterland opened to settlement only in the 1850s.

Considering labour force turnover, obviously new entrants to the region more than made up for the total losses due to death, emigration, and flaws in the census, as well as any failures in the linkage. The percentage that can be linked across the decade for the area, of about 55 percent (crudely adjusted for mortality and name changes, as noted), is a higher rate of linkage than that usually found for smaller urban and rural communities in the last century, for example of 35-40 percent for Hamilton (Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982: 106) or for Peel county (Gagan, 1981) in this same area. It is still surprising that we cannot trace about 45 percent of the sample for a region that represents over half the population of the province. This was a decade of very high emigration, mainly to the United States, but perhaps to the Canadian West as well. Others left central Ontario for the province's western peninsula or for the Ottawa or Kingston areas, as well as migrating to other provinces. An unknown proportion simply cannot be traced due to underenumeration.

It was primarily farmers who stayed in the area. They had a persistence rate of 50 percent. Labourers and semi-skilled workers left in droves, 75 percent of the 1861 group were not located, and these represented a third of all emigrants and other losses. Further doubt is cast on a bald proletarianization thesis, since among new entrants to the labour force a third—the largest proportion—were farmers, and incoming artisans and labourers were each 21 percent. Some of these new entrants were born and raised in the region and just reaching labour force age in the decade, as we shall note in later analysis.

Despite the sociological and historical emphases on the timing and drama of proletarianization in central Canada by 1871, this was a predominantly petit-bourgeois social formation, considering that over two-thirds of the male labour force was composed of farmers, their labour-force-aged sons, and the artisans and craftsmen, mostly working in small shops. Of course, the character of a social formation is not given in labour force distributions, but is a question of social and productive relations. Nevertheless, these data reveal the contours of a social division of labour that is distinctly rural and petit bourgeois, especially considering that the most of the artisans were small producers and that a very substantial proportion of those with bourgeois occupations, called "other" occupations here, were small employers and penny capitalists. Finally, the commercial and industrial growth of the southern core of the region is reflected in the growth of the "other," commercial and bourgeois occupations. More striking, however, is how modest this growth is in comparison to the growth of the predominantly petit-bourgeois groups, the artisans and farmers. It is labouring that declines.

The petite bourgeoisie, as a class, has always been a disorderly amalgam, difficult to define, much less to analyze. It is possible that the occupational labels derived from the censuses are misleading with respect to the survival and the growth of this composite class. What were the labour processes? What were the rhythms of social and cultural life? Clearly these questions are beyond the census manuscript data, but the data do provide for a direct assessment of property ownership. Table 2 gives an overview of three kinds of ownership in 1871, land (anywhere in the Dominion), homeownership, and ownership of town lots. An individual could be recorded as owning one or more than one piece of property or house. The distribution of the various forms of property — the structure of inequality — is itself of historic interest (Soltow, 1975; Darroch 1983), but here I concentrate only on the basic fact of ownership.

Table 2. Property holdings, persisters and new labour force entrants, men 1871.

<i>Entrants and persisters</i>	<i>Percent owning</i>			<i>Number of cases</i>
	<i>Land</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>Town lots</i>	
New labour force entrants 1871				
Residents 1861-1871	13.2	14.5	3.4	1836
Immigrants in 1871	28.8	33.0	12.0	4898
Total entrants	24.5	28.6	9.5	6734
Persisters, 1861-1871	50.6	57.9	19.0	3470

The table distinguishes between those who stayed in the regional labour force for a decade, the persisters, and new members of the labour force. Among the former a bare majority held any land or owned a home: 50.6 percent owned land and 57.9 percent owned a home (landownership is taken as any positive response to the

census question regarding the numbers of acres owned in the Dominion. I presume those who owned only a home and its lot did not report the property also as acreage). The small minority of 19 percent who owned town lots in addition presumably was a relatively prosperous and investing sector. Certainly land or housing was not easily acquired in mid-nineteenth-century Ontario, but an interpretation of these data needs to draw on historical and comparative contexts. In the absence of a more complete analysis, we are reminded that in contemporary Canada large numbers of families own little or no property: the poorest 50 percent of the family units in the late 1970s owned just 5 percent of all assets, including homes and automobiles (Oja, 1980: 352). More specifically, in 1981, 63 percent of families in Ontario owned homes, just 5 percent above the nineteenth-century rate for the stable population examined here, though the contexts of urbanization and of real family incomes have altered dramatically (Harris, 1986).

In any case, the evidence for 1871 Ontario is that remaining in the region was tied closely to relative prosperity. Newcomers on the whole were just about exactly half as likely to own land or their houses.² The table also shows that those who migrated into the region were already better established as owners than those who had lived in the region and inherited its constraints and opportunities upon entering the labour force. Although one-third of immigrants owned houses and fewer owned land, it is striking that their families attained the property within a decade of arrival. The crucial question of the process of acquisition is open still. Farm land had to be purchased by 1861 and the frontier of the northwestern Bruce and Huron counties, between Georgian Bay and Lake Huron, had filled rapidly between 1850 and 1860.

Something of the difficulty of acquisition in these northern counties is conveyed by their local historian who remarks that the price for village lots in 1855-56 was often so high that after a time purchasers forfeited deposits, and that settlement was retarded by the large blocks of land held by speculators (Robinson, 1906: 74-75). As for the richer and longer developed southern area, Gagan's analysis of Peel county on the edge of Lake Ontario indicates that as early as the 1830s many of the children of the settlers could not afford the price of land and had to look to the backcountry for farms (Gagan, 1981: 34-37). The evidence of relatively high land prices and of crowding makes the rapid acquisition of property for a substantial minority of immigrants a greater puzzle. Nevertheless, the evidence is clear that smallholders of all types were well entrenched in Ontario in 1871 and that there were opportunities to enter the area and buy into the dream of independent yeomanry. Certainly land was purchased in the settled areas or cleared only with great duress and the contributions of every household member of age. Since the opening of new

2. The difference is statistically significant beyond the .001 level. In the following text every measured difference noted to be of substantive interest is also statistically significant at least at the .05 level using separate, conventional tests for differences in proportions or means. References to a few contrasts of interest that are not statistically significant are explicitly noted in the text.

land could not account for the patterns reported, the evidence buttresses the view that the land market was very lively and not beyond the entry of many newcomers (Darroch and Ornstein, 1984; Akenson, 1984: ch. 5).

If the social formation of Central Ontario in this era was firmly that of the small-holders fed by the apparent thirst of immigrants for attaining small property, what then of the chances of the second generation. The question is posed here with specific reference to the settlement of the sons of the farmers, following the mainstream literature and Gagan's recent reinforcement of the view that there was a crisis in farm land (Gagan, 1981: ch. 3).

The census data of Table 3 bear on the issue. The property of farmers is presented, again as simply the percent owning land or homes; in addition, the average number of acres occupied, improved, and planted in wheat are given. The nominal data permit us to compare persistent farmers with those sons of farmers in 1861 who became farmers in 1871, and with other new farmers. The latter consists of three groups: continuing residents of the region who became farmers, but had other occupations in 1861; residents in 1861 who first entered the labour force in 1871; immigrants in the decade.

Table 3. Farmers, new farmers, and the "settlement of sons": property and product, 1871.

<i>Type of Farmer</i>	<i>Percent owning land</i>	<i>Percent owning houses</i>	<i>Mean acres occupied (SD)</i>	<i>Mean improved acres (SD)</i>	<i>Mean acres in wheat (SD)</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Farmers 1861-1871	83.2	83.2	108.1 (66.1)	66.4 (40.1)	14.1 (13.0)	1217
Settled farm sons	72.2	71.0	96.8 (55.3)	60.3 (35.0)	13.0 (18.4)	212
New farmers:						
Residents, non-farm occupations in 1861	61.0	61.0	82.3 (59.5)	47.2 (37.7)	9.3 (9.6)	398
Residents, not in 1861 labour force	53.0	53.0	97.4 (60.6)	57.3 (47.7)	10.6 (10.8)	372
Immigrants in 1871	63.7	64.2	90.0 (56.8)	51.6 (40.7)	10.6 (10.9)	1645

The great majority of farmers who had stayed in the area at least ten years were property owners: over 83 percent owned land and houses. Whether the remaining 17 percent were tenants is not immediately obvious. The aggregate census for 1871 reports 16 percent of farm operators were tenants for the province as a whole. However, as others (Houdek and Heller, 1986) have indicated, many who reported themselves as farm owners to census takers are not listed as owners in legal records for the same areas. Moreover, other nonowners in the census are not necessarily

renters, for example, those who are paying off a land contract and those who have taken up family land. Previous studies in the United States show that relatively high tenancy rates do not imply impoverishment or even small farms (Bogue, 1963; Houdek and Heller, 1986: 55). Our data show that persistent farmers had, on average, relatively large holdings, about 108 acres, with over 60 percent improved land. Though wheat remained the area's staple commodity, only relatively small amounts of land were devoted to its production, partly because "the wheat trade had run its course" (McCallum, 1980: 22) by 1870, with farm diversification well advanced and partly because farm families could reap only 10 acres or so in a given harvest season (McInnis, 1984: 12).

More directly to the point of this analysis, sons of farmers are the second most likely group to be owners of land and housing. In the ten years since they were known to have been working on their fathers' property, over 70 percent of these sons had acquired or inherited land and homes. This is still a significantly lower proportion than the over 80 percent of persistent farmers, but notable nonetheless. The average size of farms and of improved acreage was also just less than that for persistent farmers (6-10 acres, on average). This seems a remarkably successful settlement pattern for sons of farmers in a *single* decade. It directly questions both a general thesis of the crisis of the landed smallholders at mid-century and conventional historical wisdom regarding the shortage of good, or at least workable land in central Ontario after mid-century.³

The conclusion should be qualified by the knowledge that only 16 percent of the sons of farmers stayed in the area a decade and became farmers. Sixty-one percent left or could not be located. Yet this rate of disappearance was the lowest of any of the major labour force groups except farmers themselves, of whom only 50 percent disappeared. In contrast 66 percent of artisans and 75 percent of the labourers and kindred workers left, died, or were lost to our procedures.

The surprising success of farmers' sons is reinforced in the comparison with the other new farmers. On average, the other new farmers were distinctly less likely to hold land or homes. Those area residents who were new members of the labour force, but not farm sons, were least likely to be smallholders (about 50 percent), although they approximated farm sons in the acres occupied and cultivated. Many of them were sons of non-farmers in 1861 and perhaps tenancy was for them a particularly sensible short-term strategy to locate good land in which to invest wage-earnings and effort. The interpretation gains some weight from data not presented here indicating that, although they were the same average age as farmers' sons (32

3. There is no warrant to infer directly to local, say, county or township conditions from these regional patterns, but the far greater danger in Canadian historical studies has been generalization from local studies or limited textual evidence to assumed historical movements, moments, turning points, and periodization. Both recent local social histories (Gagan, 1981) and new labour histories (Palmer, 1984) have shared the difficulty of restraint with traditional historical interpretations.

years), they were much less likely to be married (55 percent versus 76 percent). In any case, for the entire region sons were settling with considerable success; if there was a crisis in smallholding, many were not aware of it.

We turn to another aspect of the question of the character of smallholders in nineteenth-century Ontario. If there is little evidence of significant deterioration of small landowners, what of the property holdings of others? Table 4 gives the proportions owning land, houses or townlots for all the major labour force groups, divided into new entrants to the area and the persistent population. It also shows differences among the groups in sociodemographic and household characteristics.

Table 4. Property, demographic and household characteristics, male labour force groups, 1871.

<i>Migration status and labour force groups</i>	<i>Property Percent owning</i>			<i>Demographic-household characteristics</i>				
	<i>Land</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>town lots</i>	<i>Mean age (SD)</i>	<i>Percent married</i>	<i>Percent childless</i>	<i>Size of household of residence</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
New members, 1871:								
Farmers	61.7	62.2	4.6	37.4 (14.8)	73.6	52.0	5.7	2017
Farmers' sons	1.6	1.1	—	20.7 (4.4)	1.7	99.3	8.3	1127
Labourers	6.8	12.0	9.2	31.3 (14.3)	43.2	74.5	6.1	1381
Artisans	12.4	21.6	18.4	31.9 (29.2)	50.2	68.1	6.0	1377
Others	14.6	22.8	19.4	32.2 (12.6)	50.5	69.6	5.6	828
Persisters:								
Farmers	77.0	77.0	6.9	47.0 (13.3)	87.4	33.6	6.6	1827
Farmers' sons	1.6	2.0	—	24.1 (5.7)	4.8	98.0	7.5	252
Labourers	14.4	31.9	24.5	44.0 (13.7)	77.1	42.9	6.1	436
Artisans	28.3	48.6	42.4	43.2 (12.8)	83.6	41.4	6.2	580
Others	31.7	46.9	41.4	41.9 (12.5)	78.1	44.5	5.9	375

The first row of each panel of Table 4 contains all the farmers of Table 3: farmers who are new entrants in 1871 are both the immigrant farmers and those who were residents, but not previously in the labour force (rows 4 and 5, Table 3); persistent farmers are farmers in 1861 and 1871 and the settled farm sons. For the analysis here, the latter group is taken as the main point of comparison.

It is obvious and not a great surprise that labourers, including semi-skilled workers, were largely propertyless in 1871: only 12 percent of the new members of the labour force owned houses overall and 7 percent owned land. Among those who stayed in the area and were or became labourers (60 percent were persistent over the decade), a significantly larger number had some property, a third owned houses, a quarter owned town lots and 14 percent had rural land. By way of comparison, estimates from assessment data for Toronto in the 1860-1870 period indicate that around 20 percent of urban labouring families owned their homes (Darroch, 1983). More detailed tabulations from the current sample have not yet been conducted for urban and rural areas, but one can assume that acquiring property or a home was somewhat easier in small villages or rural areas than in major cities.

A strong version of the proletarianization thesis would lead us to expect that the ranks of labourers swelled considerably in this period. Yet our earlier excursion into these data showed that 40 percent of labourers in 1861 moved into farming in the decade and another 20 percent went into other non-labouring occupations (Darroch and Ornstein, 1984: Table 4b). Some, but surprisingly few, seemed trapped by landlessness or deskilling in this area of Ontario.

An alternative, although still simplified, hypothesis would be that labouring harboured two groups, the first being young, single men or those in early stages of marriage who used wage work as a means of gaining the capital they needed to buy into smallholding. Since labour was at a premium on the land, they may also have stayed in wage work until at least one, probably male, child matured enough to undertake a full day's work, say, at age 12 or 13. For these families full time wage-labour would be considered a necessary, but intentionally temporary phase. The other group might be those who for reasons of age, infirmity, and hard luck simply could not otherwise support themselves.

The hypothesis gains marginal support from the data of Table 4. Labourers are significantly younger than farmers (8 years younger for new entrants and 3 years for persisters), but they are nearly the same average age as artisans and others (neither difference is statistically significant). However, the age distributions among labourers are not distinctly bimodal, as the hypothesis implies (among persisters, a full 36 percent were between age 35 and 45).

This alternative interpretation gains a little more support from the fact that the labourers just entering the labour force in 1871 were less likely to be married and, therefore, to have children than any group, except, of course, farmers' sons, who were much younger. Only 43 percent were married compared to over 50 percent of artisans and others, a substantive and statistically significant difference. The difference in stage of family cycle appears to hold for the persistent population as well. Overall, a more complicated interpretation of proletarianization is in order, but it is clear that if labouring was not the preserve of the very young and very old, neither was it a swollen catch-all.

More intriguing in this table are the clear differences in stage of family cycle and,

most significantly, class circumstances between the labouring population and artisans and craftsmen. These were unexpected differentials. We noted that artisans were more likely to be married than labourers, though of similar average age, but they were a good deal more likely to own property of all types, especially houses and townlots. Among the persistent population nearly half were home owners, over 40 percent owned townlots, and a little less than 30 percent had other land holdings. Even among the newly entering artisanal population, about a fifth owned homes and townlots and 12 percent held other land. In terms of property circumstances artisans were *not* measurably different from the residual, bourgeois, and penny-capitalist group. The striking similarity holds for both persistent and newly entering members of the labour force. As noted above, the fact that artisans as a group tended to be small property-holders suggests large numbers were independent producers and not journeymen or factory wage-workers.

In general, the evidence suggests that there were three main streams of immigrants and newcomers to the work force in 1871: those who were able to enter farming directly, and were clearly smallholders; labourers, whose property holdings were marginal at best, and an artisanal and bourgeois stream. The artisan and bourgeois stream appear to have had almost identical and quite auspicious beginnings in accumulating small property.

The question of the size, value, and character of property holdings are not systematically examined here. One might reasonably expect that if quite large numbers of families held property, the holdings would generally be modest. Yet it is striking that for the artisanal group, for example, a quarter of those who stayed over the decade in the area had two or more houses, however humble or grand. Further, 60 percent of the artisanal owners of townlots reported owning two or more. These questions of distribution and of privileged, but substantial minorities within the major occupation and social class groups beg for more detailed analysis. They also raise important interpretive questions. How do we square the evidence of artisanal ownership with the fact that this was a period in Ontario when early industrialization had set deep roots in the area's major cities (Kealey, 1980; Palmer, 1979), at least foreshadowing proletarianization and resistance movements had already arisen in response to capital's incursion on the traditional rights of craft and labour communities? Perhaps the political voices and actions of Ontario's artisans were so articulate in this era partly because proletarianization was a real and visible threat not only to the independence of their craft communities and sense of traditional rights, but also to their considerable opportunities to gain small property holdings, which materially underwrote that independence.

Table 5 pursues the analysis of the differences between artisans and labourers in this context. The table shows property and household characteristics for each group in 1871, distinguishing those who stayed in each occupational category over the decade from new arrivals. The latter are divided into those who were in the region in 1861, but in other sectors of the labour force; those who lived in the area through

the decade and had just entered the labour force; and new arrivals, the immigrants.

Table 5. Labourers and artisans: property and household characteristics by migration and mobility status, 1871.

<i>Migration/ mobility status</i>	<i>Property percent owning</i>			<i>Demographic—household characteristics</i>				
	<i>Land</i>	<i>Houses</i>	<i>Town lots</i>	<i>Mean age (SD)</i>	<i>Percent married</i>	<i>Percent childless</i>	<i>Size of household of residence</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
Labourers 1861-1871	12.8	33.8	28.8	44.5 (13.2)	82.1	40.5	6.3	257
New Labourers:								
Residents, non-labourers in 1861	16.8	29.0	18.4	43.2 (14.5)	70.9	46.4	5.8	179
Residents, not in 1861 labour force	4.3	5.3	4.3	23.6 (9.4)	22.0	95.7	6.4	281
Immigrants in 1871	7.4	13.7	10.4	33.2 (14.6)	49.0	69.1	6.0	1100
Artisans 1861-1871	31.0	58.6	53.4	45.8 (11.0)	92.2	29.3	6.3	348
New artisans:								
Residents, non-artisans in 1861	24.1	33.6	25.9	39.5 (14.3)	70.7	59.5	6.0	232
Residents, not in 1861 labour force	3.2	7.6	5.7	22.5 (9.1)	15.2	96.2	6.7	315
Immigrants in 1871	15.2	25.8	22.2	34.7 (32.3)	60.6	59.8	5.7	1062

There are three main points of interest here. First, there is a broad similarity in the general pattern of property ownership and, for the most part, of demographic and household characteristics *among the subgroups* for both the artisans and labourers. The persistent artisans and labourers between 1861 and 1871 had taken greater advantage of opportunities to accumulate small property in comparison to other members of the occupational group. For each group, the persistent members are followed in order by the regional residents who held other occupations in 1861, then by immigrants to the area and, finally, by residents just entering the labour force in the decade. As others have found for nineteenth-century communities (Katz, Doucet, and Stern, 1982: 113), property and stability went hand in glove, even in

very mobile populations, as these were, and even if the property accumulation was quite modest. It should be noted that occupational stability, as well as geographic stability, appears to be associated with property acquisition, even for labourers.

The second main feature of the data is the distinct success of persistent artisans in urban property accumulation: over 50 percent had townlots and nearly 60 percent owned homes. In contrast, only about a third of the stable labourers owned houses and lots, a significant difference, although the two stable groups were almost identical in average age, about 45 years in 1871. It follows that these labourers were less likely to be married and have no responsibilities for — or help from — co-resident children.

Third, although all artisan groups tend to have greater property-holdings than comparable labouring groups, among new artisans and labourers only the differences between the immigrant groups are significant. On the one hand, the recently arrived artisans are only half as likely to own property as their stable artisanal brethren, although they are also about ten years younger and almost identical in average age, again, to the comparable labouring group. On the other hand, they were nearly twice as likely to own property as recently immigrated labourers, differences which were statistically significant, given the rather large samples. Finally, these recently arrived artisans, though of similar age to the labourers, were a good deal more likely to have married and to have formed families, a direct consequence, no doubt, of economic circumstance.

The evidence indicates that even the least stable, labouring population of central Ontario in the last century could aspire to some small ownership, mostly of homes, but to some extent of farm and urban land. It remains a puzzle that nearly half (47 percent) of the new labourers in 1871 who were resident in the region in 1861 are known to have been farmers. Is their modest property holding in 1871 a sign that labouring was for many temporary, rather than permanent; a passage, rather than a fate?

As for artisans, it is certain that if they felt the threat of proletarianization, they were far from propertyless. If they resided for even a decade in the region, they were very likely to be owners of homes and of urban property.

Conclusion

Conventionally, sociologists in Canada ignore the past. Those who turn to it have been happy to accept a tidy historical sketch that takes the first evidence of urban industrialization and of working-class politics in the nineteenth century as sufficient evidence of the beginning of the ineluctable demise of the petite bourgeoisie and the emergence of the familiar forms of class and stratification in the twentieth century (Porter, 1965; Hunter, 1981). Such is the pervasive bias of the social scientist's "past," which, as Philip Abrams (1972: 20) provocatively put it, so often functions *not* "to provide a frame of reference for empirical studies of the mechanics of transition but instead to furnish a rationale for side-stepping such tedious historical

chores and moving at once to the construction of predictive interpretations of the present."

Ontario's historians, it seems, have had their own version of the tale. Commonly they have taken the first signs of urban expansion and of population shifts out of the established rural areas as indications of a crisis in land and in smallholding that blighted the region. The shift from the wheat staple to a more diversified agricultural economy in the 1860s seems to have reinforced the view (Lower, 1929; Morton, 1964: ch 1; Gagan, 1981).

Recently an impressive revisionist labour history has attended more closely to the implications of a restructuring of class relations with early industrialization in Canada's heartland and, in particular, to the emergence of working-class culture and politics in the area's cities (Kealey, 1980; Palmer 1979; 1984). Though attending directly to questions of proletarianization and commodity production, the work has been blinkered by two specific limitations. First, there has been a strong attachment to Clare Pentland's early thesis that a combination of land policy, settlement, and immigration to cities conspired to initiate the rapid expansion of a propertyless class completely dependent on wages after mid-century. The thesis still holds centre stage in the absence of careful documentation. Second, and directly related, the focus has been exclusively on cities and skilled, industrial workers or on proto-industrial wage-workers in rural areas, such as on the canals (Bleasdale, 1981, but see Joy Parr, 1985). There is yet no serious attention to what Palmer (1984) has recognized was the essential reciprocity between town and country. The dynamic of early, capitalist production is interpreted as having grown up within a separate, seemingly sealed, urban setting, with the forms of work and life in the countryside barely warranting attention, since they represent a fading formation. There is often an underlying, but pervasive, assumption that urban centers captured and held their populations, once and for all: urban workers were a community apart (Stephenson, 1979). The assumption is quite unwarranted in light of the accumulation of evidence that migration was a fact of everyday experience in the nineteenth century and earlier throughout North America and Europe. People simply moved routinely in and out of cities, towns, and farm areas and were connected through families, friends, and acquaintances to both. We have not yet begun to consider seriously the implications of this routine movement and its life-cycle patterns for the reproduction and change of class relations in the last century.

This first examination of patterns of labour force shifts and property holding throughout central Ontario after mid-century raises questions about many of our common assumptions. Farming and smallholding were not on the wane; other forms of small property, including petty productive property, were held by notable, if modest, proportions of known wage-labourers and, especially, by artisans. Perhaps all this was dramatically reversed in the ensuing decade or two, especially in the 1880s and 1890s, marked by the rise and fall of the organized political expressions of agrarian and labour interests in the form of the Patrons of Industry (a political

alliance of Ontario farmers) and the Knights of Labour (Shortt, 1972; Kealey and Palmer, 1982). On the other hand, perhaps our ready assumptions about the demise of small property need closer analysis than merely refining the question of timing.

No simple relationship can be drawn between the perpetuation of smallholding and the conditions that simultaneously fostered proletarianization. The one does not simply drive out the other. One of the ironies of the relationship in the last century may be that resistance to wage work often took the form of redoubled efforts to gain or maintain the promised independence of smallholding, as well as more recognizable political forms. In so doing, petty property and its associated life-ways were by no means simply swamped or absorbed by the familiar institutional forms of late twentieth-century capitalism.

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"More theory, less fact"? Social reproduction and class conflict in a sociological approach to working-class history*

James R. Conley

Abstract. As an alternative to existing approaches in sociology and social history, the concept of working-class social reproduction cycles is introduced to provide a theoretical framework for comparative analysis of class conflict and collective action in capitalism. Working-class social reproduction cycles are the social relations and social practices in the labour market, the workplace, the consumption market, and consumption, through which individuals recreate themselves as members of the working class. They structure working-class collective action in capitalism in three ways. First, antagonistic class interests may be created at each of these phases of social reproduction by contradictions between capitalists' strategies of capital accumulation, and workers' strategies of social reproduction. Second, tendencies of class formation occur in each, and third, resources for workers' collective action are located at each phase.

Résumé. Comme alternative aux méthodes en sociologie et en histoire sociale, le concept des cycles de reproduction de la classe ouvrière est introduit afin de fournir un cadre théorique pour l'analyse comparée de la lutte des classes et de l'action collective dans le système capitaliste. Les cycles de reproduction de la classe ouvrière représentent les relations sociales et les pratiques sociales trouvées sur le marché du travail, au travail, dans le marché de la consommation, et dans la consommation, par lesquelles les individus se reproduisent eux-mêmes comme membres de la classe ouvrière. Il y a trois façons par lesquels ces cycles donnent structure à l'action collective de la classe ouvrière du capitalisme. Premièrement, les intérêts antagonistiques des classes sont produits à chaque phase de la reproduction sociale par les contradictions entre les stratégies d'accumulation du capital des capitalistes et les stratégies de reproduction sociale des travailleurs. Deuxièmement, une classe sociale à tendance à se former à chaque phase, et troisièmement, les ressources d'action collective des travailleurs se retrouvent à chaque phase.

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Despite different agendas, disciplinary practices, types of problem, and modes of argument (C. Tilly, 1981), several converging developments in sociology and social history have led to a continuing dialogue in the 1970s and 1980s between at least some members of each discipline. At the level of theory, social historians' distrust of structural Marxist theories which emphasize structure at the expense of human agency (Thompson, 1978b) has been matched by efforts in theoretical sociology to escape the structure/agency dilemma, and break down the distinction between history and sociology (Giddens, 1979; Abrams, 1980). Other sociologists have called for more historically grounded theories (Stinchcombe, 1978; C. Tilly, 1981), and in Canada, social historians of the working class have looked for more theory to guide their research (McKay, 1981-82; Palmer, 1986). At the level of methodology, social historians have increasingly engaged in comparative history, either explicitly (Peterson, 1981, 1984; Montgomery, 1983), or by testing the experiences of workers in one country against models derived from other countries. Comparative analysis has itself been one of the hallmarks of historical sociology, with sociological theories and concepts directing researchers to seek what Stinchcombe (1978) calls "deep causal analogies" between historical instances (cf. C. Tilly, 1981, 1984; Skocpol, 1984).

Although the boundaries of disciplines are often easily crossed, they are very resistant to change, and the best prospects for dialogue between social history and sociology are at the less abstract level of substantive areas, where sociologists and social historians often share similar problems and an orientation to the same literature. For example, social scientists seeking to escape an overly theoretical, functionalist Marxism have called for a historical sociology of class struggle rather than class structure, and have looked to the works of social historians such as E.P. Thompson (1968, 1978a) to provide its theoretical bearings (Stark, 1980; Mackenzie, 1982; Wood, 1982; Kaye, 1983, 1984). The present paper seeks to contribute to a critical dialogue of sociology and history at this level, where questions of social class, labour markets, and the labour process have been shared by sociologists and historians in the field of working-class studies. To that end, a theoretical framework for the analysis of class conflict in capitalism, utilizing concepts of working-class social reproduction and collective action, is developed here to answer the call for a historical sociology of class conflict, and to provide sociological underpinnings for the interpretation of working-class culture prevalent in social history.

In the first section that follows, the concept of working-class social reproduction is introduced to facilitate the analysis of working-class life not just as a totality (Palmer, 1986), but as a differentiated totality, integrating aspects that have often been considered separate, if not opposed, in Marxist sociologies, such as social relations of production within the workplace, and social relations of status and ethnicity outside it. In subsequent sections, the concept of social reproduction is used to address three central problems in class analysis: antagonistic class interests, class formation, and class action.

As in both Marxian and Weberian theories, social class is conceived here as a relational category for the interpretation of social conflict and social change (Marx and Engels, 1969 [1848]; Wright, 1980; Giddens, 1973; Parkin, 1979). Three problems follow from such a conception of class. First, the sources of the antagonistic interests that give rise to class conflict must be identified. What are the classes struggling over? Second, the problem of class formation, that is, of social relations within classes, must be addressed. How do classes become collectivities which possess internal solidarity and are socially distinct from other collectivities? Finally, if classes are historical actors, seeking to produce social change, the problem of class action must be examined. How do members of a class come to act collectively in pursuit of their interests? How are the interests of individual workers turned into objectives of collective action, collectivities into collective actors? What resources do they possess that can be used to realize their objectives in the face of the opposition of members of the antagonistic class? When these problems have been ignored or inadequately answered in sociology, static, categorical, and functionalist reasoning about class and historical change has resulted; in history, the result has been impressively rich descriptions of class and culture that lack explanatory power. As much as possible, the argument will be specified historically for the 1890-1920 period in Canadian working-class history, and illustrated with examples from my own research on the working-class of Vancouver from 1900 to 1919 (Conley, 1986).¹

Working-class social reproduction

The concept of social reproduction has gained increasing currency within sociology of late, but it has often appeared in a functionalist guise. That is, social practices and social institutions have been examined to discover their contribution to the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, and this contribution has been held to explain their existence.² Such functional explanations are generally mechanical, ignoring what Giddens (1979) calls the duality of structure, namely that structures are reproduced by active human subjects. They are also ahistorical, as they submerge class and other conflicts beneath their outcomes, which appear retrospectively as functional for the maintenance of an unchanging system. History is thereby examined from the point of view of the system and of capital (Yeo and Yeo, 1981; Connell, 1983).

Opposed to functionalist Marxist accounts of class structure have been social historians of the working class, who have been mainly interested in revealing sources of opposition and conflict in capitalism, and have seen working-class culture as a "culture in conflict" (Palmer, 1979). The focus on culture in working-

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Vancouver examples are from this source.

2. That this functionalism is Marxist, and the structures being reproduced are considered structures of exploitation and domination, makes no difference for the logic of explanation (Cohen, 1978).

their active shaping of history, but it has led to the neglect of problems of social structure. Even presumably basic questions about workers, such as their number, their occupational distribution, and their social and geographical mobility have often been ignored, and as Canadian historians of the working class have themselves recognized, these "sociological" questions need to be addressed (Kealey, 1981; Palmer, 1981-82; McKay, 1981-82).

Questions of social reproduction have been less prominent in working-class history than in family and women's history, in which the strategies by which working-class families have sought to meet consumption and other needs through wage and non-wage work have been studied (e.g., Humphries, 1977; L. Tilly, 1985; Benson, 1983; Bradbury, 1984). In contrast to functionalist Marxist accounts of social reproduction as the mechanical reproduction of abstract structures, these accounts show people acting within the constraints and resources provided by social structures in historically specific situations. By reconstructing Marxist accounts of social reproduction on non-functionalist lines, we can show how it structures (that is, puts constraints on, and provides resources for) working-class action, and thereby provide a sociological concept of the underpinnings of working-class culture.

Hints of a process of reproduction of wage labour analogous to the simple and expanded reproduction of capital can be found in Marx. For example, in discussing wages as the revenue on which workers live, he comments that "not only labour-power is continually reproduced thereby but also the class of wage labourers as such." Later, he states: "the labourer spends his wages to maintain himself and his family and thus his labour-power. In order to be able to live on and act again as a buyer of commodities he must sell his labour-power" (Marx, 1971 [1893]: 392, 449). For functionalist Marxists, these remarks, and the many like them, are understood from the point of view of the reproduction of capital: if capitalism is to continue to exist, it is necessary that a class of labourers be reproduced who are dispossessed of means of production, and consequently forced to sell their labour power to capital again and again (Marx, 1976 [1863], 1971 [1893]: 385). Or, as Lebowitz (n.d.) shows, they can be the basis for an alternative, but analogous conception of working-class reproduction.³ By looking at working-class social reproduction from the point of view of labour rather than that of capital, the structuring of class conflict and working-class culture can be more fully revealed.

Starting, as does Marx (1971 [1893]: 59-60, 77, 96), from the economic reproduction of labour power, the process may be represented as a simple circulation of commodities. Workers exchange their labour power for wages, which they use to buy articles of consumption; in consuming them, they recreate their labour power to be sold again. The circulation of labour power is more than just a moment in the

3. Since formulating the ideas developed below on the basis of Lebowitz's paper, the similar analysis of working-class social reproduction developed by Secombe (1980) has come to my attention.

metamorphosis of value, however. It is also a web of social practices and social relationships which take different forms in different times, places, and social groups. Understood socially, instead of merely economically, the circulation of labour power is a working-class cycle of social reproduction composed of four phases: 'the labour market, in which workers sell their labour power; work, in which they produce commodities within the capitalist labour process; the consumption goods market, in which wages are used to buy articles of consumption; consumption, in which articles of consumption are consumed, the labourer maintained, and only as a consequence of that, labour power reproduced.'⁵

Each phase of working-class social reproduction denotes a set of social practices and social relationships which vary both historically, and within a working class at a given time and place. The labour market phase denotes the various social practices and institutions through which workers find employment. For example, in early twentieth-century Vancouver, longshoremen were employed casually, and hired either through the union, or through the dockside "shape-up"; loggers found work through hotelkeepers or employment agents; Asians were typically employed through labour contractors. The work phase denotes social relations and social practices within the workplace, both among workers, and between them and supervisors. For example, the autonomy of longshoremen working in teams contrasted with the closely supervised, machine-tending work of telephone operators. The consumption market phase denotes the many social relations and practices through which workers' wages are exchanged for articles of consumption. In Vancouver, for example, Asian workers were furnished their room and board by labour contractors, while white working-class families carried on a variety of relationships (about which little is known) with merchants, landlords, etc. Finally, the consumption phase includes both the consumption of commodities purchased with wages, and the consumption of use-values which are not in commodity form. As feminist sociologists and historians (Secombe, 1974) have observed, the latter include the products of domestic labour usually performed by women in the working-class household, but they also include religious practices, workingmen's clubs, soccer matches between unions, and similar non-commodified consumption practices.⁶

4. This phase was hidden when the reproduction of labour power was treated economically, as the circulation of value, because it was irrelevant to it.

5. "Cycle" and "phase," with their connotations of temporality, are used here with some reservations, but in the absence of any better terms, they will have to do. "Cycle" implies circularity and repetition, which is appropriate to a process that is constantly repeated. "Phase" implies a succession of forms in which something appears (phases of the moon, for example), which is appropriate to the extent that the parts of the working-class social reproduction cycle do take place at different times, often in different places, and often with different persons. A reason for developing the concept of cycles of working-class social reproduction is to bring out variations in these dimensions, and to facilitate comparison between different groups of workers.

If this was all there was to the concept of working-class social reproduction, it would consist of little more than the unfortunate sociological practice of giving resounding names to commonplace facts (C. Tilly, 1981). It is the purpose of the rest of the paper to show how this concept can be used to address central problems of class analysis in both history and sociology: the sources of antagonistic class interests, the tendencies of class formation, and the conditions of class action. Starting from a Marxist conception of class,⁷ each of these problems will be examined to show how the concept of working-class social reproduction cycles can help to reveal the historical structuring of class conflict.

Antagonistic class interests

The foundation of any Marxist theory of class in capitalism is the wage labour relationship, which is the source of class conflict in capitalist societies. A question not frequently enough asked is why wage labour is the basis for class conflict. Why does the wage labour relationship make the interest of capitalists and workers antagonistic? Sociological analyses have shown how capitalists have an interest in various courses of action to maintain profitability and capital accumulation, but have neglected to make a corresponding analysis of workers' interests (e.g., Wright, 1978b, 1979). Social historians have emphasized workers' resistance to capitalists' actions, but these have been interpreted as part of a culture of conflict (Palmer, 1979), not in terms of workers' interests. The concept of social reproduction cycles can provide the analysis of workers' interests that is missing in sociology and social history.

Since the concept of interest is fraught with difficulties, it is necessary to say what we mean by it before proceeding. Following Giddens (1979: 189), interests will be conceived here as "objective," but dependent on the "subjective" ends of action; that is, whether they realize it or not, people have an interest in courses of action which

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6. Although their contribution to the analysis of working-class life cannot be overemphasized, many feminist analyses have neglected working-class consumption practices that do not follow the model of domesticity or take place in families (e.g., workers who obtain food, lodging, sex, etc. directly in the consumption goods market), as well as aspects of working-class consumption which are not the reproduction of labour power. The former is justified by their concentration on sources of women's oppression in the family and household; the latter, however, is a result of looking at working-class social reproduction from the one-sided standpoint of its functions for capital.
 7. The concept developed here resembles Weber's "types of class struggle": "Social actions that directly determine the class situation of the worker and the entrepreneur are: the labor market, the commodities market, and the capitalistic enterprise." The resemblance is complete if his conception of status, in terms of the "consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life," is added (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 930, 937). Despite this resemblance, and the use of Weberian ideas, the concept developed here is not Weberian, because it starts not from market situation, but from relations of production. The concept of social reproduction cycles serves to integrate significant elements of Weberian theories of class in a Marxian theory, instead of smuggling them in under other names (Parkin, 1979).

would satisfy their needs or wants. These wants or needs are those of socially situated individuals (Marx, 1963 [1887]: 168), and at a minimum, they consist of "the maintenance and reproduction of the individual in certain definite relationships" (Humphries, 1977: 476). Those relationships, and therefore workers' interests, can be interpreted in terms of the working-class social reproduction cycle. Workers have interests in courses of action which enable them to at least maintain their existing cycle of social reproduction.

The resulting model of antagonistic interests in capitalism has two parts. First, at each phase of working-class social reproduction, working-class practices can be shown to have different significances for capital accumulation and for working-class social reproduction. Those contrasting perspectives are a basis for conflict between workers and capitalists, when the courses of action taken by workers to satisfy their wants contradict the achievement of their wants by capitalists. This does not mean that workers' practices are always antagonistic to capital accumulation, and practices which at one time, and under certain conditions, lead to conflict, may, at another time and under different conditions, lead to harmony.⁸ Second, however, this harmony is usually temporary, because conflicting interests are generated by contradictions that develop from capital accumulation itself. Obstacles to capital accumulation, or to continued profitability and expansion, lead capitalists to undertake individual and collective strategies to overcome them which generally affect workers' social reproduction. When those strategies put obstacles in the way of working-class social reproduction, so that workers can no longer live as they used to, their interests in meeting the requirements of that social reproduction are antagonistic to those of capitalists. Workers must either accommodate to those changes by adopting new strategies of social reproduction as individuals or families, such as changes in employment, fertility, or domestic labour (Humphries, 1977; Secombe, 1980; L. Tilly, 1985; Hanagan, 1986) or else collectively resist the capitalist strategies.

By examining both capital accumulation and workers' social reproduction, antagonistic interests of capitalists and workers can be located at each phase of the working-class social reproduction cycle, where they will be called "objects of contention."⁹ Since the goal and outcome of working-class social reproduction is the "satisfaction of needs, for the purpose of consumption" (Marx, 1971 [1893]: 445), the analysis of contradictions between capital accumulation and working-class social reproduction will begin with workers' consumption practices.

Consumption

Objects of contention in the consumption phase of working-class social reproduction

8. One of the failings of ahistorical ways of practicing sociology is to assume that social practices which in the present integrate workers to capitalism have always done so, and will always do so.
9. Objects of contention are what class conflict is about. I use this inelegant term instead of something like "issues" of class conflict to stress that we are not dealing with the goals or objectives of collective actors, but with the conflicts of interest which underlie them.

tion begin from the separation between production and consumption in capitalism. Working-class consumption practices typically occur outside of direct capitalist control and separate from the workplace, usually, but not exclusively, in households (Harvey, 1976; Katznelson, 1979).¹⁰ This separation has two consequences. On the one hand, capitalists can disclaim the responsibility of providing for workers' consumption, as in 1901, when the new Pacific Coast Lumber Company mill refused to construct houses for its workmen, who mostly lived on the other side of Vancouver, with the justification that how workers got to the plant was not its concern (*Province*, 24 January 1902). On the other hand, workers are free outside the time for which they have sold their labour power to capitalists, that is, they typically have substantial autonomy in their consumption practices, which may conflict with the interests of capital. Objects of contention arise from the different significance of workers' consumption practices for capital accumulation and for workers' social reproduction, and from contradictions in capital accumulation.

From the perspective of capital accumulation, workers' consumption is simply the production and reproduction of labour power at a certain level of skill and discipline, for subsequent purchase and use in the production process. From the point of view of working-class social reproduction, in contrast, consumption is practically life itself. The significance for workers of their consumption practices is not primarily to prepare them for work; on the contrary, they work in order to live (Marx, 1969a [1849]: 1453). Contradictions arise from these contrasting perspectives when workers' consumption practices interfere with the reproduction of labour power, that is, with the quality of the commodity capitalists are purchasing. For example, in 1910, several aldermen sought the early closing of bars in Vancouver because, in the words of one, "The employers of the city must be considered as no man is fit to do a day's work after loafing about a hotel until 1 o'clock in the morning." According to another, "the real harm came from the [working-class consumption] practice of treating during the late hours" (*Province* 3, 4 June 1910; 16 August 1910). On another occasion, employers of Chinese workers in Vancouver asked the police to more diligently suppress gambling, which was affecting the supply of labour (*Province*, 19 July 1918). In these and other areas, such as domestic arrangements, workers defended the autonomy of their consumption practices against employers, the state, and middle-class reformers, sometimes by evading their interference, sometimes by turning it to their own purposes, and sometimes collectively. Several lively confrontations took place between the police and Chinese workers, when the former raided gambling houses (e.g., *Province*, 5 February 1906).

Antagonistic interests and changing working-class consumption needs also derive from contradictions between the historical development of capital accumu-

10. As the existence of company housing and company towns indicates, the separation of production and consumption in capitalism is by no means universal or complete.

lation and workers' social reproduction. Rising real wages during economic booms (Rowthorn, 1980: 212, 217-21), and the search for new markets by capitalists in consumer goods production may lead to new products becoming available to working-class consumers, and thus to changing consumption practices. When booms give way to depressions, working-class households which became accustomed to higher real wages and consumption standards during the boom are forced either to adjust their social reproduction strategies to compensate for unemployment, short time, and reduced wages, or else fight them collectively. In the pre-war depression in Vancouver, for instance, many working-class housewives whose husbands were unemployed entered the wage labour market, and hundreds of families were forced onto relief (*Labour Gazette*, 14: 789; *Province*, 28 May 1915; 27 July 1915). Collective resistance also occurred: when their relief was cut off, single male workers in the city rioted (*Province*, 7 April 1915; *British C.olumbia Federationist*, 9 April 1915; Roy, 1981).

Because working-class social reproduction has the satisfaction of needs as its immediate objective, the consumption phase is the basis for opposition to the commodification of social relations in capitalism, in the name of the priority of human needs over the market and profit considerations which are paramount for capital accumulation (Harvey, 1976). The decommodification of social relationships (Offe, 1984: 263-5) is consequently an aspect of antagonistic interests in the labour market, work, and consumption market phases of workers' social reproduction.

Labour market

The separation of production and consumption in capitalism means that workers must appear in the labour market to sell their labour power for wages, in order to secure the money to buy articles of consumption. Objects of contention arise from the different significance of this exchange for workers and capitalists, and from changes caused by the latter's efforts to overcome obstacles to capital accumulation. The resulting objects of contention in the labour market are the price of the worker's labour power (wages), the length of time for which the capitalist may use it (hours), and control over the labour market.

From the perspective of capital accumulation, workers' wages and hours of work are two of the determinants of profits (Marx, 1969b [1865]; Sweezy, 1942). From the standpoint of workers' social reproduction, wages and hours have a dual significance, as the terms of sale of labour power as a commodity much like any other, and as constraints on and resources for consumption.¹¹ Although the two aspects have often been combined historically, such as in the nine-hours movement of the early 1870s (Palmer, 1979: 126-28; Battye, 1979: 29-30; Kealey, 1980: 120-30), it is useful to analytically distinguish them. It is necessary to look at wages and hours in

11. Marx's definitions of the value of labour power reflect this ambiguity (Rowthorn, 1980).

terms of both commodity exchange and human needs derived from social reproduction cycles, in order to understand workers' interests and conduct.¹²

If labour power is a commodity like any other, workers' interests lie in getting the highest price they can for the only commodity they own; capitalists, as buyers, want to get the cheapest price. As Morris A. Phelps, a shipyard labourer, put it in 1919: "if you were employing me naturally I sell my working power as high as I can, and naturally you give me the least that you can give ... the system itself antagonizes the one to the other" (Canada, 1919: 597). From the same point of view, workers act as "merchants of their time" (Thompson, 1967), demanding shorter hours to preserve their only "capital," to spread work and reduce the number of unemployed, and to compensate for increasingly arduous work and growing productivity.

If labour power is not a commodity like any other commodity, but is sold only in order to obtain the level of wages required to maintain an acceptable standard of consumption (e.g., Hobsbawm, 1984: 257-58), an interest in decommodification follows. Human needs are seen to take priority over "laws of supply and demand" in the labour market, as in demands that workers who are unable to sell their labour power (the old, the infirm, the unemployed, etc.) be supported by the state. The testimony of a shipwright and labour leader, J.W. Wilkinson, clearly shows this connection.

The chief thing that the average workman wants, I believe, is security, particularly to earn bread and food and clothing and shelter for himself, his wife and his children. The great bugbear which hangs over the lives of most workmen is that they cannot feel certain that they will be able to earn sufficient of the things of life, even though they are willing and thoroughly able to do so. They just feel that they are like a piece of merchandise ... a piece of wood or a piece of brick. (Canada, 1919: 469; cf. 507-8, 543)

The dual significance of the sale of labour power, and the dependence of workers' interest on wants defined by their cycle of social reproduction, was revealed in a strike of heavy construction labourers in Vancouver in 1910. Labourers who were resident in Vancouver, and worked regularly for the city or for public works contractors, had an interest in the eight-hour day, so they could spend time with their families or in leisure with other workers. In contrast, for Italian migrant labourers whose goal in Canada was to make as much money as possible before returning to Italy (Harney, 1979), shorter hours reduced their pay, and were thus an obstacle to their social reproduction. As a result, the latter struck against the shortening of hours (and concomitant wage reduction) required by a city bylaw won through the efforts of the trades and labour council (*Province*, 11, 18, 19 July 1910).

Objects of contention in the labour market also arise from capitalist strategies to

12. The economic rationale for shorter hours may have been more often the view of labour leaders, who had learned to speak the hegemonic language of capital and play by capitalist rules, than of the rank and file, for whom shorter hours meant more leisure time as an end in itself (Rodgers, 1974: 159-60; Cross, 1984).

overcome obstacles to capital accumulation, such as cutting wages, lengthening hours, or intensifying work. For example, the imposition of an increasingly rigorous industrial discipline in the late nineteenth century led craftsmen to demand a compressed workday to compensate for more arduous toil and loss of control over the pace of work. As an element in the struggle over craft controls and craft status, the demand for shorter hours was consequently more contentious than demands for higher wages (Cross, 1984; Heron and Palmer, 1977; Palmer, 1979).

Capitalist strategies to overcome obstacles to capital accumulation also make control of the labour market an object of contention between capitalists and workers, and amongst the latter. Capitalists' interest in increasing labour market competition, and in employing cheap and plentiful labour, confront workers' interest in restricting competition through exclusionary practices. Exclusionary social closure typically involves some decommodification of labour power, as employment is monopolized by workers belonging to a particular category, whether defined by organizational membership (e.g., closed and union shops), by qualifications (e.g., licensing requirements), or by membership in a status group (e.g., ethnicity). Control of the labour market can thus be transformed from an object of contention between workers and capitalists to one between workers. This was certainly true in early twentieth-century British Columbia, where male workers of British descent tried to exclude from employment both Asian immigrants, and to a lesser extent, immigrants from Europe (Phillips, 1979; Avery, 1979). The interests of capitalists and of some workers can even coincide in the creation of segmented labour markets, when the latter's interest in protection from labour market competition corresponds to the former's interest in protecting their investment in recruitment and training by providing skilled workers with conditions that reduce turnover (Rubery, 1978; Craven and Traves, 1986).

Work

The workplace is a "contested terrain" because of the different significance of the labour process for capital accumulation and workers' social reproduction, and because of capitalists' efforts to overcome obstacles to capital accumulation by reorganizing the labour process. From the capitalist's point of view, the labour process is where the labour power purchased in the labour market is realized as work creating commodities. Since the amount of work actually performed is variable, it is in his interest to exercise control over the labour process, to get the maximum production out of his workers (Braverman, 1974: 56-58; Edwards, 1979: 11-22). The problem for the capitalist is that it is only within the assumptions of an economic analysis of value that he buys labour power; in fact he hires workers, who come to work as whole individuals, with their own wants, expectations, social practices and social relationships, none of which necessarily contribute to productivity.¹³ Workers therefore have an interest in contesting actions by employers, or by other workers, that challenge the work practices on which their jobs, incomes, self-

conceptions, and workplace autonomy depend (Heron and Storey, 1986). This can take several forms. In 1913, for example, waitresses struck at a Vancouver cafe because of the cook's abusive and vulgar language, and when the owner retaliated by publishing the strikers' names and calling them "Amazons," they launched a libel suit (*British Columbia Federationist*, 14 March 1913: 4; *Province*, 23 January 1914). They were asserting a conception of themselves, and of the corresponding standards of conduct by supervisors and other workers, derived from their social reproduction cycle as young women workers.

The contradictory interests of capitalists and workers in the labour process are most sharply revealed when the former attempt to restructure the labour process in order to overcome obstacles to accumulation. Technological and managerial changes to increase the productivity of labour, lower skill requirements, weaken workers' controls over production, and increase the intensity of work can threaten not only the work practices and skills of some workers, but also their jobs, incomes, and social status; in short their entire social reproduction cycle. Their effects have always been complex, however, and Braverman's (1974) view of an inexorable increase in capitalist control and deskilling of the workforce has recently given way to a more nuanced assessment of the conditions and consequences of capitalist transformations of the production process. First, there has been more careful consideration of the conditions (such as competition in product and labour markets) in which capitalists have acted, and second, the effects of worker resistance on the shape of the labour process has received more attention (see Heron and Storey, 1986). The resistance of craft workers to mechanization and systematic management at the end of the nineteenth century has dominated historical discussion, but it needs to be balanced by examination of non-craft workers as well. In Vancouver, for example, craftsmen such as carpenters and metal tradesmen resisted specialization, speed-ups, and new supervisory regimes, but so did longshoremen and other unskilled workers.

Consumption market

With the separation of production and consumption in capitalism, the consumption market is the phase of working-class social reproduction in which the money wage received by workers is converted into a real wage by the purchase of articles of

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13. An important issue in this regard is raised by Burawoy (1979): to what extent are these expectations, etc., brought to the workplace from outside (in our terms, from other phases of workers' social reproduction), and to what extent are they developed in the workplace itself? Burawoy argues for the latter, but the extent to which his results can be generalized to other times and places is debatable. Doubt is thrown on his argument by the work of social historians on the culture of skilled workers, which embraced both the workplace and other locales, and recent work on the social definition of skill. The latter shows that the definition of work as skilled depended on non-work practices of the workers concerned, such as consumption, with the result that women's work, and the work of employees with "rough" consumption practices (e.g., loggers) was not considered skilled (Heron and Storey, 1986: 29).

consumption. Objects of contention in the consumption market arise from its different significance for capital accumulation and workers' social reproduction, and from tendencies in capital accumulation. For capitalists in consumer goods production, articles of consumption are produced only if there is a market in which they can be sold for a profit, and so are distributed on the basis of ability to pay, not on the basis of need. Since the working-class social reproduction cycle revolves around the satisfaction of consumption needs, workers have interests in the de commodification of the provision of consumption goods, removing them from the sphere of ordinary market transactions, calculations of profitability, and price variations due to supply and demand. The dynamic of capital accumulation has been mainly in the direction of the commodification of goods and services, which could be expected to be an object of contention whenever workers could not fulfill their customary consumption practices because of the unavailability, poor quality, or high price of the required commodities (Harvey, 1976), or when goods or services which were formerly free came to have a price. For example, on various occasions the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council demanded hospital care regardless of ability to pay, recreation grounds open to all, free school books, and the abolition of a new fee for bathing at English Bay (Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, 20 February 1902; 5 June 1902; 6 June 1907; 6 February 1908, 5 May 1910; cf. McDonald, 1984).

A question which arises from the consideration of objects of contention in the consumption market is whether they should be conceived as antagonistic *class* interests. The relation of the capitalist producer of consumer goods to the workers who buy his products is not a relation of capitalist and worker, as it was in the labour market or work phases, but a relation of seller and buyer (Marx, 1973 [1857]: 419), and workers' relationships with capitalist producers of consumer goods are typically mediated by others: "shopkeepers, house owners, tax collectors, unproductive labourers, such as physicians, etc." (Marx, 1971 [1893]: 462; cf. Engels, 1969 [1872]: 306). To the extent that the relationship between capitalists and workers in the consumption market is indirect, and class relations are not "transparent" (Weber, 1978 [1922]: 929), it is unlikely that conflict over consumption market objects of contention would occur directly between workers and capitalists. The same would be true of the consumption phase, but class relations in the labour market and especially at work should be more transparent.¹⁴ This is first of all a question of class formation.

14. For example, in Vancouver between 1900 and 1919, demands concerning the consumption market or consumption practices were rarely expressed in class terms in contentious gatherings (demonstrations, protest meetings, etc.) or Vancouver Trades and Labor Council meetings. In contrast, demands concerning the labour market were expressed primarily in class terms, and secondarily in ethnic terms, and demands concerning work were nearly always in class terms (Conley, 1986: 178-82).

Class formation

Whereas antagonistic class interests concern the relations between classes, class formation concerns the social relations within classes. Working-class formation has two aspects: class solidarity, or the formation of the class as a collectivity, and class polarization, or the formation of boundaries distinguishing it from other classes. In both respects, class formation is an open-ended historical process of the making, unmaking, and remaking of the working class. It includes the creation of divisions as well as solidarities, and the constitution of groups which cross class boundaries, as well as of groups within the working class.

The treatment of class formation in both sociology and social history has been deficient. In the dominant trend of Althusserian Marxist class theory in sociology, historical questions of class formation have been turned into definitions of the structural location of classes in production relations (e.g., Poulantzas, 1975; Carchedi, 1977). The resulting theories have been ahistorical, functionalist, and formalist (Thompson, 1978b; Connell, 1979; Mackenzie, 1982). In social history, a prominent response to this reduction of class formation to class structure has been to emphasize processes of class formation occurring within class conflict, in which a class culture emerges from a common experience of exploitation and struggle (e.g., Thompson, 1968, 1978a). While the point that classes are formed in the context of their relationship with each other is well taken, an important distinction is often obscured. Class formation, in the sense of social relationships or social networks, and class mobilization, in the sense of organization for collective action (C. Tilly, 1978), have often been confused under the rubric of class consciousness, or ambiguous terms such as "class formations" (Wood, 1982).

By distinguishing structural tendencies of working-class formation from mobilization, sociological underpinnings for social history can again be provided, redirecting attention to some of the questions neglected when working-class history is focussed on culture and consciousness. At the same time, the sociological understanding of class can be historicized, and the categorical impasse avoided. Starting from a broad definition of the working class as all those dependent on the sale of labour power, i.e., wage workers and their dependents (Gardiner, 1977: 157-58; cf. Przeworski, 1977), historical tendencies affecting the formation of collectivities will be examined at each phase of working-class social reproduction.

Consumption

The separation of production and consumption in capitalism makes possible the formation of collectivities within the working class on the basis of historically determined levels, standards, and styles of consumption, with effects on both class polarization and solidarity. Workers' incomes, and therefore their consumption levels, are lower than capitalists', and their styles of consumption are different, promoting class polarization to the degree that these differences are visible. They were visible to Fred Walsh, secretary of the Vancouver Metal Trades Council, in

1919: "Is there any reason why the worker[s] should walk? They build automobiles, and they ride in smelly street cars; they build mansions on Shaughnessy Heights and live in shacks in the outlying districts" (Canada, 1919: 550). These differences do not necessarily lead to working-class solidarity, however, as different levels and styles of consumption within it foster the formation of status groups. For Weber (1978 [1922]: 937, 305-06), status groups "are identified according to the principles of their consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life," on which an "effective claim to social esteem" or honour is based.

Marxist sociologists have usually resisted adopting the concept of status groups, because their existence is generally counterposed to that of classes. They are unjustified in doing so, because while status groups may divide members of the working class from each other, or unite workers with members of other classes, they do not dissolve class distinctions in consumption. For example, in early twentieth-century Vancouver, the "respectable" domestic consumption practices¹⁵ of settled, married workers were distinguished from the "rough" consumption practices of migratory, single male workers. Thus, a migratory logger who slept off a binge on the floor in the back room of a hotel on Vancouver's skid road had a different domestic lifestyle than a printer with a house in South Vancouver, a family,¹⁶ and a membership in the Sons of England. "Respectable" forms of working-class consumption may have involved the adoption of some "bourgeois" standards, and among better-off groups in the working class, promoted integration with the petite bourgeoisie, but they remained autonomously working class (Price, 1986), not least because they were inextricably bound to the other phases of working-class social reproduction.¹⁷ Similarly, the different consumption practices of various ethnic groups contributed to ethnic and racial divisions within the Canadian working class. In Vancouver, different consumption practices were a major aspect of the racial division between "whites" and Asians, to whom inherently lower standards of consumption were ascribed (Ward, 1978). Although their economic and political disabilities put Asian workers under the hegemony of middle-class labour contractors and merchants, they still maintained some autonomy (Knight and Koizumi, 1976), and the racial division within the working class did not obscure class divisions in consumption.

15. These are the practices by which workers met the consumption needs which, for some, occurred in families and neighborhoods: eating, sleeping, companionship, sex.

16. As Ross (1985) shows for London, England, the maintenance of this distinction in the sphere of consumption was largely the responsibility of working-class women.

17. Amongst those other phases was work, and as Weber argued (1978 [1922]: 306), occupation was one basis for the formation of status groups. This may be a reason for the division between "blue collar" and "white collar" workers: in addition to presumably respectable consumption practices, white-collar workers (office and sales clerks) engaged in work which was not industrial. In Vancouver, for example, J.H. McVety noted that bank clerks "consider themselves above ordinary workmen like myself" (British Columbia, 1913: III, 292), and Helena Gutteridge reported that women department store clerks felt superior to unionized workers (*Province*, 26 July 1918).

Labour market

Class formation is also shaped by the social practices and institutions of the labour market, and by the recurring competition of workers for employment. Similar employment histories and labour market positions could be sources of working-class solidarity, depending on whether they brought workers into contact with one another, isolated them individually, or divided them from other workers who did not share these experiences. For example, the night work of bakers (McKay, 1978), and the casual labour market and unusual hours of dock workers (ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union], 1975) both unified them and isolated them from other workers, while temporary work by women simply isolated them (Bernard, 1982: 31; British Columbia, 1913: I, 114). Combined with differences in consumption practices and in the workplace, they could contribute to the segmentation of the working class.

Relations of solidarity formed on the basis of labour market experiences and institutions, or on the basis of practices in other phases of social reproduction, can be reinforced by labour market competition between groups of workers. This competition can be divisive, reducing solidarity within the working class as a whole, because it usually leads the dominant group of workers to try to monopolize employment opportunities. But it can also promote class polarization, as the solidarity of the dominant group is reinforced when it unites against the threat to its position, forming the structural basis for collective action against the capitalist class.¹⁸ Asian labour market competition had this effect for the white working class as a whole in early twentieth-century British Columbia (Phillips, 1967: 23), although in Vancouver, the solidarity of white workers in industries directly affected by Asian competition, such as sawmilling, was weakened by that competition, and by the loss of status when jobs were racially stereotyped.¹⁹ The labour market can thus be a source of both cohesion and division in the working class; the task for theoretically informed social history and historical sociology is to isolate the conditions of each.

Work

The changing capitalist production process has also affected class formation. Marx and Engels (1969 [1848]: 116) expected the concentration of workers in large factories, and the homogenization of labour at a common semi-skilled, machine-tending level to lead to solidarity in the working class. There appears to be no automatic tendency for growing factory size and the development of a factory proletariat to lead to class formation, however (Shorter and Tilly, 1974), and the homogenization of labour has not been the only tendency in capitalist production.

18. See Parkin's (1979) concept of "dual closure."

19. Similarly, the experience of exclusion would be a weaker basis for cohesion in the subordinate group, because of the lack of social esteem resulting from their political and economic oppression (Neuwirth, 1969).

Even in the period at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century that Gordon, Edwards, and Reich (1982) call "homogenization," only some crafts (e.g., machinists) were being deskilled by mechanization, specialization, and systematic management. Others retained their old skills (e.g., bricklayers) or acquired new ones (e.g., printers), and new crafts were created (e.g., electricians). The formation of solidarities in the workplace consequently occurred along different lines for each: the boundary between threatened crafts and less skilled helpers broke down, secure crafts retained their exclusiveness, and new crafts lay ambivalently in-between (Roberts, 1976; Heron, 1980; Kealey, 1980; Heron and Storey, 1986). Divisions of mental and manual labour, and divisions of authority in the workplace also led to divided solidarities within the working class, and perhaps to the reduction of class polarization for office workers and supervisory employees. The former was implied by a debate in the Vancouver Metal Trades Council in 1917, over a resolution excluding "any foreman or employer of labor who has the [power of] hiring and firing of men" from being a delegate to the council (Metal Trades Council, 14 November 1917). Divisions like these have of course appeared prominently in Marxist class analysis in sociology (e.g., Poulantzas, 1975). They have not, however, been seen historically as objects and outcomes of struggles, in which divisions created at one time could be dissolved by further changes in the labour process, in a complex process of making, unmaking, and remaking the working class.

Consumption market

Class formation in the consumption market is structured by the extent of the separation of production and consumption for different members of the working class. This affects the development of solidarity based on common experiences and social relations, and of polarization on the basis of the degree of transparency of class relations in this phase of social reproduction. Since this is an area in which there are more questions than answers, class formation tendencies will be considered only in terms of the residential patterns resulting from the housing market, and the division of domestic labour in the working-class family.

Some research has shown how the housing market, and urban transportation systems affected working-class residential patterns and class formation (e.g., Cumbler, 1979). In early twentieth-century Vancouver, the working class was segregated from wealthy, middle-class Vancouver, but ethnic and status groups were also segregated within it, and workers were dispersed to the suburbs (Roy, 1980; McCririck, 1981).²⁰ The latter in particular accentuated the separation between production and consumption (Kealey, 1984: 41), making it difficult for workers to mobilize around objects of contention not connected to work and the

20. The effects on class solidarity and polarization of other aspects of the housing market, such as home ownership or tenancy, have barely begun to be studied (see Harris et. al., 1981).

labour market. In isolated frontier resource towns and camps, in contrast, there was practically no separation between work and residence, or work and consumption, encouraging class polarization and solidarity (Bercuson, 1978).

The lack of transparency of class relations in the consumption market may have been reinforced by the domestic division of labour in working-class families, to the extent that housewives were "administrators of the wage" (Humphries, 1977; Ross, 1985), and thus the main actors in the consumption goods market. This would contribute further to the divorce of consumption market position from class formation tendencies at work and in the labour market. More research into the social organization of working-class consumption market practices is needed in order to arrive at any definitive conclusions, however.

Analysis of working-class formation in each phase of social reproduction has involved carving up workers' experiences, but that is only a prelude to putting them back together, as solidarities and divisions at one phase reinforced and were reinforced by solidarities and divisions at other phases of social reproduction. Divisions by racial and ethnic group, by gender, and by skill each involved distinctive labour market, consumption, consumption market, and workplace practices that reinforced and signified each other. In Vancouver, for example, Asians were considered suitable for certain kinds of work, and restricted from others because they had distinctive consumption practices; because they were restricted in their labour market opportunities, their incomes and therefore their levels of consumption were lower than many other workers. Similarly, the relegation of women to domestic labour and childrearing in the consumption practices phase was reproduced in the labour market and workplace, where young women were temporary wage workers prior to marriage, and where they were restricted to "women's work," such as domestic and personal service, laundry work, food preparation, and garment making. Skill divisions also combined aspects of various phases of social reproduction, especially work and the labour market, where technical expertise and control over the labour process were combined with restricted entry to the trade. They were reinforced by the higher real wages of skilled craftsmen compared to other workers, and by the status deriving from their "respectable" consumption practices.

The analysis of class often stops at class formation, as if the transition from class interests and class formation to class action was relatively unproblematic. But as a succession of writers on mobilization in collective action and social movements have shown (Olson, 1968; Gamson, 1975; Oberschall, 1973; C. Tilly, 1978), that transition cannot be taken for granted. Class action must be examined as a problem in working-class mobilization and collective action.

Classes as historical actors

The final problem in the study of the working class in capitalism is the question of the conditions under which it becomes a historical actor. In neither Marxist

sociologies of social class, nor most social histories of the working class, has this problem received an adequate theoretical formulation, because questions of mobilization and collective action have been submerged in questions of consciousness and ideology. In many Marxist sociologies, the interest of the working class in socialism is simply assumed (e.g. Wright, 1978a), and attention is diverted from the interests workers have actually pursued in collective action to the ideological mechanisms preventing them from acting on this "fundamental interest."²¹ Social historians have generally avoided this "platonist Marxism" (Thompson, 1974), by examining the actual culture of workers, rather than only its distance from what it might have been. But within an interpretive framework primarily concerned with showing how working-class culture developed from the experience of class and class conflict (Wood, 1982), working-class organizations and collective actions are portrayed as expressions of that culture or consciousness.²² Valid in its own terms, this approach nonetheless leaves out some important considerations in the transition from class experience and class consciousness to class action. Those concerns can be addressed by examining the actions of workers in producing historical change as a problem in mobilization and collective action. Charles Tilly's concept of collective action can be combined with the framework developed in the previous sections to analyze the conditions of working-class action in class conflict.

First, Tilly's (1978) model of collective action begins from the effects of large-scale structural changes occurring during capitalist development, such as proletarianization and the formation of nation-states, on the interests and social organization of the affected populations.²³ The analysis of antagonistic interests and class formation in the preceding sections represents a specification of those components for the study of early twentieth-century working-class collective action. Second, there is the mobilization process, by which people commit resources to collective purposes. Since this is an important link between social reproduction and collective action, it will be discussed in more detail below. Third, Tilly and his colleagues have examined collective action itself, especially the sources and consequences of changing forms or "repertoires" of action (e.g., C. Tilly, 1986). Fourth and last are the conditions of strategic interaction which affect the occurrence of collective action by a collectivity: opportunity and threat, repression and facilitation, and power. They will be examined in more detail to show how they help in understand-

21. Questions of mobilization have consequently been ignored, as exemplified by the unbridgeable gulf in Poulantzas' (1975) theory between the structural "place" of a class and its "position" in class struggles. Cf. Connell (1979).

22. See Frank (1986: 109), discussing strike tactics of Cape Breton miners: "These forms of action could only be understood and accepted among workers who shared common assumptions about their right to exercise a powerful latent authority within their workplace." Heron and Storey (1986: 31-32) exhibit the same tendency.

23. This is in contrast to "breakdown" theories in sociology, which emphasize the disruptive and disorienting effects of social change, and see collective "behavior" as a symptom of social pathology. See Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly (1975); Tilly and Tilly (1981); Hunt (1984).

ing the development of class action within class conflict.

Resource mobilization

In order to act collectively, people must mobilize. Mobilization is "the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action" (C. Tilly, 1978: 7). Two critical elements of mobilization are thus the resources possessed by members of a collectivity, and the degree to which those resources are under collective control. The concept of working-class social reproduction enables the specification of some of the resources which can be mobilized by workers for collective purposes.²⁴ They often appear descriptively in working-class social history, as resources for collective action,²⁵ but they need to be made explicit, in order to reveal causal regularities in working-class history.

In the consumption phase, the major resource possessed in varying amounts by different workers is the social esteem deriving from their level and style of consumption. This was a resource in the early twentieth century to the extent that some workers, such as women and craftsmen, possessed a status in the community that led the targets of collective action, or other parties to it, to treat their claims and actions more favorably than they might otherwise have done. It is collectively controlled principally by means of the informal norms and sanctions of status groups, although more formal controls, such as union rules prohibiting drunkenness, can also be present. Status is a fragile resource, with little power to compel, because its existence depends on the evaluations of others, not on the workers possessing it. For example, Vancouver businessmen responded sympathetically to a telephone operators' strike in 1902 because the anticipated future domestic roles of the young female operators as wives and mothers meant that they required paternalistic protection. But when telephone operators struck in 1906, and when they joined the 1919 general strike, they did not receive the same business support as in 1902, because Vancouver businessmen now saw all working-class militancy as an obstacle to capital accumulation.

In the labour market, workers' main resource for collective action is their ability to cease selling their labour power, and bring production to a standstill. Collective control of this resource has been achieved mainly through unionization. Labour power is a more valuable and versatile resource than status, since it depends not on others, but on the ability and willingness of the workers possessing it to stay off work, and to prevent others from replacing them. The latter depends on the scarcity

24. Resources outside the social reproduction cycle include votes, political influence, and physical force. They are external to my model, which is focussed on economic and social, not political factors.

25. See, for example, Kealey (1986: 83, 93) on printers: "These unions' power lay not only in their members' valuable skills, which could be withdrawn, but also in the newspapers' susceptibility to public pressure.... In addition, their literacy, general standing in the community, and leadership in the broader trade-union movement all provided extra clout in bargaining."

of strikers' labour power; when it is not scarce, workers have to take militant measures, such as mass picketing or turnout actions (Brown, 1981), to prevent their replacement.

The capacity of workers to prevent others from replacing them in strikes depends in part on their position in the work phase of working-class social reproduction. Workers with skills critical to a particular production process can more effectively withdraw their labour power than those in less critical positions. This was shown in strikes by metal trades workers and by bakers in Vancouver, in which small shops, dependent on craft skills, settled more quickly than larger shops, where specialization and mechanization were more advanced, and craft skills less crucial to production. Skill is not the only workplace resource, as both skilled and unskilled workers may have the capacity to disrupt production through sabotage, slowdowns, and work stoppages at technically or economically critical times. Such resources have come under collective control in both formal organizations like unions, and in informal work groups (Montgomery, 1979: 104).

Finally, in the consumption market, the workers' main resource is their purchasing power, which can be withdrawn in consumer boycotts. Because of the separation of production and consumption, this resource is difficult to bring under collective control, but unions have tried to do so through the union label on consumer goods, and the "unfair list" of employers whose services and products union workers are urged to boycott. In Vancouver, a union label strategy was followed mainly by unions in the consumer goods and services industries, such as tailors, garment workers, cigar makers, printers, and cooks, waiters and waitresses. Like consumption status, working-class purchasing power is not as strong a resource as those found in the labour market and work phases of social reproduction, because its success depends on the actions of others, rather than on the actions of the workers benefitting from its use. In addition, purchasing power is limited by low real wages: as a carpenter explained in 1913, white workers patronized non-union, Chinese restaurants, because they had to live as cheaply as possible (British Columbia, 1913: III, 112).

It is important to identify the resources possessed by workers at each phase of their social reproduction, both because they shape their capacity to act collectively, and because changes in the labour market, consumption, etc., affect the distribution of these resources within the working class. It is also important to locate these resources in workers' social reproduction cycles because this directs us to their location in pre-existing social relationships, avoiding the individualistic, utilitarian reasoning characteristic of some analyses of mobilization (e.g. Olson, 1968; for critiques, see Fireman and Gamson, 1979; Tilly, 1985).

Strategic interaction

The context for the mobilization of resources for collective action is not only the social relations of class formation, but also the power relations of class conflict.

Thus, intervening between mobilization and collective action, and even shaping mobilization itself, are conditions of strategic interaction: opportunity and threat, repression and facilitation, and power.²⁶ Adapting Tilly (1978: 55, 133-42), we can say that an opportunity exists when another party is vulnerable to the use by collective actors of the resources they possess to support claims that would realize their interests. For example, a tight labour market represents an opportunity for workers, because when they cannot easily be replaced, their employers are vulnerable to demands backed up by the withdrawal of labour power. A threat is a challenge or claim by another party that would harm the collective actors' interests. Examples in the early twentieth century include the promotion of immigration by employers and the state, and measures taken by employers, such as mechanization and specialization, that challenged the job control exercised by crafts. Facilitation and repression refer to the actions of employers, the state, or other groups who respond to workers' mobilization or collective action. Repression raises the costs of collective action for participants in it, or makes it more difficult for its objective to be achieved. In early twentieth-century Vancouver, repressive actions included the firing of union organizers, the dismissal and replacement of strikers, and police actions against picketers and working-class demonstrators. Conversely, facilitation lowers costs of mobilization, or makes collective action easier (C. Tilly, 1978: 55, 100). Facilitating responses in Vancouver were almost entirely by other workers, who provided organizers, supported strike funds, and sometimes struck in sympathy. Finally, power refers to responses to the content of demands made by collective actors: in Tilly's quasi-Weberian definition, a group whose interests prevail over the interests of another party when those interests conflict is the more powerful party (C. Tilly, 1978: 155; Weber, 1978 [1922]: 53). Thus, the power of strikers can be indicated by the outcomes of their strikes.

Conditions of strategic interaction can be shown to affect the occurrence of individual collective actions; for example, strike activity in Vancouver increased when the labour market was tight, and when the success rates of strikes was on the increase (indicating growing working-class power). In addition, strategic interaction had a cumulative impact on the course of workers' mobilization and collective action, affecting the objectives for which workers were mobilized, and the extent of their actions. Strategic interaction helped to create the conditions for the class-wide mobilization of workers for explicitly working-class objectives in Vancouver in 1918-19, revealed in the general strike on 2-3 August 1918, protesting the murder of Ginger Goodwin, the widespread support of Vancouver workers for the One Big Union in early 1919, and the month-long general strike in sympathy with the Winnipeg general strike in June, 1919.

26. The term "strategic interaction" is here used in a wider sense than that discussed by Tilly (1978: 29-35), but the idea is basically the same, namely the conditions that people take into account in choosing to act collectively.

Opportunity and threat, repression, and power were central to the occurrence of the radical events of 1918-19 in Vancouver. First, the war capitalist boom from 1916 to 1919 provided workers with the opportunity to remobilize. Unions that had been weakened by the pre-war depression from 1913 to 1915 rebuilt, and many previously non-unionized workers formed rapidly growing organizations. The labour shortages of the wartime boom provided a tremendous opportunity to make up for the setbacks of the pre-war depression, and the threats posed by the rising cost of living and by the prospect of the flooding of the labour market with returned soldiers after the war lent urgency to workers' action. A strike wave resulted, as workers in Vancouver took the opportunity to remobilize, to strike, and to try out tactics (such as the general strike) learned in a smaller strike wave of 1909-12.²⁷ Second, workers who experienced the repression of mobilization efforts before 1916, and continued employer hostility after 1916, were led to support new forms of organization and action, such as the general strike, in pursuit of anti-capitalist objectives. Third, class polarization was sharpened by the growing working-class power indicated by the successful use of militant action to overcome employer resistance and repression. Increasing power gave organized workers the confidence to follow their socialist leadership in experimenting with new forms of organization and action, such as the One Big Union.

The conclusion to be drawn from this review of conditions of strategic interaction is that while antagonistic interests and working-class formation were crucial structural conditions, radical class action resulted from the experiences of different groups of workers in class conflict. By reformulating class action in terms of mobilization and collective action, we have been better able to specify what those experiences were, helping to reveal the deep causal analogies that are the essence of any comparative social history or historical sociology.

Conclusions

More theory, less fact, or less theory, more fact? Few would deny that both are needed, although many would disagree about the amount and kind of each. Despite efforts such as this to argue for a closer integration between sociological and historical approaches to working-class studies, differences in disciplinary practice are probably too strong to be overcome by theoretical or factual arguments. In large part, this is a problem of the way research questions are established in history and sociology. Historians reading this essay would probably be happier if there was "more fact," that is, if the argument was more explicitly located in specific historical instances, showing in practice how the perspective being offered here aids in posing and solving recognized historical problems.²⁸ Sociologists, in contrast, would be

27. In this sense, as Kealey (1984: 16, 39-40) argues, the strike wave of 1916-19 was a continuation of that of the pre-1913 period.

28. See Conley, 1986, for an attempt to use this framework to address an existing problem in working-class historiography.

interested in "more theory," that is, more of an effort to situate concepts of social reproduction and collective action in the existing literature. In a last-ditch bid to placate those two audiences, let me recapitulate the contributions of the concepts of social reproduction and collective action to social history and sociology.

With respect to history, concepts of working-class social reproduction and collective action provide the structural context for working-class culture and class conflict. The concept of social reproduction does not replace the concept of working-class culture, but it does provide a necessary foundation for it in the structuring of working-class experience, by revealing the constraints and resources from which a culture is built. Although they are organized around the wage labour relationship, the phases of social reproduction are not reducible to it, and by considering workers' experience in all its complexity, we are better able to address the central concerns of working-class history, and to integrate the findings of women's history and the history of the family to the history of working-class collective action (e.g., Hanagan, 1986).

With respect to sociology, the concepts of social reproduction and collective action developed here address the complexity and historicity of class structure, starting from Marxist premises, but without sacrificing important Weberian contributions. Avoiding the teleological certainties of functionalist Marxism, they provide a framework for the historical sociological analysis of class conflict, focussed on the constraints and resources shaping the choices and strategies of workers in the past and present.

The concept of working-class social reproduction does not answer all the questions; for example the state and politics are notably absent from the analysis.²⁹ But if it contributes to a dialogue between sociologists and social historians that enables them to advance working-class studies by integrating hitherto separate spheres of study, then it will have served its purpose. More theory, less fact? Yes, but only insofar as the theory enables us to see better what is in the facts, and to provide hypotheses for historians and sociologists to explore in them.

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29. Where does the state fit into the analysis of working-class social reproduction and collective action?

First, the state plays a role in regulating social relations at each phase of social reproduction (e.g., property rights, factory legislation, immigration policies, liquor laws). As such, it is the focus of political conflict over whether its policies will serve capital accumulation or workers' social reproduction. Second, in addition to being a target of workers' collective action, the state acts to repress and facilitate mobilization and collective action, by forbidding and suppressing some forms, and permitting or encouraging others.

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Race and gender: structural determinants in the formation of British Columbia's salmon cannery labour forces*

Alicja Muszynski

Abstract. The industrialization of the fisheries of British Columbia began in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the canning of salmon for export to Great Britain. Since fish was an essential staple in the diet of the native peoples living in the Pacific Northwest, its capture and processing was a vital part of their economic activity. Salmon canners sought a factory labour force at the cheapest possible wage. To the extent that native peoples continued to meet subsistence needs, at least partially, through the native economy, when employed for wages they did not have to be paid the full costs of the production and reproduction of their labour power. Of all the groups employed, native women and their children received the lowest wages and least secure conditions of employment. The paper explores the use of race and gender by salmon canners as a means of creating a labour force and paying it the lowest wages possible, according to the ability of each group to partially realize subsistence needs through pre-capitalist relations of production. Special attention is given to the place of native women in this process.

Résumé. L'industrialisation des pêcheries de la Colombie Britannique débuta à la fin du 19^e siècle avec la mise en boîte de saumon pour l'exportation en grande Bretagne. Le poisson étant une denrée essentielle dans le régime alimentaire des autochtones habitant le nord-ouest du Pacifique, sa prise et son traitement furent des parties importantes de l'activité économique des autochtones. On chercha des travailleurs dont les salaires seraient minimes. On n'eut pas à payer la contingente autochtone le plein prix qu'exigea leur travail puisque les autochtones eux-mêmes, par le biais de leur propre économie, suppléèrent aux salaires peu élevés. De tous les employés, les femmes autochtones et leurs enfants reçurent les salaires les plus bas et travaillèrent sous des conditions d'emploi les moins sûres. On explorera dans cet article l'utilisation de la race et du genre par l'industrie du saumon pour créer une main d'œuvre recevant un salaire minime selon la capacité de chaque groupe de subvenir à ses besoins par des relations de production pré-capitalistes. Une attention spéciale sera accordée au rôle de la femme autochtone dans ce processus.

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The development of the British Columbia salmon-canning industry is an important study because it clearly illustrates how capitalists used pre-capitalist relations of production to structure cheap labour forces. Cheap labour forces can be created when pre-capitalist economies are transformed, simultaneously releasing labour power for industrial employment while subsistence needs continue to be partially met within pre-capitalist relations of production. Labourers can then be employed for wages below the costs necessary for the production and reproduction of their labour power, precisely to the extent that those costs are borne outside a purely capitalist economy.¹

Labour forces that continue to rely on pre-capitalist relations of production can be found either within a particular geographic region, or brought in from another area. Each group of labourers is therefore reliant on pre-existing economic relations in different ways, depending on where the particular group is situated. Industrial employers therefore segregate their labour forces, attaching specific groups to particular tasks and paying wages according to the ability of each group to sustain itself both within the capitalist economy, as well as outside it. Thus, tasks become typed according to the race and gender of the group assigned to perform them.²

The industrialization of the B.C. fisheries, in the last half of the nineteenth century, proceeded on the basis of the ability of salmon canners to recruit such groups. According to their own testimony, given during several royal commissions, canners would have employed European women and children, had these been available in sufficient numbers. Lacking this particular pool of labour, they turned to native women and children and to Chinese men in filling the jobs inside the salmon canneries.³

By 1902 the salmon canning industry had reached maturity and the number of European immigrants became significantly greater than both the native Indian population and immigrants from other areas of the world. At the same time, the balance between European male and female immigrants became more evenly distributed. Table 1 summarizes population figures for different races and compares

1. A more complete theoretical discussion, including a critique of Marx's labour theory of value, is contained in Muszynski (1986: Ch.1 and 2).
2. A number of feminist authors have demonstrated that gender inequality was a feature of western Europe prior to its industrialization, and was used by capitalist employers to pay women and children wage rates lower than those received by men (Barrett, 1984; Rowbotham, 1976). Not all economies colonized by Europeans possessed the same degree of inequality (Leacock, 1981), but European capitalists certainly tended to hire workers on the basis of such distinctions when hiring native wage labour within British Columbia.
3. The following analysis focuses specifically on the employment of native people by salmon canners. A discussion of the transformation of Chinese male peasants into cheap wage labourers is contained in Muszynski (1986: Ch.5). Only the early history of the industry is covered here. Native peoples tended to resist employers through their ability to continue traditional economic activities. Fishers were by far the more militant group within the industry in this early period. Canners were able to keep their labour forces disorganized by stressing racial and gender differences, and were successful until after World War II, when the entire industry was unionized (Muszynski, 1986: Ch.7).

numbers of men to women for this period of time. Figures for the Indian population were not included in 1871, and it can be seen that the proportion of women (mostly European) to men was less than half. The census of 1880-81 included native Indians, and the proportion of women significantly increased. Between 1890 and 1901, the population almost doubled as a result of immigration from European countries. In that year, European women would have outnumbered native women, since the native Indian population decreased. Finally, while the Chinese population (mostly males) formed a significant proportion of the total population in the early decades, it was definitely a minority by 1901, despite having almost doubled from the previous decade. The figure is inflated because Japanese men began to enter the province in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and were counted together with the Chinese. Provincial leaders began to step up efforts to reduce Chinese immigration by instituting a series of head taxes. After 1903, a \$500 head tax made it very difficult for Chinese to enter the province (Bolaria and Li, 1985: 86).

Table 1. Population of British Columbia 1871-1901.

Year	Total male (A)	Total female (B)	No. Indian (A & B)	No. Chinese	Total
1871	7,574	3,012	not known	1,548	10,586
1880-81	29,503	19,956	25,661 ^a	4,350	49,459
1890-91	63,003	35,170	25,618	8,910 ^b	98,173
1901	114,160	64,497	25,488	19,482 ^c	178,657

Source: Figures for 1871 taken from *Annual Report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries* (1872: 22). A further breakdown by race was given: Whites: 8,576 and Negroes: 462. The size of the Indian population was estimated between 35,000 and 40,000 (a figure that was too high).

Figures for 1880 to 1901: *Census of Canada*.

- a. This figure was not given in the census but is taken from Duff (1977: 45). The figures provided here should be taken as approximations, given the diverse sources from which they are taken, and the fact that census taking was just beginning in the province.
- b. This figure represents people born in China, a fairly accurate representation of the resident Chinese population since emigration from China only became legal in 1868, with the signing of the Burlingame treaty.
- c. This figure is inflated, because the Chinese and Japanese were counted together, as "orientals," despite the fact that the two groups arrived from different countries at different periods. Japanese emigration to Canada became significant at the end of the century. Adachi (1976: 38) breaks the category down to 4,597 Japanese and 14,885 Chinese.

Native economies

In order to understand how B.C. salmon canners used native labour, it is necessary to briefly describe the pre-capitalist economies of the area that became known as British Columbia.

Prior to European contact, native peoples formed a fairly dense concentration of diverse cultures and social groupings. Duff (1977: 8) notes: "Except for barren and inaccessible areas which are not utilized even today, every part of the Province was formerly within the owned and recognized territory of one or other of the Indian tribes." While the population as a whole was large, the core economic unit consisted

of "small localized groups of people who lived together throughout the year" (Duff, 1977: 16). Membership followed kinship rules of descent and exogamous marriage, but the rules varied greatly from one tribe to another. The tribes also possessed varied concepts of ownership rights to the land and resources. In general, stratification increased as one travelled from the Fraser River north to Alaska.

There were no political institutions of the nature of a state or a kingdom. The power of any one clan was defined in terms of its relationships to clans connected to it through kinship.⁴ Its power was tied to its ability to exchange wealth through potlatches. The institution of the potlatch served to redistribute food and wealth throughout the area, and prevented any one group from amassing too much wealth, and, consequently, power (Suttles, 1960).

The northern coastal tribes, especially the Tlingit and Tsimshian, had the most rigidly defined social and economic relationships. Matrilineal households or lineages were the basic economic units, and they joined larger tribal groupings. The basic economic units operated autonomously during the summer, going to the individual hunting and gathering grounds, and, in the winter, assembling in the larger groupings in a common village. Along the central coast, local bilateral kin groups clustered into named tribes. They also shared a village for part of the year. The Kwakiutl adhered most closely to this pattern, while the Coast Salish organized in a looser web of bilateral kinship ties (Duff, 1977: 16).

In summary, the coastal tribes developed a wide variety of social groupings around comparable economic units based on variously defined kin associations. The total economic system consisted of a large number of loosely associated units, some internally stratified by rank, each claiming rights to certain key fishing, hunting, and berry and root gathering sites. This particular economic organization appears to have made ideal use of the environment, in terms of a hunting and gathering mode of production. To use fishing as an example, fish such as salmon, herring, and eulachon which were a basic staple, concentrated in particular spots along the coast at various times in the year. Because the supply varied from year to year (sockeye salmon, for instance, have a four-year cycle with two good years and two poor ones), most units could realize some years of great abundance and some years of near starvation. The potlatch, universal among all tribes, served as a medium of redistributing surplus among all groups. "In the last instance the potlatch was an institution for validating claims to resources, land titles, and the right to acquire surplus products from the use of clan lands" (Averkiewa, 1971: 334).

The institution of the potlatch enabled a wide variety of small economic units to become interdependent, exploiting the available resources. Although the tech-

4. The term clan is used here in a very loose fashion, to mean a group larger than the basic economic unit or house group but smaller than the tribe. A loose equivalent would be community, since many, but not all, of these groups shared a common place of residence for part of the year. The lack of precise terminology stems from the wide diversity of groups covered in this analysis.

nology was that of a hunting and gathering economy, the entire socio-economic system generated considerable surplus which was used to develop a rich and diverse culture. Economic inequality and exploitation existed, and were more pronounced among certain tribes, but the entire economic organization depended on cooperation. Any external influence upset the equilibrium, and, at best, required adjustment within the system, as appears to have occurred in the first phase of European contact (Pidcocke, 1969).

The fur trade introduced an ideology of individual gain and prestige, and the means whereby an individual, rather than a group, could acquire wealth. This is not to say that individualism did not exist in pre-contact times. Averkieva (1971) has noted the tendency among the Tlingit toward patriarchal private property relations. However, the Europeans influenced the direction of change. Moreover, European economic relations directly contradicted those of native peoples in British Columbia. This was not evident during the initial contact period because the industrial revolution was just beginning to change the mode of production in western Europe, and because the Europeans originally did not intend to develop provincial resources other than fur. Since coastal peoples relied on fish as a basic staple, their economic organization was not initially threatened.

From the fur trade to European settlement

The trading company represented European power during the period of the fur trade. After amalgamating with the North West Company in 1821, the Hudson's Bay Company held a monopoly position in what became known as British Columbia.⁵ The colony of Vancouver Island was created in 1849, when the British government granted title to the company. The first governor resigned shortly after taking office and was succeeded, in 1851, by James Douglas. The year 1858 marked a transition from the predominance of the fur trade to a growing emphasis on settlement, when a second colony was created on the mainland of British Columbia. Douglas resigned his post with the Hudson's Bay Company to become governor of both colonies. The colonies were united in 1866, and, in 1871, entered Confederation.

The second half of the nineteenth century marked an economic transition. The fur traders organized economic relationships oriented to overseas markets, and were interested in the colonial economy only in terms of its extractive capacities. The native peoples occupied an important position as suppliers of the resource. The year 1858 also marked the beginning of the gold rush, and the entrance of a new type of foreigner into the colonies. Gold seekers had no use for the native peoples except in subsidiary roles; for example, as guides or prostitutes. For the first time, the two groups competed directly over resources, as gold miners working the Fraser canyon disrupted the salmon fishing and processing operations of native groups on the river. The conflict led to violence. "Some of the miners came up from California boasting that they would 'clean out all the Indians in the land,' and there were instances of

5. The details that follow on the fur trade were taken from Fisher (1980).

the kind of indiscriminate killing of Indians that was a feature of the American west" (Fisher, 1980: 98). Unlike the American west, however, the Indians held their ground, and Douglas intervened to diffuse the situation.

The gold rush was short-lived, but it represented the first stage of a new economic relationship between Europeans and resources, one of direct access. Gold miners were a largely transient population, unlike the settlers who followed them. The settlers were interested in one thing, land. Access to it was mediated by European governors of the colony, who disposed of it under the assumption that it belonged to the Crown. "Absolute title (a European concept) has been vested in the Crown ever since Britain, Spain, Russia, and the United States, without consulting any Indians, settled the questions of sovereignty over this continent" (Duff, 1977: 66n). The British state recognized an obligation toward native peoples, founded on the assumption that they were its subjects. As native peoples themselves were to point out time and again, however, they never entered, either voluntarily or through armed struggle, into any such relationship with a foreign power. The concept of European title to the lands of British Columbia was imported by the Europeans who came to settle there. In other words, they simply assumed the land belonged to them and they took it. While the settlers and the provincial government denied any obligation to the original inhabitants, the colonial government under Douglas (but not his successors) and the federal government did recognize an obligation to "extinguish" aboriginal title, by treaties and allocation of reserve lands.

Clearly such concepts of private property relations to land and resources were foreign to the native inhabitants. Their concepts of ownership were based on acknowledged rights to use the land and its resources, rights that had to be negotiated by one group with its neighbours. And the rights carried with them an obligation to share surplus in return for recognition of title (for example, through the potlatch). However, the European code of rights was ultimately backed by armed force, and there are numerous instances in the various government reports of the use of armed vessels to "settle" disputes over land rights. The native population was at a disadvantage because its weaponry was inferior to that of the Europeans and there was no cohesive political institution that could negotiate on its behalf in Victoria, Ottawa, and London.

The fisheries played a crucial role in the conflict, since they were vital to the coastal native economies, and the first major capitalist thrust in the north was made by salmon canners. The missionary Duncan took on the role of intermediary on behalf of the northern Tsimshian. At his request, Indian Reserve Commissioner O'Reilly travelled to the mission village of Metlakatla, in 1881, to conduct hearings. The reason for the urgency was "the Indian fisheries were being taken possession of by whites for cannery purposes, and that if steps were not taken to secure to the Indians their fisheries, they would suffer great injustice" (Metlakatlah Commission, 1884: lxxvi). The Metlakatla Indians demanded the entire peninsula in question, including Turner's fishery on the Skeena, which was the location of Inverness

cannery (the first constructed in the north). O'Reilly replied he had no power to deal with lands sold to the whites. While he did his best to reserve the sites demanded by native groups, provincial administrators later claimed he had been too generous and cut back the size of many of the original allocations. In the end, settlers and capitalists received the major concessions. Salmon canners established their plants pretty well where they wished, occasionally running into disputes with local groups. The native population was assigned specific tracts of land and specific fishery sites. Thus, the overall socio-economic system enforced through the potlatch was truncated. However, native economies were not destroyed, but continued alongside capitalist relations of production. As the original native system was dismembered, individual native economic units became dependent on capitalist relations of production.

Had the provincial policy of ignoring native claims to the land and resources triumphed, and the native population been either exterminated or absorbed within European colonization, then its mode of production would, in fact, have disappeared. But Dominion policy was to recognize some form of aboriginal title, enough to enable native groups to continue the battle for legal rights. In addition, although no new treaties were made, reserves continued to be laid aside. Therefore, a land base *within* the developing capitalist mode of production was secured. The Indian agents appointed by the federal government tried to induce the native population to become cultivators. But they had little success, partly due to the nature of the land itself. Much of the coastal land cannot be cultivated, and the reserves were often laid out on land the settlers did not value, land not worth cultivating. The native population continued its traditional economic pursuits, incorporating wage labour, especially that offered by canners, into its traditional pattern.

The hunting and gathering economy (fishing is here incorporated as part of hunting) was marginalized. The land and resource base was appropriated by settlers and capitalists, and held for them by the state. But there was enough of it left for native use to enable the native population to preserve some form of its pre-capitalist mode of production. Its entry into capitalist relations, therefore, was partial. In one way, this made it an ideal labour force for salmon canners. The native people, at least in the early period, were fairly numerous, and willing to work irregular hours and short seasons because these corresponded to their own economic activities. Above all, since they did not depend totally on wages to subsist, and were not conscious of themselves as proletarians, they accepted very low wages. Especially in the early period, wages were seen in terms of total revenue accruing to the village. While an individual might not earn very much, certainly not enough to support him/herself, the total for the group was enough to procure the necessities it had come to need from the capitalist economy (for example, staples like lard, tea, as well as clothing and furniture). And, in later years, while younger men appear to have begun regarding their incomes as their own property, native women still appear to have pooled their money.

The very factors making native people an ideal cannery labour force, however, also made them difficult to discipline and subordinate. Cannery work was adopted into the seasonal migratory pattern, and, for many people, was one wage employment among several possibilities. Native women and children, for example, began to migrate to the hop fields in Washington state after the cannery season ended. Especially in the 1870s and 1880s when other populations were still small, many had their pick of employment opportunities, although all tended to be seasonal or short-term (for example, work on railway construction or in sawmills). Winters were generally spent back home on the reserve. Thus, although many coastal people became *primarily* dependent on cannery work for a wage income, they were not *totally* dependent, not in the beginning at any rate, and they continued to have non-monetary means of subsisting. Gradually, however, many of them did begin to develop careers in the canneries, and the encroaching capitalist economy made it increasingly difficult to subsist solely on the land or fisheries. The forces of production originally remained fairly undeveloped, which meant that canneries were built close to the resource in remote areas. Just as native people became dependent on cannery work, refrigeration and other techniques allowed plants to be moved to urban areas. Rather than canners seeking the resource, now the resource was brought to the canners, who built their plants close to major transportation routes. As canneries in remote areas were closed, the coastal villages which had incorporated work there into seasonal migration were left without a major source of wage income.

Native cannery workers (1871-1902)

By the 1880s, most coastal villages included salmon canneries as part of their seasonal migration. Table 2 illustrates the number of canneries by geographic location for this time period. The Fraser River canneries, from their inception in the 1870s, almost guaranteed employment to the Coast Salish living in the vicinity, while the Tsimshian were secured places in the Skeena and Nass River plants. But soon the entire coast was involved, including the tribes living on Vancouver Island and along the central coast. The Indian agent for Cowichan agency on Vancouver Island noted that, in the summer of 1881, several villages in the southern part of his district were almost deserted as men, women, and children found employment on the Fraser River. He estimated they would return with over \$15,000 in wages (Department of Indian Affairs, 1882: 160). Meanwhile, the Indian agent for Fraser River moaned because the Indians went off to commercial fisheries, neglecting the cultivation of reserve land.

There is no class of labourers to compete with them at the fisheries or at steamboating on the Fraser River. Their women, also, who are very industrious, are profitably employed at the fisheries during the fishing season, making nets and cleaning fish for the canneries.... The Indians love working in batches together, and much prefer the above kind of employment to agricultural labour (Department of Indian Affairs, 1882: 166).

Table 2. Number of canneries by location for the years 1871-1902.

Year	Fraser river	Skeena river	Nass river	Central coast	Vancouver Island	Total
1871	1	—	—	—	—	1
1875	3	—	—	—	—	3
1880	7	2	—	—	—	9
1885	6	2	—	1	—	9
1890	16	7	3	6	—	32
1895	21	7	1	6	1	36
1900	42	10	1	11	1	65
1902	42	10	2	12	1	67

Source: Lyons (1969: 146-47, 164, 705-6). Canneries underwent a great number of changes in owners and locations. Sometimes a cannery would change names when ownership changed, while at other times several canneries might bear the same name. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the precise number of actual canneries in operation in any one year (canneries also occasionally closed one or more seasons and then re-opened). These figures are approximate and should be used as an indication of over-all trends and especially the escalation in the numbers built by the turn of the century on Fraser River, Skeena River, and along the central coast.

Thirteen hundred Indian men were employed on the Fraser River the following year, 1882, earning an average daily wage of \$1.75, for a season lasting approximately ninety days. Most of them fished. Four hundred Indian women were employed cleaning and canning salmon for \$1.00 a day (Department of Indian Affairs, 1883: 61). While such a short season could not provide sufficient employment to feed a European family, the pooled wages for a whole village represented a considerable amount of money. The cannery required a large supply of labourers on hand to process all the fish caught as refrigeration techniques at this time were almost non-existent, and fish had to be immediately processed or it spoiled. Catching capacity tended to outstrip canning capacity, and fishers were sometimes limited in the number of fish they could land in a twenty-four hour period. Native contractors were sent to the coastal villages to persuade everyone to relocate at the canneries for the season. They had problems holding the labour supply, especially in these years of railroad construction and the availability of wage labour in a thinly populated province.⁶ In 1883, the cannery caused much discontent among their employees when they held wages until the second run ended.

When the first run of salmon is over on the Fraser River, the Indians are told by the managers or owners of the fisheries, that they have no more work for them until the second run commences, which often is a delay of two weeks; they retain the Indians' money as security that they may not go home or engage in any other occupation until they want them again, therefore, the Indians are obliged to remain idle about New Westminster for that length of time or forfeit their wages. Some Indians come hundreds of miles to labour at the fisheries, and to have them subject to such unfair treatment is certainly a great grievance and one they bitterly complain of. (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884: 46)

6. For a more detailed account of the types of employment available to native peoples during this period, see Knight (1978). Knight and Koizumi (1976) document the life history of a Japanese fisher.

Locations near European settlements also caused incomes to be diverted from buying commodities useful to the village, to the cultivation of individual vices, especially gambling and alcoholism. There was a booming business in New Westminster, Victoria and on Puget Sound, catering to these activities. In addition, native women were recruited as prostitutes in these centers, containing a heavy concentration of single European men. One of the chief reasons Indian agents sought to keep the native population on the reserves was to keep it away from the cities and their attendant vices.

Gradually, salmon canners found a more subordinate labour force among Chinese male labourers. In 1884, there was less work available due to increased employment of Chinese men inside the canneries. "The Indians from all parts of this agency [lower Fraser] complain very much this spring and summer of how they are undermined in the labour market by Chinamen, especially in all kinds of light work, where the Indian women and their boys and girls used to be employed" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885: 104). Chinese men displaced native women in cannery work as well as taking their place in domestic work for private families, doing washing and ironing. The canners, in turn, had to compete with railroad construction, which, in the mid-1880s, imported large numbers of contracted Chinese labourers. In these years, therefore, large numbers of native women were hired to work in the Fraser River canneries, but the situation on that river was temporary. Fraser River canneries were located close to urban centers, in which Chinese contractors operated and which also contained growing China towns with an abundance of Chinese labour. In the north, native peoples continued to be hired in large numbers because they lived in the area and it was extremely costly to transport labourers from the southern part of the province.

The sheer number of native peoples congregating at New Westminster each spring created problems. In 1885, three thousand came from all over the coast, seeking cannery employment and camping along both banks of the Fraser river, from New Westminster to the mouth of the Fraser. Indian agents were not blind to the potentials of such a large gathering.

Indian affairs require careful handling, as, although tribal feuds and jealousies have for long kept distant bands from uniting, still the present labour fields throw the different bands together, and they hear each other's grievances, and although a feeling of discontent is not likely to make any uprising on the land question possible, still it is this feeling which encourages those murders of isolated miners and settlers which were so common a few years ago. (Department of Indian Affairs, 1886: 81)

This comment indicates one reason for the preference in hiring Chinese instead of native labourers. The native population was dispersed over a large area and still controlled, in a limited way, its own means of subsistence. Village and community organization was strong. Most native labourers camped near the canneries according to village groupings, and often worked alongside community members. In other words, they were only a partially subordinated labour force, unlike Chinese

labourers, organized under the Chinese contract system.

Although it is outside the scope of this paper to analyze the use of Chinese labourers in salmon canneries, a short discussion by way of comparison is useful. Chinese contractors, or middlemen, supplied, supervised, and provisioned the bulk of the labour force for each cannery. Their labour forces were hired for the entire season, while native labourers working in the factories (that is, the women and children) were only given work when it was available. Race and gender distinctions were very important. Although native women in northern canneries might actually do work Chinese men performed in the south, within any one cannery there was a strict gender and racial division between the work performed by Chinese men and native women. The latter, and their children, received the lowest wages and least secure conditions of employment.

Chinese middlemen contracted with the canners before the season began for a set price, usually per case of salmon packed. If salmon runs were poor, the contractors rather than the canners absorbed the losses related to labour costs. Because they provisioned the Chinese crew, many contractors cut their losses by cutting back on supplies of food. The relation between contractor and labourer was linked to social organization in China, especially the area around Canton, where most of the Chinese labourers to the Pacific northwest originated. They left their families in China, tied to a deteriorating peasant economy suffering the effects of European military aggression in the last part of the nineteenth century. Therefore, as in the case of native labourers, salmon canners were able to pay another group of labourers below the costs of production and reproduction of their labour power. Only Chinese men originally came to North America (the few exceptions involved using Chinese women as prostitutes), and their subsistence requirements were linked to pre-capitalist relations of production, where the actual labour forces were for a time at least reproduced. Many comments were made by canners and others, for example, that Chinese men could live on nothing but rice. In other words, their living standards were judged to be far below those of white workers (Ward, 1978: 10). Unlike native peoples, however, they were more easily subordinated, since they were cut off from access to their means of subsistence, although dependent on pre-capitalist relations of production in China, through contractual agreements with middlemen (who for example, often paid their way to North America through loans binding labourers to contractors for a number of years) and obligations to their families in China (Chan, 1983: 43-46).

Geographical distance served to separate Chinese labourers from pre-capitalist relations of production. A similar method could not be employed for native labourers, nor was it desirable since salmon canners, especially in remote areas, required proximate labour supplies (thus cutting costs of transporting labourers). As previously discussed, the potlatch was the institution binding the socio-economic structure of the native population. Indian agents and missionaries tried to stop the ceremony for years, with varying degrees of success. In 1885, the potlatch was

legally banned by special amendment to the Indian Act. Capitalist penetration of the native economies was probably more successful than legal prohibition, but it does indicate a degree of awareness by the European population of its significance. Especially among the Kwakiutl, the practice continued in secret, and Indian agents complained bitterly of its persistence. The Tsimshian also resisted. They refused to allow any Indian agent to come and reside with them, and the Indian Act could not be enforced in the north for many years. An agent was only appointed in 1887, and he established his residence at Metlakatla, a mission village. The Tsimshian also prevented surveyors from establishing boundaries. Armed cruisers were sent from Victoria, and native leaders arrested (Department of Indian Affairs, 1887: x-xi).

Northern native groups could resist more effectively because European settlement had not penetrated that far, and contact with Europeans was not extensive. In the south, however, urban growth made subsistence increasingly difficult. For example, in 1886, the Fraser River salmon run failed. The native population was caught between both modes of production. It could not acquire the fish through traditional methods because there were no fish. Because there were no fish the canneries were not providing cash income, which meant that supplemental food commodities could not be purchased. To the extent that other food sources were not pursued because villages had relocated to the Fraser and to the extent that potlatching as a means of distributing food was no longer practiced, native people faced starvation.

In European society, sexual inequality structured labour in such a way that a different value was assigned to the labour power of each gender. As noted in the introduction, this allowed industrial capitalists to employ female labour power below its costs of production and reproduction. In British Columbia, salmon canners were primarily of European extraction, and they brought with them an ideology that valued the labour power of men and women differently, as well as that of non-European races. While native labourers, male and female, were paid lower wages than European labourers, native women (and children) were paid the lowest wages. While gender and racial characteristics have nothing to do with the operation of capitalist relations of production in the abstract, they have everything to do with the way those relations are practiced. Structures of inequality are used to structure labour forces, allowing large groups of labourers to be paid below the costs necessary to produce and reproduce their labour power. While gender and racial divisions are introduced in the workplace, pre-capitalist relations of production are necessary to allow these labourers to survive.

Women appear to have played a crucial role in the maintenance of the native economy. The Cowichan Indian agent remarked: "The Indian women and children are always the most eager to go to the hop-fields, where they always earn considerable sums of money, and, amongst these Indians, the wife's purse is generally entirely separate from the husband's" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1887: 92). Women used wages to buy clothing, furniture, stoves and sewing

machines, as well as staples like flour, tea, and sugar. Many young native men spent their incomes in the urban centers, causing people on the reserves to rely on the earnings of the women and children. Cowichan Indian agent Lomas provided an insightful summary of the effects of wage labour on village life.

All the younger men can find employment on farms or at the sawmills and canneries, and many families are about leaving for the hop fields of Washington Territory; but the very old people who formerly lived entirely on fish, berries and roots, suffer a good deal of hardship through the settling up of the country. The lands that once yielded berries and roots are now fenced and cultivated, and even on the hills the sheep have destroyed them. Then again, the game laws restrict the time for the killing of deer and grouse, and the fishery regulations interfere with their old methods of taking salmon and trout. With the younger men the loss of these kinds of food is more than compensated for by the good wages they earn, which supplement what they produce on their allotments; but this mode of life does away with their old customs of laying in a supply of dried meat, fish and berries for winter use, and thus the old people again suffer, for *Indians are often generous with the food they have taken in the chase, but begrudge giving what they have paid money for, without suitable return.* (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888: 105, emphasis added)

The quote illustrates the dilemma of a people caught in two different economic sets of relations. By the end of the 1880s, a pattern had emerged. In the early spring, the men went hunting and trapping, while the women and old men prepared gardens, planted potatoes, etc. However, as Lomas indicates, the yield from these sources had shrunk. Thus, when the salmon canneries opened in May or June, the entire village, except for the very old, was deserted as people sought to supplement their food supplies with food bought with wages. After the canning season, many families travelled to the hop fields where they could extend their wages (especially women, who did not have as many employment opportunities as did young men). After the canning season, other groups travelled to their fishing stations to catch and dry fish for their own use. On reserves with land unsuitable for farming, people purchased potatoes and vegetables from others, and concentrated on manufacturing activities during the winter months, including building boats and canoes, and household furniture. Women able to afford sewing machines made clothes for their families and to trade or sell; knitting machines were used to make, for example, the famous Cowichan sweaters.

However, the availability of wage employment was partially a result of the small size of the urban population. In the 1880s, the situation began to change. Ironically, salmon runs at the end of the decade were phenomenally large, but the employment of native peoples declined in proportion to the total labour force employed. In 1894, Superintendent Vowell concluded:

It is noticeable that within the last few years there has been a falling off in the gross earnings of the natives of British Columbia, which may be accounted for by the gradual influx of settlers of every nationality into the province, which increases each year. The Indians do not now, nor can they expect to in the future, make as much money as formerly in any line of industry or enterprise where the natives used to be the only people available for such employment and pursuits; whitemen and Japanese, and others, are at the present time to be seen in all directions and in great numbers competing with them in

the labour market, and in the occupations of fishing, trapping and hunting, etc. (Department of Indian Affairs, 1895: 202)

The trend Vowell notes was partially suspended in the fishing industry over the next few years because the enormous supply of fish led to the erection of new canneries. Native people were employed in large numbers, but their proportions lessened, especially on the Fraser. Contractors could offer cheap Chinese and Japanese labour (Japanese men competed with native and European fishers). Cannery jobs were segregated by race and gender, so that encroachments made by specific groups of labourers were perceived in racial terms, rather than as a method allowing employers to keep labour costs minimal.

As indicated in Table 2, between 1885 and 1890, the number of canneries increased from nine to thirty-two, most located on the Fraser River. Fishery officers feared overfishing would exhaust salmon stocks, as had occurred on the Columbia River system. In 1892, a fishery commission was appointed to investigate the problem. The evidence submitted gives some indication of the size and composition of cannery labour forces, although there was considerable variation. Overall, the average Fraser River plant employed approximately eight white men (foremen, firemen, and watchmen in charge of the retorts), one hundred Chinese men, forty to fifty native women, and eighteen to twenty boys (native and Chinese). One cannery paid native women \$1 a day while white boys received \$2. Chinese men were generally paid monthly by their contractors. In Wadham's cannery, for example, the "boss Chinaman" received \$.50 to \$.70 a case or a little over \$.01 per can. In this case, the Chinese contractors hired native women "and of course these Chinamen pay the Klooitchmen." He goes on to note "it would not pay any white to do the work the Chinamen do for the pay, or anything like what the canneries would be willing to pay ... a white man would starve to death." Native women received \$.10 an hour (\$.125 at Wadham's), while Chinese men received between \$30 and \$45 a month. White salmon (which, unlike the red fish, had no value in the can) was given free to the Indians (testimony of F.L. Lord, *B.C. Fishery Commission Report*, 1893: 178-179).

Numbers employed in any one day, however, varied a great deal. The canners retained a core of white and Chinese men to whom they guaranteed steady employment (white men were hired directly on to company payrolls and paid by the canners). Around this core, they required a number of casual labourers who could be called in at any time, and who might have to work around the clock. This was the reason it was so handy to have native families camped near the plants. In fact, one pioneer canneryman, Alexander Ewen, claimed it was necessary for canners to have licensed boats in order to offer employment to native men to fish, thereby making sure they brought their families to the cannery. "The real reason that you want to have those boats of your own and get Indian fishermen as they bring their families around and you have Indian women and boys, and some of the men, not fishermen, to work in the canneries, and when this extra fishing comes on you can take off your

own boats and get off to work in the cannery" (Lord, 1893: 117).

The result of the commission hearings was the abolishing of licensed boats on the Fraser River. The end of the decade witnessed a series of phenomenal runs to the river. In 1896, for the first time, a Pacific fish, salmon, generated the highest commercial revenues in the Canadian fisheries. By 1901, seventy-seven canneries were operating in the province, and thousands of fishers, of all nationalities, earned their livelihood on the Fraser alone. This was the golden age of the provincial salmon canning industry. During these years, all available labour, including native, Chinese, Japanese, and European, was in demand, although job structure continued to mirror gender and racial divisions.

Conclusion

The salmon canning industry has always been extremely volatile, dependent not only on a large supply of salmon, but also on a market in which provincial canners never dominated. In the early period, the chief market was the British working class. However, tinned salmon was a luxury and dropped from proletarian diets when wages fell or prices rose. In addition, several countries competed in supplying this market.

When B.C. Packers was formed, it closed a number of the canneries it had bought, and assumed a dominant position in the industry until the two world wars eroded that position. In countries allied to Canada, the wars created a high demand for canned salmon as a source of cheap protein easily preserved. New salmon canning companies were started to take advantage of the high profits which could be made. After World War II, Superintendent Vowell's prediction was finally and irrevocably borne out. One after another, salmon canneries which had operated for the better part of the century began to cease operations. The native population in the north suffered especially severely, since that part of the province was settled at a later stage than the south. Canning operations were increasingly combined and moved near large urban centers, primarily Vancouver and Prince Rupert. Canners could now recruit women from newly immigrating overseas populations (Japanese, East Indian, Portuguese, to name the most important), in addition to native women.

By the 1950s, native women could boast of three generations of women in their families who had worked in the same canneries. When the plants closed, the most mobile and best workers relocated to canneries still operating. But the majority were forced back to the reserves with no paid employment. The state filled the gap with unemployment insurance, welfare, and old age pensions. It is fitting to conclude with the testimony of native women cannery workers.

Kinship could be traced according to which women worked in which cannery. Mary Hopkins, born in the 1800s, is a retired cannery worker.

I am Bella Bella; my mother is from there. They all worked in canneries, my mother, my grandmother. I started when I was sixteen. Bella Bella, Rivers Inlet, later when I got married Butehead, Klemtu. Oh, I like it. I really enjoyed working in that cannery here. We used to hand fillet the herring. Every summer

I worked, worked long hours. Lots of fish; start at the morning, no time to rest. We got lots of money then. All the women were working.

When the canneries were closed, there is [sic] no more jobs for us. All the women have time. We were really sad when we heard it; some of them cried. Now we only get welfare. I get old-age pension. (Steltzer and Kerr, 1982: 47)

This woman judged her wages to be good. Since filleting is the most highly skilled job for women in fish plants, it commanded higher wages than, for example, washing fish. She also notes all the women worked, resulting in a relatively good income for the village. And working twenty hours in a row when one is paid by the hour, even without overtime pay, would result in a high money income for that period of time. The testimony of other women reveals that many thought they were paid poorly. However, in a way, it becomes relative, relative to the options available and to the other activities pursued by women to support themselves and their families. Wages had to be placed in the context of overall subsistence activities. Cannery work allowed them to pursue other, non-monetary means of earning their livelihood. However, cannery work was essential because some form of wage income had become necessary to supplement other subsistence activities. When that source of money income disappeared, other income sources were also gone and the native economy was no longer sufficient to support the population. State social assistance filled the gap.

Klemtu cannery, located on the central coast, closed in 1968, having operated for approximately forty years. Brenda Assu recalled how people used to congregate at Cassiar cannery, located on the Skeena River in the north, from Kitwanga, Kitsegeucula, Hazelton and probably Kispiox (Skogan, 1983: 37). Cassiar was the only operating cannery left in the early 1980s, its future in doubt since it had gone into receivership. Sunnyside on the Skeena, was built in 1916, closing in 1969. Mabel Ridley recalled how people came to work from upriver, from Kitkatla, Port Simpson, Hartley Bay, and Kitimat. Most of them worked in the cannery all their lives. In addition to being a cannery worker, she was also a midwife.

I learned these things [midwifery] from my mother and my sister. At Sunnyside, when they first call me, I stay up all night maybe 'til the hard labour starts and the baby is born sometimes at five or six in the morning. Then I go to my house and tend to my own family and go to work. I was floor lady at Sunnyside for twenty years (Skogan, 1983: 38).

Elizabeth Spalding began to work in 1916, when she was eight years old. Her mother was afraid to walk from the reserve to Port Essington (on the Skeena) by herself, so she took her daughter. She brought a box for her to stand on, and the women showed her how to do the work. She has been in the industry almost sixty years. She recalled Japanese women working there, with their babies strapped to their backs. "We don't know what rest is when we're young. When there's lots of fish we just quit for two hours to sleep then work again. After a while we were paid around fifty dollars a ticket, but now they make real lots of money. Cheap in my time" (Skogan, 1983: 63-64).

Finally, Leona Sparrow recorded the life histories of her paternal grandparents, both of whom were Salish (Fraser River area). Rose Sparrow also remembered Japanese women working in the canneries with their small babies strapped to their backs, while older children were kept in boxes in the cannery, where the women could keep an eye on them. Native women generally had either an older daughter or a grandmother to care for young children. Rose's twelve-year-old daughter looked after the children, one of whom was born at a Skeena River cannery. Rose left work at eight and the baby was born four hours later. She was allowed to return home to breast feed the baby because their home was close to the plant (Sparrow, 1976: 93-94).

"Cheap in my time" is perhaps a fitting epitaph. An attempt has been made here to demonstrate how the native economy was transformed but not destroyed when capitalists began to prosecute the provincial fisheries. The more general argument is that industrial capitalists will attempt to pay labour power below the costs necessary for its production and reproduction. They can do this if pre-capitalist relations of production continue within capitalism and if structured inequality exists. The latter serves to split the working class into organized workers who seek wages to cover their own and their dependents' costs of production and reproduction, and those groups disadvantaged along a variety of dimensions. Up until World War II, native people, Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian peoples were all considered to be non-people by the state. While European male workers used political means to achieve economic gains, these groups were invisible politically. The implications of these historic, non-capitalist divisions are that Marx's concept of the value of labour power as uniformly determined (thus reduced to a single figure in any one period of time) must be revised. The value of labour power is determined not only in the economic marketplace but also in the course of class struggle. Where structured inequality predates capitalist relations, advantaged groups *within* and *outside* class relations will use distinctions like gender and race in class struggle with capitalist employers.

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The politics of dependence: Women, work and unemployment in the Vancouver labour movement before World War II*

Gillian Creese

Abstract. This paper addresses the way that gender relations structured women's experiences in the Vancouver labour market and the labour movement before World War II. The social construction of women as dependents of men, regardless of their individual situation, affected the conditions women faced in the workplace and when unemployed. Women did not have an established right to work, so they also had no right to unemployment relief. Since patriarchal gender relations affected workers' experiences in the workplace and throughout civil society, gender also structured working-class politics. The strategies that the Vancouver labour movement adopted to address issues of women's work and the problem of unemployment were premised on the dependence of women within the family, and sought to preserve domesticity as the primary sphere for working-class women. During the depression of the 1930s, however, unemployed women began to challenge the centrality of patriarchal relations in working-class politics by demanding equal treatment for the unemployed regardless of marital status or sex.

Résumé. Cette étude démontre la façon dont les attitudes envers la femme ont structuré les expériences de la femme dans le marché du travail de la ville de Vancouver et dans l'organisation du travail avant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. La structure sociale a causé aux femmes d'être dépendantes des hommes, sans tenir compte de leur situation individuelle, et a affecté les conditions auxquelles les femmes devaient faire face dans le lieu de travail aussi bien qu'au chômage. Étant donné que la femme n'avait pas de droits établis pour travailler, donc elle n'avait pas de droits à l'assurance chômage. Puisque le concept patriarcal a toujours déterminé les expériences de l'individu dans le lieu de travail autant que dans la structure sociale, le statut masculin a toujours déterminé les politiques parmi la classe ouvrière. Les stratégies adoptées par l'organisation du travail de la ville de Vancouver, pour soulever les questions de la femme dans le travail et le problème du chômage, étaient basées d'après la dépendance de la femme au foyer, et ces stratégies ont cherché à sauvegarder le foyer domestique comme phase primaire des femmes de la classe ouvrière. Durant la grande dépression des années 30, cependant, les femmes sans travail ont commencé à lancer un défi contre le concept patriarcal dans les politiques des classes ouvrières en demandant l'égalité des droits pour tous les chômeurs, indépendamment de leur état civil ou de leur sexe.

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Introduction

The development of social history during the last two decades has provided an impetus for the emergence of historical sociology in Canada. Social history, or new labour history, attempts to overcome the organizational and economic orientation of conventional labour history by reinserting workers into their social context and examining a broad range of working-class practices arising from the many facets of workers' lives. Following the work of E.P. Thompson (1963) and Eric Hobsbawm (1964), social historians have focused on the way that classes are "made" by the workers themselves. Although few historians would use sociological language, the subject of enquiry is the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, the interplay between social relations that produce the working class and the social relations that the workers produce and reproduce. In essence then, social history is the study of the structuration of classes (see Giddens, 1979; Przeworski, 1977).

Since the 1960s Canadian social historians have made an important contribution to our understanding of class and class formation in Canada (see Kealey and Warrian, 1976; Kealey, 1980, 1981; Langdon, 1972, 1975; and Palmer, 1979, 1983). Yet Canadian social historians have given little consideration to relations of subordination other than class relations, in particular to relations of gender and ethnicity that structure the conditions workers face within the workplace and throughout civil society. Indeed there has been a tendency to present an undifferentiated characterization of working-class experiences in a particular time and workplace that has usually been synonymous with the experiences of white male workers. In spite of the conceptual and empirical conflation of workers with white male workers in Canada, social history can uncover the heterogeneity of working-class life, as historians like Eugene Genovese (1972), Herbert Gutman (1976), and Gerda Lerner (1976, 1979) have demonstrated. Although many social historians have chosen to ignore the heterogeneity, contradictions, and conflicts within working-class experiences, these should be recognized as essential elements of the "making" of classes. This requires abandoning the *a priori* primacy that conventional Marxist theory affords to class and class relations over other relations of power and domination, and focusing on the articulation of class relations with relations of gender and ethnicity.

Women in the Vancouver labour market

A central feature of the labour market in early twentieth-century Vancouver, as in all contemporary societies, was the segregation between women's and men's wage labour. In addition to segregation within the labour market, women also faced segregation within the home. Indeed, the role of women's labour within the family was closely related to gender segregation within the labour market. Patriarchal family relations defined women as dependent/subordinate to male breadwinners within the family while, at the same time, the economic realities of working-class life forced many women into wage labour. A gender ideology that stressed women's

domesticity as natural and appropriate, and the contradictions between the existing family-household system and women's wage labour, greatly affected women's position within the labour market (see Barrett, 1980). Defined as dependents of men within the family, women's wage labour was treated differently than men's. Gender defined the nature of one's experience in the labour market, the kinds of work available, the level of remuneration, and the patterns of wage labour. This gender definition of work experiences meant that gender relations played an important part in the development of working-class politics in Vancouver.

In 1901 female workers comprised only 6 percent of the British Columbia labour force. The labour force participation of women increased slowly over the next three decades, and 14 percent of the labour force was female by 1931. Half of the female labour force in the province in 1931, or almost 22,000 women, laboured for wages in the urban centre of Vancouver. By 1931 women comprised 19 percent of the Vancouver labour force (see *Census*, 1931, Vol. 3: 756-763; 1951, Vol. 5: 2-5, 2-6). The majority of these women were employed in only a handful of occupations. Of all women employed in Vancouver in 1931, 96 percent worked in domestic and personal service, trade and finance, the professional sector, manufacturing, and transportation (see Table 1). Women were concentrated within a limited number of jobs within each of these sectors of employment. Of all women working in domestic and personal service, 94 percent worked in one of three types of jobs: 44 percent worked as domestic servants; 33 percent were employees in hotels, restaurants, and boarding houses; and 19 percent were tailoresses, laundresses, and hairdressers. In trade and finance, 88 percent of women worked as office clerks in banks and insurance companies, and in the retail trades as saleswomen. Nurses, teachers, and legal secretaries comprised 85 percent of professional women. In manufacturing, 65 percent of women worked in food processing, textiles, and bookbinding; 72 percent of women in transportation were telephone operators (see *Census*, 1931, Vol. 3: 756-763).¹

Female workers were typically confined to women's jobs where they earned, on average, between one-half and two-thirds of what men earned. The average weekly wage for Vancouver women, as a percentage of men's average weekly wage, was 63 percent in 1911, 62 percent in 1921, and 56 percent in 1931 (see Table 2).

1. The 1931 *Census of Canada* did not record individual occupations within the professional or trade and finance sectors. Women in the professions were classified as working within education, health, or law. In contrast, the 1911 *Census* listed occupations within these sectors, and 81 percent of women were recorded as nurses, teachers, or stenographers in the professions. Similarly, in 1931 trade and finance was only classified according to the broad categories of retail trades, banks, and insurance companies. In contrast, the 1911 *Census* listed 78 percent of women in trade and finance as office workers and saleswomen. There can be little doubt, however, that women classified under education, health, and law in 1931 continue to refer to teachers, nurses, and legal secretaries (rather than professors, doctors, or lawyers), or that those in retail continue to be predominantly sales clerks, and in banks and insurance companies predominantly office workers rather than managers (see *Census of Canada*, 1911, Vol. 6: 286-297; and 1931, Vol. 3: 756-763).

Table 1. The occupational distribution of the female labour force in Vancouver, 1931.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Employed women</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Agriculture	21	0
Building trades	79	0
Domestic and personal service	8,060	37
Civil and municipal government	388	2
Fishing and hunting	1	0
Forestry	24	0
Manufacturing and mechanical	1,858	8
Mining	24	0
Professional	4,169	19
Trade and Finance	5,569	25
Transportation	1,598	7
Unstated	136	1
All occupations	21,927	99

Source: *Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. 3: 756-763.*

Table 2. Average weekly earnings for adult wage earners in Vancouver, by gender, 1911, 1921, and 1931.*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Average weekly earnings</u>
June 1910-June 1911	
Male	\$19.16
Female	\$12.13
June 1920-June 1921	
Male	\$24.62
Female	\$15.34
June 1930-June 1931	
Male	\$25.63
Female	\$14.40

* Adult wage earners are defined as those over fifteen years of age.

Source: *Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. 5: 23-27.*

The nature of women's paid employment was related to their role as primary domestic workers. The low level of remuneration for women's work and the difficulty of monopolizing skills to raise wages was at least partly related to the fact that women's paid labour often involved skills related to domestic labour (see Barrett, 1980; Hartmann, 1979). In addition, the burden of domestic responsibilities for married women usually restricted women's paid labour to the period before marriage, or when other circumstances, such as high male unemployment or the death or desertion of a spouse, made employment necessary. Domestic responsibilities also constrained the ability of female workers to organize. The lack of available time and energy, limited access to meeting halls and media, isolation from other workers, the absence of child care facilities, the expectation that marriage would

soon end paid labour, and the prevailing notions of appropriate female behaviour all hampered women's attempts to raise wages and improve working conditions (see Rosenthal, 1979; Frager, 1983). In contrast, male workers were both economically and politically stronger, with higher wages, access to skilled jobs, full citizenship rights, and access to labour media and meeting places. Male workers also had the time to engage in politics and union organizing that their wives' domestic labour made possible. Male workers were capable of demanding more for their labour than were women and, since men were the primary breadwinners, higher male wages became defined as a right in the context of the "family wage" strategy of the labour movement.

The prevalence of a gender ideology and family structure that defined women as primary domestic labourers dependent on men is central to the development of a politically divided working class. Issues of women and wage labour were constructed around the role of women as wives and mothers, the need to protect women, and to preserve the sanctity of the family. Issues of male wage labour, on the other hand, centered on questions of a living wage and, increasingly, a male "family wage." The convergence of views among middle-class reformers, male working-class organizations, and the state about female domesticity generated protective legislation for women and children in Canada as it had in other capitalist societies.²

As the proceedings and the *Report of Labour Conditions in British Columbia* in 1914 illustrate, the nature of the discourse on women's labour was couched in terms of female dependence on men. In their testimony employers stressed that women were not expected to have to live on their salaries and, therefore, women's wages had nothing to do with any notion of a "living wage." Young women earned about \$1 a day in stores and factories in Vancouver at a time when the Vancouver Local Council of Women estimated that \$10 a week was a minimum living wage for a young woman.³ Employers argued that they only hired young women living at

2. The acceptance of domesticity as the appropriate sphere for women was expressed within the socialist as well as the reformist sections of the labour movement. Kealey (1984) and Sangster (1985) have recently shown that the Socialist Party of Canada and the Communist Party of Canada, respectively, accepted the ideology of female domesticity and based their responses to the "woman question" accordingly. For this reason, female workers were not treated more equitably within the Vancouver labour movement during periods of strengthened socialist politics. In contrast, the labour movement's response to Asian workers in Vancouver, against whom there was a long history of exclusion and racism, was more equitable during periods of upsurges in socialist politics than when reformist politics dominated (see Creese, 1986).
3. The Vancouver Local Council of Women presented a report at the Royal Commission on Labour recommending legislating minimum wages for women working in stores and factories. The minimum wage that the Council recommended was actually \$7.50 per week, although they argued that a woman could not live on less than \$10 per week for a "bare living without any other expenses at all." Presumably the Vancouver Local Council of Women felt that a more conservative recommendation would be more likely to become law, and thus improve the abysmal wages of women even if the minimum wage fell far short of a "living wage" (see PABC, GR 684, Box 2, File 1: 1-13).

home, that it was not respectable for a young woman to be living elsewhere and because they lived at home higher wages were not necessary. As the manager of a Vancouver laundry testified:

Q. With the minimum wage you pay a woman, \$1.25 a day, if she were not living at home do you think she could live on that?

A. No. I would not expect her to They should not be away from home, those that get \$1.25 a day.

Q. Suppose it was not their own fault? Suppose their parents were dead and they had to go to work?

A. I don't expect they could live on that. But these girls that get \$1.25 have homes and help to support the family by working in the laundry. That is the way I look at it. (PABC, Gr 684, Box 1, File 8:105)

Young teenage girls, from fourteen to sixteen years of age, worked for even lower wages in order to acquire job experience. There are reports of young teenage girls earning as little as \$3 and \$4 a week in department stores, and other instances of young girls working as apprentices to tailoresses for nothing (see PABC, GR 684, Boxes 1 and 2). The availability of this cheap pool of labour helped to keep the wages of women workers low. In general all single women were expected to live with their parents until they married. After marriage women were not expected to work in the labour market, and if they did low wages were justified in terms of married women's dependence on their husbands.

Table 3. Age and marital status of the female labour force in British Columbia, 1931 (in percentage).

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total female labour force</u>	<u>Single</u>	<u>Married/widow/divorced</u>
10-24	48	97	3
25-44	35	69	31
45 and over	17	37	63
All ages	100	76	24

Source: *Census of Canada*, 1931, Vol. 3: 669.

It is difficult to assess how many women working in Vancouver were supporting themselves or other dependents. Of all women in the British Columbia labour force in 1931, 76 percent were single, but marital status varied according to age. Young women under 25 years of age comprised 48 percent of female workers, of whom 97 percent were single. Thirty-five percent of working women were between the ages of 25 and 44, of whom 31 percent were married, widowed, or divorced. Seventeen percent of employed women were over the age of 45, of whom 63 percent were married, widowed, or divorced (see Table 3). It seems reasonable to assume that a large percentage of women in the labour force were responsible for their own support, while many older women were probably also responsible for supporting dependents. It is clear, however, that the real status of dependence was less important than the definition of all women as dependents of men. Regardless of their

marital status, men earned higher wages and had access to better jobs than women. Moreover, during periods of high unemployment both gender and marital status affected the situation of working-class women. Strategies to promote male employment over female employment, and the inability of single women to get municipal relief under any circumstances, were directly related to the social definition of all women as dependents of men.

Women and the labour movement: The politics of dependence

White male workers dominated all working-class organizations in early twentieth-century Vancouver. Trade unions and labour reform and socialist political parties were headed by white men, constituted primarily by white men, and defined issues as they affected white male workers. Both women workers and Asian workers took part in labour politics, joined unions, and engaged in strike activity during this period, but each did so from a position of economic and political weakness vis-à-vis white male workers. In the case of Asian workers, the organized labour movement in Vancouver pursued strategies of exclusion until the 1930s.⁴ With the exception of some skilled craft unions, it was rare for female workers to be excluded from labour organizations. Indeed, the inclusion of women was often proclaimed as an objective of the labour movement. Women were not, however, included as equal members of the labour movement.

For the most part, the organized labour movement in Vancouver either ignored the conditions facing female workers, supported protective legislation for women, or sought the inclusion of women in trade unions to supplement the strategies of male workers. Women who worked in traditional female jobs were encouraged to join the labour movement; the few women in non-traditional jobs were more often excluded from trade unions. Women usually belonged to one of two kinds of unions: unions that emerged in industries that were predominantly female, such as laundry workers, waitresses, candy makers, telephone operators, garment workers, and domestic workers; and unions in predominantly male industries that were either unskilled or were already undergoing the process of deskilling, for example tailoring, retail clerks, bookbinders, boot and shoe makers, cannery workers, farm labourers, packing-plant workers, and sugar refinery workers. Skilled craft unions either existed in areas where women did not work, or attempted to resist the

4. Asian workers were the major source of "cheap labour" in competition with white male workers in British Columbia. The British Columbia labour movement adopted strategies to exclude Asian workers from specific jobs, from joining the labour movement (until 1927), and from further immigration to Canada. Agitation against Asian workers began in the 1870s and lasted, with a brief hiatus during the period of militancy immediately following World War I, until the depression of the 1930s. The radicalization of the labour movement during the 1930s, the growth of socialist politics stressing the unity of all workers, and the increased participation of Asian workers in labour conflicts during the depression, helped to strengthen ethnic solidarity within the Vancouver labour movement during the 1930s (see Creese, 1986).

introduction of female labour by excluding women from the unions. Among skilled unions — for example, cigar makers and bookbinders — unionized male workers attempted without success to resist the introduction of machines and female labour by excluding women (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 9 January 1914: 7). In 1913 the Moulders' Union advocated banning women from foundries because it was considered unsuitable work for women, a view endorsed by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (see Rosenthal, 1979: 37). The Barbers' Union also refused to allow female barbers, or Asian barbers, into their organization (see PABC, GR 684, Box 1, File 2: 104).⁵

The evaluation of male labour as dear and female labour as cheap was entrenched within labour movement practices and union contracts. Low female wages and higher male wages were a standard feature of the labour market whether or not women were unionized. Even in predominantly female unions, such as the Laundry Workers and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees' Union, differential male and female wages for the same jobs were incorporated within union wage demands and contracts. During a strike of workers at seven Vancouver laundries in the fall of 1918, for example, wage demands included \$18 for female and \$25 for male head markers, \$15 for female and \$20 for male assistant markers, and a minimum wage of \$12 for women and \$24 for male drivers. These wage demands emerged out of a strike of 290 laundry workers, of whom 236 were women. During a long strike at the Vancouver Sugar Refinery in 1917, the union settled for a 10 percent wage increase for male workers but nothing for the women, even though women earned only \$.17 to \$.20 an hour, while men already earned a minimum of \$.32 an hour.⁶

Demands for equal pay for the same jobs, even demands for across the board rather than percentage increases, did not begin to occur until the 1930s, when these demands emerged among striking waitresses. There was a long history of pay differences between union waiters and waitresses performing identical work. In 1907 the union scale was \$9.50 per week for waitresses and \$12 for waiters; in 1912 it was \$12 and \$14 respectively; in 1919, \$16.50 and \$19.50; and in 1926 wages were \$18.50 per week for waitresses and \$25 for waiters. Waitresses in the Vancouver area took part in ten separate strikes during the 1930s. In a period of high labour militancy among employed women, Vancouver waitresses were the most

5. Before World War II women belonged to unions of tailoresses, retail clerks, laundry workers, waitresses, candy makers, telephone operators, bookbinders, garment workers, domestic workers, boot and shoe makers, cannery workers, farm labourers, packing-plant workers, and sugar refinery workers (see *Labour Gazette*, 1900-1939; *Western Clarion*, 1903-1920; *B.C. Trades Unionist and Union Label Bulletin*, 1908-1909; *Western Wage Earner*, 1909-1911; *British Columbia Federationist*, 1911-1925; *British Columbia Labour News*, 1921-1922; *Labour Statesman*, 1924-1934; *Unemployed Worker*, 1931-1934; *B.C. Workers' News*, 1935-1937; *People's Advocate*, 1937-1939; Canada, Department of Labour Strikes and Lockout Files, 1907-1939 (PAC RG 27); Rosenthal, 1979).

6. See PAC, RG 27, Vol. 310, Strike 182 and Vol. 305, Strike 21; *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 September 1918: 1; *Labour Gazette*, December, 1918.

militant group of women. During a strike in 1933 equal wages of \$12 per week for waiters and waitresses were, for the first time, placed on the labour agenda by the striking waitresses.⁷

Labour practices incorporating lower female wages for the same or similar work were part of the strategy for a male "family wage" wherein a man's wage should be based on the support of himself and his dependent wife and children. Support for a male "family wage" even led some socialists to chide women for seeking equal pay. For example, an article in *The Western Clarion* argued that:

Your plea for equal wages is at variance with the possibilities of modern capitalism. The wage of the male is in the main fixed by the requirements of the head of a family, upon whom is dependent the future supply of wage slaves. Your wage is based upon the requirements of the individual.... You are helping to cheapen him. You intensify his struggle to live, and, ironical thought it may seem, insofar as you crowd him from industry you aggravate the poverty of your own sex, the wife and daughters dependent upon him (*Western Clarion*, 23 May 1914: 1).

Issues specific to female workers, such as equal pay or child care, seldom gained prominence within labour politics. Not surprisingly, women's leadership roles within the labour movement were restricted to unions in which women formed a large part of the membership. The Tailors, Garment Workers, Laundry Workers, Domestic Workers, and Hotel and Restaurant Employees' Unions, which had a majority of female members, were the only unions to elect female delegates to the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (see VTLC Minutes, 1900-1939). Women's leadership roles were, however, extremely restricted even in unions where they formed a majority of the membership.

The pattern of labour politics that developed around gender centred not on women's role within the labour market, which was considered to be, and usually was, temporary, but on the way that conditions of wage labour affected women's current or future roles as wives and mothers. Labour politics focused on the appropriate sphere for working-class women, not on their rights as workers. Indeed, women did not have "rights" as independent workers as did men. The central strategies for resolving the problems of female workers were legislation to protect the "weaker sex," and the institution of a male "family wage" adequate for a man to support his dependent wife and children. These labour strategies were firmly premised on a gender ideology which defined domesticity as the appropriate sphere for women. The redefinition of women as equal workers and citizens was prerequisite to bridging gender divisions, but the redefinition of women as equal members of the working class posed a fundamental threat to male dominance within the family.

The labour movement's concern with the low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions facing women often centred on the "moral" well being of female

7. See the Minutes of the Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary Employees' Union, local 28, 1907-1926; and PAC, RG 27, Vol. 356, Strike 89.

workers. These concerns ranged from the moral dangers facing women who performed services for male customers that were deemed appropriate for men but improper for women (for example barbering or cocktail waitressing), to "dirty work" that could imperil the health of future mothers (for example work in the foundries), to the problem of female prostitution which was commonly linked to wages too low for self-support.⁸ At the hearings of the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in British Columbia in 1914, for example, a representative of the Barbers' Union provided the following explanation of why women were not allowed into the union:

The general objection brought before the International is that when women come to slopping around over some of these dirty old bums the way they sometimes have to do we don't consider that they ought to be in that kind of business. It does them no good as a general rule. I don't think you would choose a lady barber for a wife. (PABC, GR 684, Box 1, File 2: 104)

Demands by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council for factory inspectors and hours of work legislation for women and children were also couched in terms of alleviating conditions "inimical to the physical and moral well being of females and young persons" (VTLC Minutes, 15 December 1904). In 1914 a joint committee of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the Vancouver Local Council of Women and the Vancouver Board of Trade, pressed for protective legislation for women regarding hours of work, overtime, minimum wages, and a prohibition against white women working "in the same establishment with Asiatics" (PABC, GR 684, Box 2, File 1: 13-15). All of this legislation was justified on the basis of protecting female and young workers from the excesses of capitalist exploitation and moral degradation, rather than in terms of their rights as workers.

The employment of women in traditional men's jobs during World War I raised the issue of the equality of male and female workers in a different form. Support for female suffrage had grown within the Vancouver labour movement during the previous decade, although it was premised on support for "maternal feminism," the beneficial moral influence of women on social issues, rather than on conceptions of women as equal citizens.⁹ The following excerpt from the *The Western Wage Earner* typifies labour's support for female suffrage:

8. For discussions of the moral dangers that women faced from engaging in "improper work," and the labour view that prostitution was directly related to low female wages, see the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Labour Conditions in British Columbia; the Minutes of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, 1889-1940; and *British Columbia Federationist*, 1911-1925.

9. Socialist support for female suffrage was more contradictory. Although the socialist members of the provincial legislature proposed numerous female suffrage bills before one was adopted in 1917, many other socialists argued that suffrage was a bourgeois women's movement, and therefore regressive. As an article in *The Western Clarion* argued, "Remember that those who talk of the woman question, of women's rights, and her place at home, who [talk] of social reform and the power of the 'better sex' to overcome evil conditions by tactful means, are working against your interests. There is no 'woman question.' There is only one question for you to solve, the slave question and it calls men and women alike" (*Western Clarion*, 10 December 1910: 1).

Women should vote because their vote would supplement man's, and while he looked after the big things they would look after the little things ... [such as making sure] that the street cleaner did his duty, so that her children might not be killed by diphtheria (*Western Wage Earner*, February 1909: 19-20).

The conditions of a war economy posed the question of female equality in a more fundamental way than had suffrage. The performance of women in previously male jobs brought into question many of the notions about women's capabilities that had been used to justify lower wages and restricted job opportunities for women.¹⁰ Traditions of male privilege in most jobs and unequal pay for men and women doing the same kinds of work were challenged by the events of the war. As Helena Gutteridge, a leading feminist in the Vancouver labour movement, wrote:

Thank God for the war. If it will be a means of forcing upon the people a realization that men and women who labor are first and foremost workers, and all they have to sell is their labor power, not as "men" or "women" but as workers. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 15 October 1915: 1)

Women working for low wages while filling men's jobs were a serious threat to male workers. Many workers feared that this would result in the reduction of men's wages and increased male unemployment when the war ended. For this reason male workers were encouraged to insist upon equal pay wherever "women replace men or work side by side with men, doing the same amount of work, of the same quality in the same time" (*British Columbia Federationist*, 15 October 1915: 1).

Support for equal pay for women doing "men's work" was adopted by the organized labour movement during the war out of expediency. Trade unions supported equal pay in order to protect male jobs for soldiers returning home, not because the experiences of the war generated new perceptions of women's equality. The Machinists Association, for example, supported equal wages for women only when the Canadian Pacific Railway munitions shop in Vancouver started to replace soldiers with women. The machinists demanded that men be hired wherever possible, that returning soldiers be given preference for jobs, and that when women were hired, as a last resort, they be paid the same wages as men (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 5 January 1917: 3). Similarly, the street car conductors demanded that female replacements "become members of our association and receive the same wages and consideration as the men," although they were not expected to remain conductors for long (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 November 1916: 4). The postal clerks recommended that female replacements be hired on a temporary basis so that these jobs would be available to soldiers when

10. Rationalizations for lower women's wages during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included the lower nutritional needs of women, the higher output of male labour, the lower qualifications of female workers, the more demanding nature of male jobs, and the argument that men supported families while women did not (see Drake, 1984). As Bannerman, Chopik, and Zurbrigg (1984) have pointed out, when the British Columbia labour movement did support equal pay it was premised on assumptions that men were superior workers, and that employers would hire men rather than women if forced to pay the same wages for the same work.

they returned (see Campbell, 1980: 181). The Trades and Labour Congress, at its annual convention in September of 1915, amended its platform dropping the demand for the "exclusion of women from factories, workshops, and mines" and including the "principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women" (see *Labour Gazette*, October 1915: 405). Support for equal pay for women during the war was, however, a short-term strategy to protect male wages:

We will not only benefit them [women] by helping them to secure equal pay for equal work, but we shall, at the same time, prevent our own wages and conditions from being drawn down to a lower standard by any successful efforts of employers to use female labor at a lower price. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 6 September 1918: 7)

The issue of equal pay for women was dropped from the agenda of the labour movement in Vancouver and elsewhere in Canada once the war was over and women were again confined to traditional "women's work" at traditionally lower women's wages. As the post-war depression set in, concern over unemployment dominated labour politics in Vancouver; concern about the conditions facing employed and unemployed women returned to issues of morality and the effect that cheap female labour had on male wages.

The dependence of women on men within the family affected the conditions facing women during periods of high unemployment. Married women and single women living with their families were considered to have no right to hold jobs while men were unemployed, regardless of whether these women worked to support dependents. The right of single self-supporting women to jobs was less contentious by this time, but the dependent status of women affected self-supporting women nonetheless. Unemployed women, unlike men, were ineligible for municipal relief under any circumstances. Since women did not have an established right to work, they also had no right to unemployment relief. During periods of high unemployment women were dependent on charity organizations. In response to high female unemployment before World War I, for example, the Vancouver Local Council of Women established a Women's Labour Exchange to provide domestic work for unemployed women and a creche to care for their children (see *Labour Gazette*, November 1913: 556; January, 1914: 789-790). While unemployed men received relief, however limited and inadequate, from the municipal government during periods of high unemployment before and after World War I, women received no state support when unemployed (see *British Columbia Labour News*, 24 March 1921: 1).

During the first part of the post-war depression in 1920 and 1921, the Vancouver labour movement was primarily concerned with male unemployment. As the depression deepened in 1922 the situation of unemployed single women was recognized as more extreme than that facing unemployed men, who received at least some city relief. The vision of women turning to prostitution out of desperation was raised within the labour movement (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 3 March

1922: 1). The prospect of immorality among unemployed women was linked to unemployment in general, and to the presence of married women in the labour market in particular. As a delegate at a Vancouver Trades and Labour Council meeting commented:

...a number of married women were working for low wages and taking the place of single girls. Some of these women, he said, joined some league for the uplift of fallen women, but were at the same time driving more on the streets. (*Labour Statesman*, 9 July 1926: 1)

The issue of married women working for wages was never clear cut because it was recognized that those with unemployed or absent husbands needed the employment. The central strategy proposed to address unemployment was to increase male employment and to "get the [male] laborers wage increased," which in turn would reduce the need for women to enter the labour market (see *Labour Statesman*, 9 July 1926: 1).

As always, employers took advantage of high unemployment to try and reduce wages. Although new female minimum wage laws were established in most areas of the labour market after the war, different rates for girls under 18 and for inexperienced labour reduced the job security of more experienced women. In the mercantile sector, for example, the female minimum wage was set at \$12.75 per week. However, girls under 18 earned a minimum wage of \$7.50 per week for the first three months of work, rising to \$11 after two years, or when they turned 18 and received the adult minimum wage of \$12.75. Women over 18 classified as inexperienced workers started at \$9 per week for the first three months, with an increase of \$1 every three months up to the minimum wage of \$12.75. Female minimum wage legislation followed this pattern in all industries, excepting those where no minimum wages were established.¹¹

In an effort to reduce wages, employers preferred to hire young female workers living with their parents, and were reported to be dismissing experienced women to replace them with cheaper workers (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 24 March 1922: 1; 20 July 1923: 1-2). These practices increased the number of unemployed and destitute self-supporting women. Although the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council had supported the implementation of female minimum wage legislation as a solution to low wages, it became clear that the legislation was ineffective in the

11. Female minimum wage laws were established in British Columbia in the early 1920s but, in addition to setting lower minimum wages for those under 18 and without experience, no minimum wages were established in the areas of farm labour, domestic service, or fish canning, so many women continued to be paid well below the established minimum wages. (see Appendix, Minimum Wage Act, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour*, 1932). In addition, the onus of enforcement for the minimum wage laws was placed on working women, who were required to launch a complaint with the Minimum Wage Board before wages were investigated in any particular workplace. Without the protection of union organization, and especially during periods of high unemployment, enforcement of the laws was virtually impossible.

absence of union organization. In the summer of 1922 the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council requested that a woman organizer be contracted since "the unorganized state of women in the local factories, make[s] it impossible to get any effective results from the Minimum Wage Act" (see Vancouver Trades and Labour Council Minutes, 16 May 1922). Women who filed complaints with the Minimum Wage Board were often fired, and there were reports of blacklists against women workers who testified before the Board (see *British Columbia Federationist*, 27 July 1923: 3). The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council advocated the organization of women for two reasons: first, to enforce the Minimum Wage Act and provide greater job security during times of high unemployment; and second, so that lower female wages would not contribute to the lowering of male wages. A strategy of organizing female workers was still designed more to preserve higher male wages than to raise women's wages to a living level. As an article in *The British Columbia Federationist* stated:

Female labor always has been more exploited than that of men, because it is, naturally, a more uncertain quantity. But the lower rate of wages paid to women affects men's labor indirectly, causing the latter to be cut out entirely, or employed at lower than standard rates in many industries. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 28 March 1924:1)

The chronic economic stagnation of the 1920s was not conducive to successful union organizing among men or women, so nothing was accomplished to improve the situation of working women during this period. Increasingly, however, women began to demand equal rights to jobs and relief, a movement that gained considerable success during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The politics of unemployment: women's struggle for equality

Although the organization of unemployed women began during the 1920s, it did not advance very far until the Great Depression. Unemployed women remained separate from the stronger and more successful unemployed men's organizations, and the organization of unemployed women was not pursued by the Vancouver labour movement as a whole. As Mrs. J.S. Woodsworth told a meeting of unemployed women in Vancouver, women had to demand the right to government relief:

Unemployed girls and women are just awakening to their position, and are now realizing that it is the duty of the government to help them out in their needs. The only way to get the desired help is to follow the spirit of the times and organize in an unemployed body, like the men, then if times get better, we can be better able to organize industrially, and so have a good standard of living. (*British Columbia Federationist*, 24 March 1922: 1)

Unemployed Vancouver women did not win any right to relief during the 1920s. The records of the City of Vancouver indicate that in November of 1930 only 155 women were on city relief rolls, compared to 4,513 married men and 5,244 single men (see Vancouver City Archives, Vancouver City Records, Social Services Files 106, A6). The marital status of women was not recorded because single women were

ineligible for relief under any circumstances. The few women on relief were most likely widows and deserted wives with dependents who were unable to find work or unfit to perform it. As the severity of the depression set in, the movement to remove married women from the labour market in preference to men and, secondarily, single women intensified. Gender and marital status were important determinants of the conditions experienced by unemployed workers throughout the depression.

The severity of the economic depression of the 1930s radicalized the working class in Vancouver as in other parts of the country. Women were more actively involved in trade union organizations and strike activity than in any previous period in the city's history and, as we have seen, equal pay demands were placed on the labour agenda by striking women workers for the first time.¹² Unemployed women, both single and married, were also radicalized during the Great Depression and played an important role in defining the political issues around unemployment. In a period of general opposition to married women working, organized unemployed women began to challenge the centrality of patriarchal relations in working-class politics by demanding equal treatment for the unemployed regardless of marital status or sex.

The situation facing unemployed single women remained extremely precarious throughout the 1930s, but as the depression wore on unemployed women were successful in winning limited rights to relief. In the early 1930s, when married unemployed men and their families were receiving groceries and single unemployed men received meal tickets, unemployed single women were still denied any form of relief (see *Unemployed Worker*, 12 December 1931: 3). In response to the desperate situation of many women, at least one women's hostel was established by charity organizations.¹³ Short-term residence in the women's hostel was the only alternative to domestic service or, when domestic service could not be found, prostitution (see *Unemployed Worker*, 27 November 1932: 3). As the ranks of unemployed women and their demands for relief grew, city relief was finally granted in early 1933. In May of 1933 there were approximately 900 single women on the Vancouver relief roles (see *Unemployed Worker*, 10 May 1933: 6). Although relief, rather than charity, could now be obtained, it remained difficult for single women to qualify for relief. Unemployed women were forced to take domestic service positions for as little as "\$5 per month, and sometimes with no wages except room and board," and were only granted relief because of ill-health or when domestic service was unavailable (see *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933: 9).

12. For a more in-depth discussion of labour militancy among Vancouver women during the Great Depression see Creese (1986).

13. It is unclear which charity organizations actually financed the women's hostel in Vancouver, or even if more than one hostel existed. During this period, however, the city denied single women aid and referred them instead to (at least one) hostel run for destitute women (see *Unemployed Worker*, 1931-1934).

At first single women were issued relief in the form of money, a benefit which married men had recently won, but the city soon shifted to a system of meal and bed tickets, similar to the system of relief for single men prior to the establishment of the relief camps.¹⁴ Unemployed single women were forced to give up their own lodgings and stay in designated hotels (see Vancouver Trade and Labour Council Minutes, 20 June 1933). The Women and Girls' Club staged demonstrations for cash relief rather than meal and bed tickets, and for an increase in the rate of relief from \$2.40 to \$2.80 per week (see *Unemployed Worker*, 28 June 1933: 2). The campaign was unsuccessful, in part because only a minority of the unemployed women were organized.

At the end of 1936 the Single Unemployed Women's Protective Association launched a "drive for equal rights with men" to win equal relief rates, but again with little success (see *B.C. Workers' News*, 24 December 1936: 2). Approximately 400 single women were on the relief rolls in Vancouver at the end of 1936. Nearly two-thirds of these women were over the age of fifty, and they continued to be denied relief unless "their cards have been signed 'no work' by the Government Employment Service or a doctor's certificate proving them unfit" (*B.C. Workers' News*, 24 December 1936: 2). The policy of denying relief to healthy single women so long as domestic service jobs were available at any wage continued throughout the 1930s. The movement to exclude married women from the labour market also persisted. In February of 1939 Vancouver City council proposed a resolution to prohibit "married women from remunerative work, especially in stores, offices, and factories" (*People's Advocate*, 17 February 1939: 2).

Although unemployed single women did not win equal rights with unemployed men, they did win a limited right to relief during the 1930s. Unemployed women were even more successful in many individual acts of resistance, and in placing the concerns of women and families on the political agenda of the unemployed in a form that was not premised on their status as dependents of men. The shifting of working-class politics from the workplace into the community during the Great Depression facilitated the increased political involvement of women, especially married women. The tensions between women's domestic roles and political activity in the labour movement were not a factor in the politics of the unemployed because the divisions between home and workplace were no longer relevant. The following incidents illustrate the way that women actively shaped the agenda of the politics

14. The problems facing unemployed workers were not uniform because gender, marital status, and race defined their treatment by government relief agencies. Because of this, numerous unemployed organizations emerged to deal with specific problems of married men and families, single white men in the city, single white men in the relief camps, single Chinese men, and single white women. The main organizing network among the unemployed groups was the National Unemployed Workers' Association, affiliated with the Workers' Unity League and the Communist Party, and the Unemployed Council which included a coalition of progressive labour groups including the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (see *Unemployed Worker*, 1931-1934; *B.C. Workers' News*, 1935-1937; and *People's Advocate*, 1937-1939).

of unemployment during the 1930s and, at the same time, challenged the centrality of patriarchal relations on issues of relief.

The Unemployed Worker carried weekly reports on the actions of the Neighbourhood Councils and Block Committees, organized under the Communist-affiliated National Unemployed Workers' Association, throughout the Vancouver area. Most of these columns carried stories about groups of unemployed women, sometimes accompanied by unemployed men, converging on the local relief offices to demand redress for grievances. These grievances involved single and married women and their families, and sometimes Asian as well as white families.¹⁵ For example, this kind of direct action won milk for women with babies (14 February 1933: 7), relief for ill single women (21 June 1933: 9), clothing allowances for married women and their children (2 August 1933: 10), medical care for pregnant women (9 August 1933: 6), and relief for destitute Japanese and Chinese families (12 December 1931: 2; 19 April 1933: 6; 8 November 1933: 10). As the depression wore on, organized women were also active in resisting evictions and restoring utilities that had been cut off; the success of these actions was, however, usually short-lived (see *B.C. Workers' News*, 1935-1936). In 1938 The Greater Vancouver Housewives League was formed to "combat the rising cost of living by utilizing mass buying power as a lever to lower prices and better products." It successfully lowered the price of bread, butter, and milk (see *People's Advocate*, 4 March 1938: 4; 6 May 1938: 1; 10 February 1939: 1).

In addition to issues that dealt directly with the problems of unemployed women and their families, the Women's Labour League and the Unemployed Women and Girls' Club were also active in support work for unemployed men. When single men from the relief camps staged a mass strike in 1935, the Women's Labour League called on families to "be host to one Relief Camp striker in the city and provide him with a midday meal on Mother's Day" (*B.C. Workers' News*, 3 May 1935: 1). During the single unemployed men's occupation of the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery in 1938, they organized daily food for the unemployed men (see *People's Advocate*, 27 May 1938: 1-2). In addition, unemployed women organized support pickets in aid of striking men and women, demonstrations to mark International Women's Day, lectures on issues such as birth control, divorce laws, and public daycare, and they participated in hunger marches and unemployment conferences throughout the 1930s.

The severity of the depression of the 1930s had a contradictory effect on the movement toward women's equality. On the one hand, massive unemployment increased the agitation to exclude married women, and single women living with their parents, from the labour market in favour of men. Women still had not won the

15. The inclusion of Asian workers and families within the organizations of the unemployed during the 1930s, and the inclusion of issues of specific concern to Asian workers on the political agenda, represents an important shift toward bridging the serious ethnic cleavages that characterized the history of the British Columbia labour movement before World War II (see Creese, 1986).

right to independent status as workers. On the other hand, the severity of the depression increased the militancy of many working-class women, employed and unemployed, and resulted in women more vocally placing issues of concern to themselves on the political agenda. The protracted conflicts during the Great Depression took place within the community as often as within the workplace, and this locus of working-class militancy provided a new forum for female militancy. Moreover, the shift of working-class struggle to the community created greater legitimacy and support for the issues raised by women. The male "family wage" ceased to be central to struggles for relief as women placed on the political agenda their demands for extra relief for pregnant women and young children, and the right of all women and men, single or married, to adequate relief. Although women did not win the equal right to work, relief, and equal wages during the depression of the 1930s, their active participation in the politics of unemployment helped to redefine working-class politics away from exclusively male-defined issues, and contributed to the development of a more equal role for women in the post-war period.

Conclusions

The practices of the Vancouver labour movement took place within the context of the conjuncture of patriarchal family relations and capitalist relations of wage labour. Men were, in general, the primary breadwinners in the family unit, responsible for supporting their wives and children. In light of this the adoption of a strategy promoting male employment and seeking male wages adequate to support a family made sense; but it ignored the fact that many women supported dependents, and that many men did not. The "family wage" strategy might have made more sense if it was related to the support of dependents rather than to gender. This would have resulted in differential wages between married and single men, however, and was contrary to labour traditions of pay for work performed. Differential wages between men and women, on the other hand, were already legitimated by traditions of different types of male and female work, rationalizations about the different quality of their work, and the social definition of men as breadwinners and women as dependents regardless of the reality of the situation of individual workers. Moreover, support for a male "family wage" reinforced male domination over wives and children within the family. If the "family wage" were ever completely institutionalized it could reduce the economic needs driving women into the labour market, reduce cheap female labour competition without increasing women's economic independence, and maintain male dominance in the labour market and the home. Family wages were never completely institutionalized, however, so while male wages remained much higher than women's, they were not high enough to keep wives and daughters out of the labour market. Instead, gender segregation and a cheap female labour surplus were entrenched as characteristics of the labour market.

A strategy of equal pay for equal work would have been more effective in securing a higher standard of living for the working class by eliminating reserves

of cheaper labour. A strategy of equality among male and female workers would have threatened male domination within the home, however, and challenged the prevailing views of women's proper sphere within the home. Women's domesticity was embedded within gender relations throughout civil society and underlay practices in the labour movement. There was a contradiction, however, between an ideology that posited female domesticity as the appropriate role for women and the realities of a working-class family; wages were often insufficient for supporting a family and tenuous employment required that other available wage earners, such as wives and daughters, enter the labour market. In the context of the dependence of women within the family, female workers formed a cheap marginal pool of wage labour which potentially threatened the already insufficient wages of male workers with cheap labour competition. Male "family wages," the exclusion of married women in preference to male employment during periods of depression, and the general indifference to the conditions facing female workers so long as neither male workers' wages nor the morality or health of future wives and mothers was imperiled, were all products of the tension between accepted gender ideologies and the realities of women's work under capitalism. Rather than challenging the dependent status of women upon which cheap female labour was premised, the practices of the labour movement entrenched a gender-segregated labour market and maintained women's dependence within the family and the economy.

During the depression of the 1930s, with the extension of labour politics into communities, working-class women more actively defined the political agenda through their activities. The contradiction between a patriarchal ideology that defined the place of women within the home supported by a male breadwinner, and the realities of massive unemployment contributed to the radicalization of working-class women. As women became more active in unemployed politics, and in trade unions and strikes during the 1930s, the contradictions between their dependence within the family and their desire for political and economic equality became sharper. The struggle that working-class women waged for the right to work, relief, and equal pay during the 1930s reflects a developing feminist consciousness among working-class women. The more women actively placed their issues on the political agenda, asserting their equality as workers and citizens, the more effect working-class women had in redefining patriarchal labour strategies.

It should not be surprising that feminist working-class practices did not advance very far in the period prior to World War II. Indeed, it is arguable whether women have moved very far toward equality during the post-war period, in spite of the growth of feminist consciousness among women. The political activities of working-class men and women were, and are, products of the structures of inequality that define their lives, and the strategies adopted by workers to transform those structures. The structure of the family-household system not only subordinates women to men, it is the locus of the transmission of gender identity. Since any real equality of women as workers and as citizens involves the transformation of gender

roles and the family structure, such a task cannot be accomplished by the labour movement in isolation, even if the need for change were recognized. During the 1930s a growing number of women in the Vancouver labour movement were just beginning to recognize that their inequalities as workers, as citizens, and as wives were fundamentally linked. By actively placing demands for female equality, regardless of marital status, on the political agenda of the labour movement, they challenged the centrality of patriarchal relations in working-class practices.

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Public relief and social unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s: An evaluation of the ideas of Piven and Cloward*

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Abstract. Since the early 1970s the work of Piven and Cloward has been an important source of ideas for those trying to understand changing patterns of state involvement in the provision of a variety of public relief measures and the role that popular mobilization plays in shaping state policy in this area. This paper examines the framework developed by Piven and Cloward for analyzing the forces which shape public relief policy, devoting critical attention to the analysis of the impact of poor people's movements on this area of state policy through a discussion of public relief policy and social unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s. It is argued that, while Piven and Cloward's work provides a useful source of questions about the factors which shape relief policy and the politics of public relief, it does not adequately capture the complex and shifting relationship between economic and political crisis, state policy concerning public relief, law and order and other areas, and the rhythms of social unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s. The rather simple and mechanistic model developed by Piven and Cloward does not provide an adequate basis for interpreting changes in public relief policy.

Résumé. Depuis les premiers jours des 70s le travail de Piven et Cloward reste une source importante des idées pour ceux qui essayent de comprendre les modèles variables du rôle de l'état en livrant une variété de mesures de salut publique, aussi bien que le rôle de la mobilisation populaire en façonnant le programme de l'état dans ce regard. Cette dissertation examine le charpente que Piven et Cloward ont développé afin d'analyser les forces qui forment le politique du salut publique. Elle s'occupe d'une critique de leur analyse de l'effet des mouvements des pauvres sur cette région de politique publique par moyen d'une discussion d'un programme de salut publique et de l'agitation sociale à Terre-Neuve pendant les années trentaines. On soutient que quoique le travail de Piven et Cloward donnent des sources utiles de question des facteurs qui composent les programmes et le politique de salut publique, cela ne suffit de comprendre convenablement ni le rapport changeant et compliqué entre la crise politique, ni le politique de l'état vis-à-vis le salut publique à l'ordre social, ni le rythme de l'agitation sociale à Terre-Neuve pendant les années trentaines. Le modèle de Piven et Cloward, à la foi trop simple et mécanistique, ne donne qu'une base suffisante qui peut expliquer les changes dans le politique du salut publique.

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Introduction

In the last twenty years what Piven and Cloward (1971: xv) call the "progressive liberalization" thesis of social policy development has come under serious attack. Many writers have stressed that the development of social policy cannot be regarded as a simple response of the state to the needs of the population (Higgins, 1978: 11-27). It is not the result of rational decisions made by rational individuals after informed investigation of social problems. Nor is social policy shaped in some way by "community values" in a general atmosphere of humanitarianism and awakening social conscience (Government of Canada, 1973).

Recent events have also thrown into question the idea that social policy is both sensitive to changing human needs and gradually improved to meet those human needs more effectively. When James Struthers (1979: 70) writes that "recent changes in Canada's unemployment insurance programme seem to defy logic and common sense," he does so because it is precisely at a time when the need for effective income security provision for the unemployed is rising that the government of Canada "is *reducing* benefits and *stiffening* eligibility requirements." In the 1980s, it is clear that the government would like to follow a program of restricting the availability of unemployment insurance as far as is politically feasible, a program which, incidentally, has been recently endorsed by both the Macdonald and Forget Commissions. Writers like Struthers (1979, 1984) and Stevenson (1984) see many parallels between current trends in income support for the poor and unemployed and state policy in the 1930s. If there are periods in which income support for the unemployed is expanded and periods in which it is contracted, the question of why this occurs needs to be addressed. A great deal of research has implicitly or explicitly focused on this question. But one particularly influential and comprehensive framework to explain this phenomenon has been provided by Piven and Cloward in their books *Regulating the Poor* (1971) and *Poor People's Movements* (1977). They offer not only an account of the forces which shape relief cycles, but also an assessment of the role of popular mobilization in shaping state policy in this area.

This paper evaluates Piven and Cloward's contribution to our understanding of patterns of relief provision by examining the complex relationship between economic and political conditions, unemployed movements, and state policy concerning public relief and public order in Newfoundland in the 1930s.

Piven and Cloward and *Regulating the Poor*

Several analysts of poverty and social policy have noted that concern about poverty seems to be cyclical. Jeremy Seabrook (1980), for example, suggests that poverty is periodically rediscovered as a social problem and that this tends to bring forth some response from the state. He suggests that this cyclical pattern may be due to people's consciences being less easily stirred in times of economic difficulty than during better times. A relationship between the treatment of the poor and economic

conditions has also been suggested by Graham Room. Citing the work of Piven and Cloward, Room argues that during times of high unemployment an enlarged pauperized stratum may become a threat to political and social order and that:

It is then likely that the repressive aspects of social security provision will be relaxed, and that social insurance benefits as of right will be more politically acceptable to the powerful, as compared with means-tested benefits. (Room, 1979: 204)

Room adds that "in more prosperous times, a contraction of provision is likely, with strategies of official coercion into the labour market." There may be a certain logic to Room's arguments, but unfortunately they do not present Piven and Cloward's ideas accurately. In addition, they seem to fly in the face of James Struthers's analysis. For Struthers, "depressions produce 'meaner' wages" for those who can find work and the adherence by the state to the principle of "less eligibility" (the able-bodied unemployed supported by the state should be provided with a living standard *below* that enjoyed by the lowest paid independent worker) in the provision of poor relief leads to a more restrictive income support system for the unemployed (Struthers, 1979: 78). It is important to link changes in relief provision to economic fluctuations and to the political sphere, but this must be done with great care and with an awareness of the great complexity of the forces involved in shaping social policy.

Piven and Cloward (1971, 1977) offer a general theory to explain patterns of relief provision which is based on an analysis of both Europe and the United States of America. It is because their arguments are well-developed and because they have been so influential that they are examined here.¹ For Piven and Cloward (1971: xiv) state intervention generally and relief provision in particular is necessitated by the need for the state to deal with "the untrammelled forces of the marketplace" in capitalist society. It is the "strains toward instability" in capitalist economies which require the state to take on "regulative functions" (1971: 4). Both depressions and "rapid modernization" are the sources of such strains and it is in response to the problems caused by these that the state acts in the area of relief.

Piven and Cloward (1971: xiii) support the position that: "relief policies are cyclical — liberal or restrictive depending on the problems of regulation in the larger society with which governments must contend." They explain the basis for these cycles thus:

The historical pattern is clearly not one of progressive liberalization; it is rather of periodically expanding and contracting relief rolls as the system performs its two main functions: maintaining civil order and enforcing work. (1971: xv)

The key to understanding relief systems, according to Piven and Cloward, is to

1. *Regulating the Poor* was a particularly influential book in the early 1970s (Muraskin, 1975). According to Loney (1977: 455), the book was given the C. Wright Mills Award. Both this book and *Poor People's Movements* (1977) were taken as important guides to action by those concerned with fighting poverty.

appreciate that “relief programs are intended to deal with dislocations in the work system that lead to mass disorder” (1971: xv). The essential argument is that normally market incentives act as the main means by which people are “regulated and controlled” in capitalist society.

So long as people are fixed in their work roles, their activities and outlooks are also fixed; they do what they must and think what they must. Each behaviour and attitude is shaped by the reward of a good harvest or the penalty of a bad one, by the factory paycheck or the danger of losing it. (1971: 6)

With mass unemployment this pattern is broken “loosening people from the main institutions” which regulate their lives. If unemployment persists the implications are quite serious:

When large numbers of people are suddenly barred from their traditional occupations, the entire structure of social control is weakened and may even collapse. There is no harvest or paycheck to enforce work and the sentiments that uphold work; without work, people cannot conform to familial and communal roles; and if the dislocation is widespread, the legitimacy of the social order itself may come to be questioned. The result is usually civil disorder — crime, mass protests, riots — a disorder that may even threaten to overturn existing social and economic arrangements. It is then that relief programs are initiated or expanded. (1971: 7)

For Piven and Cloward, work and the rewards of work underpin the stability of many social institutions, including the family.

When men cannot earn enough to support families, they may desert their wives and children, or fail to marry the women with whom they mate. And if unemployment is long-lasting entire communities may disintegrate as the able-bodied migrate elsewhere in search of work. (1977: 11)

Mass unemployment leads to the progressive deregulation of daily life and social unrest is one manifestation of this deregulation, along with higher divorce, crime, and suicide rates. But the key to understanding the expansion of relief programs is the social disorder which results from the breakdown of social control. And, according to Piven and Cloward, the key to preventing this disorder is for the state to restore the unemployed to their work roles (1971: 7-3). They suggest that “simply providing aid to ... the unemployed will not stop disorder” since “the trigger that sets off disorder is not economic distress itself but the deterioration of social control.” To restore order the state must provide “a surrogate system of social control ... at least for a time.” This, it is asserted, is why the unemployed “are generally succored only on condition that they labour” (1971: 8). Making work a condition of obtaining relief prevents the erosion of work roles which would occur with direct aid. It even helps to “stem the fragmentation of lower-class life,” something which they say is likely to be encouraged by direct aid (1971: 343-4).

When the social breakdown resulting from mass unemployment “becomes clear to elites” (1971: 344), then various forms of work relief will be introduced. In particular, it is large-scale work relief which “tends to stabilize lower-class occupational, familial, and communal life, and by doing so diminishes the proclivities towards disruptive behaviour which give rise to the expansion of relief in the

first place" (1971: 347). "Once order is restored ... *relief giving can be virtually abolished.*" During the 1930s in the United States they suggest that direct relief was replaced by work relief to deal with mass disruption, but that when order was restored work relief was abolished and "millions of the poor were rapidly shunted into a labour market where there was insufficient work" (1971: 348).

The value of *Regulating the Poor* (1971) is that, like the "social control" models which became popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Muraskin, 1975), it does provide a challenge to accounts of public welfare which emphasize the role of progressive ideas in directing social change. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the "functions" that relief "serves for the larger economic and political order" (1971: xiii), both in political and economic terms. It has a welcome historical orientation, attempting, as it does, to link changes in state policy with economic cycles and popular political action. And it draws attention to the important question of considering the factors which influence the *form* in which relief to the unemployed is given. The book, then, "points to a range of important issues in social policy and exposes a number of assumptions" even if, as Higgins (1979: 189) suggests, its thesis is "somewhat over-simplified" and not to be adopted "too uncritically."

In a later book, *Poor People's Movements* (1977), Piven and Cloward take up the question of the role that popular mobilization plays in shaping state policy regarding welfare. In particular, they are concerned with why such movements succeed and "how they fail." Piven and Cloward's work on poor people's movements has much in common with what is called "resource mobilization theory." This theory addresses the question of "how challengers, lacking routine access to the polity, are able to gain collective control over the resources of some constituency and to use them in some form of rebellious collective action" (Gamson and Schmeidler, 1984: 568). Not surprisingly solidarity and organization play a key role in resource mobilization theory. *Poor People's Movements* offers general observations on popular mobilization as well as detailed comments on particular movements in the United States, including the unemployed workers' movement of the 1930s. Piven and Cloward are, however, critical of the role played by organization in the successes achieved by poor people's movements. Rather, they stress that gains more often result from mass protest and disruption. And they regard this protest as being created and shaped more by "institutional conditions" than "the purposive efforts of leaders and organizers" (1977: 36-37). Effort directed at building organizations is for Piven and Cloward often misdirected and an obstacle to successful action. It diffuses discontent rather than focusing it and it leads people "into the meeting rooms" and "away from the streets" (1977: xxii). This, of course, assumes that it is mass protest on the street which is the key factor in successfully bringing pressure to bear on governments.

When concessions are gained by lower-class disruptive activity, according to Piven and Cloward, these are only what historical circumstances have made elites

ready to concede (1977: 36). And these concessions are an elite strategy for controlling the poor. While Piven and Cloward's attempt to draw attention toward the importance of disruption as a political strategy for gaining concessions out of a reluctant elite and their observations about organization building and maintenance becoming an end in itself as well as a means of diffusing discontent are well taken, it does seem that they overstate their case. As Hobsbawm (1978) notes in a review of *Poor People's Movements*, Piven and Cloward claim that the poor can only create crises, that is, they can "wait for a propitious moment, push hard, and see what happens." The response to such a push is, however, totally structured.

The political system will always know what to concede, though it can always afford, if pressed, to give a little more. Its concessions will bring "the poor" some gains, but at the price of reabsorbing protest into the system, until the cycle is broken by another crisis permitting another mobilization of mass discontent, which will have the same results. (Piven and Cloward, 1977: 49).

For Hobsbawm, Piven and Cloward's vision is a pessimistic one and their strategy is one of "blind militancy" which provides "a peculiarly uncertain as well as limited guide" for action.

Piven and Cloward tend to treat "the elite" and "the political system" as monolithic entities which are interested in establishing, maintaining, or reasserting "control" over the lower classes. Yet, this kind of formulation is not adequate. For example, Spenceley (1986: 232-3) points out that we cannot move from intentions to effect and response in a simple fashion, even if some of those with power and authority are concerned with finding mechanisms by which to ensure that the lower classes are obedient and docile. In order to understand patterns of relief provision it is necessary to provide an adequate theoretical and empirical account of how social policy is actually determined, and this must involve a full description of the political process in all its complexity.

Finally, it should be noted that while Piven and Cloward do focus on cyclical changes in relief, particularly the expansion and contraction of the system, they do not really address the important question of how and why fundamental changes occur in the principles and practices which guide social policy. Because of this they fail to "periodize social welfare in relation to structural stages of economic development" (Dickinson, 1986: 115). This, however, is a shortcoming which will not be explored in this paper.

Despite the cautions of many writers,² the ideas of Piven and Cloward have

2. The work of Piven and Cloward has continued to receive a great deal of critical attention. In addition to works already cited, the exchange between Albritton (1979, 1979a) and Piven and Cloward (1979) is important, as is that between Gamson and Schmeidler (1984) and Cloward and Piven (1984). Friedland (1983: 147-150) and Alford and Friedland (1985: 348-353) provide some incisive comments on Piven and Cloward's work. *The New Class War* (1982) is reviewed by Adams (1984), Delgado and Winant (1982), and Foster (1983). All these reviews contain comments on Piven and Cloward's earlier work. Some of the more general critical examinations of the concept of "social control" are also useful in evaluating the ideas of Piven and Cloward. Particularly useful are essays by G. Stedman Jones (1977), Donajrodzki (1977), and Higgins (1980).

proved very attractive to many on the left of the political spectrum. They were quickly adopted by Huston (1972) to help explain the introduction of make-work schemes in Canada and have been used more recently by Loney in his discussions of the politics of job creation (1977, 1979). They have been attractive to those concerned with fighting cuts in social programs since the mid-1970s. When *Radical America* (1977) asked, "How can these cutbacks be fought?" it urged its readers to urgently study the "mass mobilization" strategy of Piven and Cloward in order to answer the question (1977: 3-4). In *The New Class War* (1982) Piven and Cloward specifically outline their method of dealing with "Reagan's attack on the welfare state."³

How useful are the insights offered by Piven and Cloward in understanding the struggles of the unemployed over the issue of public relief in Newfoundland in the 1930s? Can patterns of state response to public protest and social unrest be explained as a means of "regulating the poor"? Do their observations on poor people's movements help us to understand the successes and failures of the movements of the unemployed during the 1930s? What can be said in reply to these questions is best conveyed by the historical discussion which follows.

The economic and political crisis of the early 1930s.

With the onset of the Great Depression conditions deteriorated very rapidly in Newfoundland.⁴ While layoffs and wage cuts were made in the mining and forest industries, it was in the fishing industry that the situation became most serious.

3. In *The New Class War* (1982), Piven and Cloward apparently modify their earlier position. This book analyses "Reaganomics" and the attack on the welfare state in the United States as "capitalism against democracy," that is, the attacks on the welfare state are seen as part of an effort to reduce poor people's subsistence resources, weaken their bargaining power, and drive them into low wage work. This, it is suggested, will enhance the profits of capital (1982: 13). This is a strategy which will fail, according to Piven and Cloward. Democracy, they argue, can no longer be contained (1982: 146-147). As Delgado and Winant (1982: 126) suggest, this argument seems to imply that the state's ability to insulate the capitalist economy from the political demands of the enfranchised has broken down, an argument which, incidentally, is very close to that of those who argue for "the crisis of democracy" (Crozier, Huntington, Watanuki, 1975). Not only is this a rather optimistic view (Adams, 1984; Foster, 1983), but it seems to represent a shift in Piven and Cloward's view of welfare away from that found in their earlier works. Apparently, in the 1980s, welfare does not serve the function of "regulating the poor" and poor people can effectively mobilize to tame capitalism by using the power of the state. Again, as several reviewers note, this seems to be a rather optimistic and one-sided view of the nature of welfare and the state. It is a view which does not fit well with current events and which, as Adams (1984: 117) notes, leads towards the well-worn path of "social democratic reformism."

4. The following discussion of Newfoundland in the 1930s is drawn from my manuscript "Riots, raids and relief, police, prisons and parsimony: The political economy of public order in Newfoundland in the 1930s." The research on which this article is based was partially funded by the S.S.H.R.C. and by Memorial University's Institute of Social and Economic Research. This support is much appreciated.

And this had a drastic effect on all other aspects of the economy. The export value per quintal for salt cod fell from over \$9.00 in 1929 to \$4.53 in 1932 and \$4.00 in 1936 (PANL GN 14/1/A, File 304.2, Statistical Report 1936-7: 123). The total value of this export fell from over \$16 million in 1929 to \$7.3 million in 1936. As prices for cod fell, so the debts of those engaged in fishing rose. In 1931 it was estimated that only a third of the supplies given out to fishermen had been paid for at the end of the fishing season (*Evening Telegram*, 23 March 1932). As credit was curtailed and small merchants went out of business, and as fishermen lost their equipment to pay off bad debts, many were forced out of the industry. With the possibilities of finding work in the woods and mines limited and with emigration to Canada and the United States of America curtailed there was no alternative for many but to apply for public relief. The winters of 1931, 1932, and 1933 were ones of appalling misery in Newfoundland as the numbers of people totally destitute and receiving the dole rose to a maximum of 90,000, approximately one-third of the country's total population. As the costs of public relief rose to well over a million dollars, government revenue, derived mostly from customs duties, fell sharply from a high of \$11.6 million in 1929-30 to \$8.0 million in 1932-33 (Government of Britain, 1933: Sections 121-195; Noel, 1971: 186-203). Budget deficits averaged \$4.0 million in the period 1930-33 and interest payments on the growing debt ate up over 60 percent of annual revenue. By 1931 financial disaster was looming perilously close.

As unemployment rose in the early 1930s and destitution became widespread the government did make some limited efforts to provide temporary work for some of the population on road work and wood cutting projects. Such efforts were, however, not popular with the government for a number of reasons. Work schemes had been employed extensively in the period immediately after World War I. In response to widespread agitation and with the threat of social unrest mounting the authorities had undertaken to provide relief on an unprecedented scale. Under considerable pressure and with some reluctance, the Liberal government of the day expanded both direct relief provision and indirect forms of assistance, including public works and state subsidized employment schemes. Most of these make-work projects proved very difficult to administer and expensive to maintain, while returns for expenditures were very limited. In all, it was estimated by the Amulree Commission in 1933 (Government of Britain, 1933: Section 137) that about \$2.0 million was spent on various forms of relief in 1921-22. Most of the schemes were developed quickly in crisis conditions at a time when there was no effective government machinery for administering them. Soon a very chaotic situation developed. Evidence emerged of widespread laxity and corruption in the administration of relief and eventually a commission of enquiry was established. In the midst of a political scandal the Hollis Walker Report (*Evening Telegram*, 21-22 March 1924) was published. It revealed a sorry state of affairs, including the gross mismanagement of relief projects and profiteering by businesses involved in the projects. There was also evidence of corruption in high places. The allegations which led to this

enquiry forced the resignation of the Prime Minister, Richard Squires.

Public works had managed to dampen some of the social unrest which developed in the early 1920s in response to unemployment and destitution, but as an added precaution the government had expanded the country's small police force by 25 infantry men and a mounted section. They had also resorted to the use of local naval reservists and the British Navy to forestall any major outbreaks of violence. Following the Hollis Walker enquiry, there was an understandable reluctance on the part of governments to undertake large-scale public works or subsidized work schemes. In addition, an extensive program of work creation would have proved very expensive; in fact, much more expensive than providing the destitute with direct relief. Throughout the 1930s public works schemes were always viewed with disfavour by governments, and used selectively to deal with a particularly threatening situation. Cost was always the major consideration, not surprisingly in a bankrupt country, and one of the main fears was that if work was provided in one area for some men then this would lead to other destitute people making demands for work.

In the early 1930s, with state revenues falling and the country finding it increasingly difficult to borrow funds, serious efforts were made to try and cut expenditures. In particular, the growing relief bill was viewed with alarm. Attempts to limit spending in this area led to a spate of break-ins at merchants' stores all over Newfoundland. The government was literally deluged by telegrams and letters reporting starvation, and Wilfred Grenfell greatly embarrassed the government of Sir Richard Squires (he had been returned to power in the late 1920s), internationally, by accusing it of failing to provide for the destitute (*Daily News*, 28 November 1931). Organized action followed initial protest. And in the summer of 1931, Sir Richard Squires was anxious enough about the situation to contact the Governor, Sir John Middleton, about persons with "Red tendencies" who were organizing the unemployed in Conception Bay and St. John's, the two areas which had emerged as trouble spots in the crisis of the early 1920s (PANL GN 1/3A, 1931, File 842; PANL GN 1/3A, 1932, File 349). Facing what he regarded as a dangerous situation, Squires again resorted to the use of the British Navy.

In 1931 the financial state of Newfoundland was so precarious that default was narrowly avoided by bank loans which were provided on the condition that tariffs be revised and a strict policy of retrenchment followed by the government. The government was also forced to seek the assistance of the British Government in managing its financial affairs. In the fall of 1931 two financial advisors arrived from Britain and a Montreal-based businessman, R.J. Magor, was hired to oversee the cutting of expenditures in key areas. The Liberal government responded to the crisis of 1931 by initiating a savage program of retrenchment and by raising taxes. This program of cutbacks was extended and intensified by the conservative United Newfoundland Party when it came to office in June 1932. Between 1931 and 1934 civil service was trimmed from 3,230 persons to 2,476 and the administrative

machinery of the state was systematically dismantled. Expenditures on policing and public relief were, however, increased substantially during this period (PANL GN 14/1/A, Finance, File 304.2, Statistical record 1935).

In November 1931 Mr. Magor announced his plans for the reorganization of public relief (*Evening Telegram*, 14 November 1931; 19 November 1931). In accordance with the scheme of treasury control introduced by the British advisors, all government expenditure was to be strictly controlled. By this means it was hoped to eliminate all ad hoc, unauthorized, and unplanned spending. By this time the bulk of the government's revenue was under the direct control of the British advisors. Mr. Magor devised a scheme which endeavoured to ration relief. This was to be achieved by more effective regulation of the actions of relief officials and by a system of budgeting in advance. In addition, local self-help would be encouraged to lessen the burden on the state. Statutory declarations would be required of all applicants for relief and a standard food ration issued to all those who were successful in their application for support. The maximum ration to be issued to one adult for one month was 25 lb. of flour, 1 qt. of molasses, 3 3/4 lb. fat back pork, 2 lb. beans, 1 lb. peas, 2 lb. corn meal and 3/4 lb. cocoa (*Evening Telegram*, 6 January 1932). Relief officials could, if they saw fit, reduce this ration which provided just under 2,000 calories per day to an adult (*Evening Telegram*, 6 February 1932).

The introduction of the new relief scheme in the winter of 1931-32 proved difficult. Lack of detailed information provided by less than competent officials, as well as rapidly deteriorating conditions, made accurate budgeting impossible. The new, tougher attitude towards relief also led to many protests and some raids on merchants' stores by the destitute. In a few cases raids were narrowly avoided by the issue of rations. Early in 1932 an attempt was made to introduce the Magor ration in St. John's. The capital city had always enjoyed a higher rate of relief than the rest of the country. The Magor ration cut levels of support for the destitute in St. John's and soon well-organized resistance to the new system was in evidence. Protests and meetings with government officials provided those on relief with no satisfaction and early in February trouble erupted when hundreds of men, women and children attempted to get Sir Richard Squires to respond to their demand that the Magor scheme be abolished. When violence did erupt it came as a result of Squires' refusal to meet with the representatives of the unemployed. A crowd entered the Court House and confronted the Prime Minister, who was assaulted (*Evening Telegram*, 11 February 1932, 12 February 1932). In order to calm the situation, Squires instructed the crowd that they would be given relief under the old system. Where petitions and meetings had failed to move the authorities, face-to-face confrontation had succeeded. There were those who argued that the unemployed were being manipulated in order to undermine the Liberal government, but there is no evidence that the February incident was anything but a well-organized effort to prevent the government from cutting relief. Some of the leaders of the protest were established leaders of the unemployed and they continued to be active during the early 1930s.

On February 18th it was officially announced that the Magor ration had been abandoned (*Evening Telegram*, 18 February 1932). New rates of relief provided a substantial improvement in conditions for the destitute of St. John's (\$1.50 per week for a single adult). It was also announced that another requirement of the Magor scheme, that men be put to work for their dole, be relaxed (*Evening Telegram*, 20 February 1932). Efforts on the part of the state to force relief recipients to work for their dole were to be a constant source of conflict throughout the 1930s. Government officials may have viewed work relief as a means by which the idle might be controlled, but attempts to force the destitute to work were more likely to lead to violence than to prevent it.

Pressure for the government to abandon the Magor ration was also mounting outside St. John's in the early part of 1932, following the successful example set by the unemployed of the capital city. This pressure was particularly well organized in the Carbonear area of Conception Bay. By the end of February groups from various communities near Carbonear were demanding that the Magor ration be issued every three weeks instead of once a month. The situation also remained tense in St. John's. The unemployed began in late February to press the government for relief work (*Evening Telegram*, 1 March 1932), work which would provide them with a cash income and a higher standard of living than that provided by food relief. During this period the situation in St. John's continued to be quite volatile. Cuts in ex-service men's pensions led to protests by the Great War Volunteers Association (*Evening Telegram*, 10 March 1932), and the new budget led to an estimated 30 percent rise in the cost of living (*Evening Telegram*, 2 March 1932). There was also growing evidence of corruption in high places which increased resentment as austerity measures were extended. Even members of the government became critical of the situation and toward the end of March there were several resignations (Noel, 1971: 201).

By the end of March a very serious situation had developed in St. John's. On March 30th it was reported that the House of Assembly had opened briefly and that it was protected by over thirty policemen, both mounted and on foot (*Evening Telegram*, 30 March 1932). The following day about 250 unemployed men marched on the House to present a petition (*Evening Telegram*, 31 March 1932). They complained of "malnutrition and semi-starvation" which seriously affected their capacity to work and demanded a 50 percent increase in the dole ration. They also wanted action to prevent evictions for non-payment of rent and employment on public works. The government agreed to act on these demands and to reorganize the existing allowance (*Evening Telegram*, 31 March 1932, 5 April 1932). Already a small increase in the ration had taken place in late March as a result of pressure by the unemployed, but in the delicate political climate the government felt obliged to give something more to the destitute of the city. Eventually a 20 percent increase in the ration was agreed to, which came into force on April 9th (PANL GN 2/5, File 541F, 1931-32). While these negotiations had been taking place a political crisis of

major dimensions had been brewing and it was this that encouraged the government to yield to the demands of the unemployed.

The opening of the House of Assembly on April 5th was chosen by the government's political opponents for a confrontation. At a meeting on April 4th many prominent St. John's individuals, including several important merchants, decided to organize a parade which would present to Sir Richard Squires a request for an investigation into charges of wrong-doing against his ministers. On April 5th a massive parade estimated at between 8 and 10 thousand people marched to the Colonial Building in St. John's (*Evening Telegram*, 6 April 1932). The building was protected by a squad of police, including four mounted officers. A deputation wishing to present a petition to the government was kept waiting for half an hour while procedures were discussed, but eventually they were allowed into the building. During the delay the crowd became restless. The police attempted to control the crowd, but when trouble broke out they were forced to take refuge in the Colonial Building and a siege followed. A baton charge by the police failed to disperse the rioters, as did the efforts of the mounted police. The Colonial Building was partially looted and Richard Squires was lucky to escape without major injury. It was not until late in the evening that the police were able to leave the building. During the night extensive looting occurred in St. John's. The parade had turned into a riot. Many people had been injured and liquor stores had been broken into. The police had proved totally incapable of controlling the situation and calm was only restored with the aid of armed volunteers organized by the Great War Veterans' Association. Even when the situation was quiet the authorities were in a considerable state of anxiety. It was reported to the Minister of Justice that six carbines had been stolen and that threats had been received to destroy the power plant, put the city in darkness, and "begin a season of looting" (PANL GN 1/3A, File 349, 1932). In the event, it was decided to send for the British Navy and the H.M.S. Dragon, a cruiser with a complement of 400 men and 6.6 inch guns, soon arrived in St. John's (*Evening Telegram*, 12 April 1932).

The riot of April 5th profoundly shook St. John's and marked the death knell of Squires' government. The defeat of the police showed that the authorities had but a slender hold on law and order and the merchants of the city were very anxious about further violence. The decision was quickly made to expand the police force by 100 men (*Evening Telegram*, 12 April 1932). Later a special police force was also added. This force was responsible for policing the whole of the country (there was no standing army). Many of the officers were poorly trained and poorly equipped. And many of them were scattered all over the island of Newfoundland. Following the incident of February 1932 a decision had been made to arm the police with tear gas and by the end of 1932 the force itself was almost double the size it had been in 1931 (PANL GN 13/1, Box 161, File 62).

Following the April riot Sir Richard Squires resigned and an election was set for June. But the events of April further confirmed in the minds of many people the idea

that politics was doomed in Newfoundland. In the wake of the riot there came many calls for government by commission (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 8 April 1932), for a body of honest men to step forward and save the country from bankruptcy and for "a bloodless revolution" to install a "dictator" (*Evening Telegram*, 12 April 1932). More and more the idea that democracy was not only doomed, but actually an obstacle to effective government was being expressed. When the United Newfoundland Party under F.C. Alderdice was elected in June, it was committed to fulfill but one election pledge, to examine the desirability of establishing commission of government (*Evening Telegram*, 23 May 1932). Throughout the period leading up to the election, conditions continued to be very serious in Newfoundland. The situation in St. John's had been eased somewhat by improvements in relief, but outside the capital many areas were still subject to the harshness of the Magor ration. In some areas the relief situation was made particularly bad by the fact that merchants were refusing to fill dole orders. This was not surprising given that the government was months behind in the payment of its debts to the merchants. The precarious financial position of the country suggested that this situation could only get worse.

When the new government assumed power they faced an immediate crisis. Squires' government had managed to raise enough funds to pay the half-yearly interest in the national debt, but it seemed unlikely that the next payment would be met. Almost at once the Alderdice government set about finding ways of cutting expenditures. Further cuts in social services were worked out and renewed attention was directed towards the relief system (PANLGN 2/5, File 541F, 1931-32). In July, Mr. Penson, one of the British advisors, outlined a program to break with the "wholesale issue of relief" (1931-32). Outside St. John's, no relief would be given except "in certain bad spots" and "in individual cases personally approved at headquarters." He suggested that no relief should exceed \$1.80 per head per month, including St. John's. In the "bad spots" a fixed sum would be allocated to relieving officers for distribution. Magor's scheme may have been harsh, but it was condemned by the United Newfoundland Party for distributing relief in too lax a fashion.

Putting Penson's proposals into action proved difficult. Attempts to cut relief in St. John's met with resistance and a cut of only 5 percent was made in the level of support in July. The unemployed committee in St. John's was also pressing for work. Politically, it was very difficult for Alderdice to impose cuts in relief and in the face of mounting agitation he agreed to limit cuts in relief in St. John's and to provide work in the city (*Evening Telegram*, 22 July 1932). Delays in providing this work, however, led to the leaders of the unemployed being challenged by a group of "hotheads" (*Evening Telegram*, 25 July 1932). On the evening of July 25th a group of about 2-300 unemployed set off to visit the acting Prime Minister, Mr. Winter, in order to get a definite answer about when relief work would start. By the time the parade reached Mr. Winter's house it was 1,000 strong. Mr. Winter was not

at home and the crowd, followed by about twenty constables, headed for Water Street and the commercial centre of the city. Again, a parade turned into a riot. Stores were looted and pitched battles fought with the police. Again, the Great War Volunteers were used to help restore order. Unlike the incidents of February and April, this time the police made extensive arrests, including the leaders of the unemployed (*Evening Telegram*, 26 July 1932; 27 July 1932). Within a few days of the July riot, relief work was started in St. John's. Again, the vulnerability of the government to organized pressure was revealed. Lacking the force needed to impose austerity on the unemployed, they had no choice but to retreat from their plans to cut relief to the lowest level possible. It was in this climate that both concerned people in St. John's and the government began to show considerable interest in land settlement schemes. These, it was thought, would enable "the unemployed surplus" to be removed from town (*Evening Telegram*, 29 July 1932). The "wilfully idle and troublesome" would be "given a chance on the land," while a special scheme might be used for dealing with the "troublesome youthful element" from which "most of the mischief" was thought to be springing. Land settlement might also, in the long term, make many of the unemployed self-sufficient and in this way lessen the relief burden.

While attention was focused on St. John's in the summer of 1932 conditions were deteriorating in other parts of Newfoundland. And opposition to the new relief policy was emerging. Resistance to the changes in relief was particularly strong in parts of Conception Bay, where people did not rely much on fishing. In many communities men refused to work for the dole and demanded that no cuts be made in relief. Relieving officers attempting to introduce the new relief policy were threatened and some were assaulted. Threats of raids were numerous and in several cases these raids were only prevented by the issuing of rations. At the end of July three men were brought into St. John's from Conception Bay charged with rioting (*Evening Telegram*, 30 July 1932). Once the government had been confronted and had given in to pressure in one area, word of this quickly spread elsewhere and others organized to make similar gains. Apparently, some areas of Conception Bay had managed to resist the imposition of the Magor ration. Fearing widespread violence the government had stepped back and as late as August 1932 large sections of the Bay were receiving relief at the rate of \$1.80 per adult every three weeks. Elsewhere effective opposition to cuts in relief had not been forthcoming and by late 1932 adults were receiving as low as \$1.13 per month in some places (PANL GN 2/5, File 541G). At a local level, relieving officers were encouraged to cut relief as much as possible, while in the period 1932-33 a variety of measures were taken to discourage the destitute from applying for assistance. More intensive investigation of relief applicants was arranged, more strict control over relieving officers exercised and the question of disenfranchising those on poor relief was seriously considered. By and large the government adopted a strategy of ignoring acute distress. If this eventually led to a confrontation and perhaps a violent incident, then they would act,

but not before. Many raids occurred and the fact that they were limited in number is testimony to the demoralization and lack of organization of the poor in many outport communities.

It is no exaggeration to say that the United Newfoundland Party launched an attack on the provision of relief. The general aim was to reduce relief spending to a minimum and the government employed psychological warfare, force of arms, undercover agents, and any other means at its disposal to meet its aims. Where necessary, ground could be yielded, where weaknesses were identified in the opposition, gains could be made. It was a war in which the government's stakes were its own survival as well as that of the country and the existing power structure. It was a battle in which the opposing forces were unequal in many respects. The poor had few weapons, but the government's room to manoeuvre was limited. The force at its command was inadequate for effective policing and its finances were exhausted.

The vulnerability of the government was again revealed when trouble broke out in Conception Bay in the fall of 1932. Opposition to the government's new relief policy had been mounting since July. In mid-August 500 men had assembled in Carbonear to inform the local relieving officer that they would not accept any cuts in relief (PANL GN 2/5, File 541G, 1932; *Bay Roberts Guardian*, 9 September 1932). This was a serious confrontation in which the Court House was damaged and an assault occurred. In accordance with its tough attitude toward cutting relief, the government decided to punish any violations of the law in connection with relief. An attempt to arrest the man responsible for the assault, however, provoked further trouble (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 14 September 1932). The Department of Justice was informed by the unemployed of the area that no trial would be allowed. When a large body of men assembled to support this position, the government sent out a special train from St. John's with 115 infantry police and five mounted men on board. An "impressive cavalry ride upon Carbonear town" followed, but by the time the police arrived the crowd had dispersed. Not surprisingly this was not the end of the trouble in the area. In September a police sergeant on dole duty was held against his will until he was able to get an assurance that there would be no change in the dole ration (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 28 September 1932). The government continued with its plans to cut relief despite the opposition and this led to a serious confrontation in early October. During this incident the town of Carbonear was more or less taken over by relief protesters. They held local merchants against their will and seriously assaulted them. There was some looting, the train was held up, and the railway track demolished. The local police force was driven into hiding (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 12 October 1932; 21 December 1932). Food was issued to the crowd and further trouble was averted. The following day another incident occurred in nearby Spaniard's Bay. Again, an improved dole ration was demanded and when the government refused to agree to this, the railway tracks were torn up and some looting occurred. The local policemen were expelled from the area (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 21 December 1932). A large force of constabulary were

sent to the area, but a peace settlement was reached without further violence.

The government's attempts to cut the dole were at the heart of the trouble in the Conception Bay area. But the communities in the vicinity of Carbonear showed an unusual ability to organize effective action. Many of the destitute residents of these communities were not fishermen. They were miners who had worked in the mines of Bell Island and in Cape Breton. As such, they no doubt had experience of the effectiveness of collective action. There was also a clear political dimension to these protests. After the ringleaders of the protests were arrested, they were sent to trial (and then jail) and at the trial it was noted that during the trouble "a socialist doctrine was being continually preached over in the district" (*Evening Telegram*, 14 December 1932). Apparently the "crowd" had the idea "that everything should be divided up."

By the fall of 1932 it was clear to the government that, in terms of practical politics, the limit to which they could impose cuts in spending had been reached (Noel, 1971: 207). Further cuts might trigger "absolute revolt" (Noel, 1971; PANL GN 2/5, File 582.1). By this time the country's default seemed inevitable. It was just a matter of time. Further loans were obtained from the banks when it was argued that there were "grave threats of insurrections" and "mob rule," but these simply delayed the inevitable (Neary, 1986: 46). The new loans came with strings attached in the form of an official enquiry into the future of the country.

Attempts to limit spending in the winter of 1932-33 were only partially successful. "Determined and bitter opposition" led to the abandonment of "the full program" (PANL GN 2/5, File 582.7). The government did not have the power to impose its program on the population. This is a situation quite unlike that posited by Piven and Cloward. For them, elites do not appear to be constrained in their range of actions by financial considerations or the fragility of their hold on power. In Newfoundland, once the power of the organized unemployed had been demonstrated, those ruling the country were in constant fear that further violence might develop. In particular, they feared simultaneous outbreaks of violence in two or more places. In 1932 a further addition to the police force of 100 special constables strengthened the government's position, but it was still far from confident of its ability to maintain law and order. And the policy prosecuting rioters and those who committed dole frauds led to a major crisis in the prison system. By mid-1932 the penitentiary in St. John's contained twice the number of prisoners which would normally have been incarcerated there, and in the fall of the year a prison ship was obtained and moored in St. John's harbour to handle the overflow (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 28 October 1932).

From late 1932 the situation in Newfoundland stabilized somewhat. However, the winter of 1932-33 was not without incident. Force was used to obtain relief in several communities and some small riots occurred. Expenditures on relief were cut whenever and wherever possible. But the conflict of 1932 had led the government to avoid the kind of wholesale cuts in relief which would likely lead to mass protest.

Late in 1932 it was also decided to provide some work for the unemployed. Even limited public works were rejected as too costly and likely to lead to a flood of demands for "their" share of state-provided jobs from people all over the country. Rather, the government made arrangements for 90,000 cords of pit props to be cut by private contractors for export (PANL GN 2/5, Files 579A-C). The government's more adroit handling of the relief issue together with the expanded police force and the occasional provision of work probably accounts for the lessening of protest from late 1932, although the provision of work did generate some conflict when contractors employed people not on relief to cut wood. In 1933 further efforts were made to limit relief, but the government moved with great caution and avoided any major confrontation. Essentially, a standoff had been reached.

Meanwhile the Amulree commission of enquiry investigated Newfoundland's problems and the British government paid the country's debts. When the Commission reported late in 1933 it recommended that responsible government in Newfoundland be suspended and the country be governed by a commission (Government of Britain, 1933). This was to be government by six appointed commissioners under the chairmanship of the Governor of Newfoundland. The Commission was responsible to the British government and mandated to provide immediate assistance to the country as well as provide for its long-term rehabilitation.

Commission of government and relief

When the commission came to power in February 1934 it was faced with the immediate problem of what to do about public relief. Widespread agitation against existing government policies continued in early 1934 and raids and other incidents related to relief continued to be common. One such incident was the Twillingate riot during the trial of men on a relief-related charge. In March 1934 the commissioner responsible for justice produced a major review of the dilemmas of policing the country and the question of law and order as it related to public relief (PANL GN 38, S4-4-1, File 1). In this he noted that "repeated complaints" were reaching his department from magistrates and from the police of grave disturbances and breaches of the peace in many parts of the country. These were almost all related to the inadequacies of the relief system. The Justice Department took the position that breaches of the law would not be tolerated, but pointed out that for this to be enforced "sufficient force to compel observance" would be needed. With the existing force, this, it was argued, was "practically impossible." The government felt that it had no alternative but to increase the dole ration in order to try and diffuse opposition and "reduce the occurrence of breaches of the law."

An improved ration would also help fit the population for whatever schemes of employment might be devised. If the government did not have "sufficient Force ... to deter agitators from further resistance" and if breaches of the law might have to be ignored, then perhaps improving relief might buy greater tranquility for the new government. The increases in the dole ration which date from 1934 were, therefore,

not made on humanitarian grounds, but after a full consideration of the costs and benefits of not increasing relief. Improving relief rations, however, was not the same as making relief more easily obtainable, and in the summer of 1934 an attempt was made to force as many people as possible to support themselves through productive labour by cutting them off the dole. Those unable to go fishing would be expected to work in the woods. Thus, any inexperienced and ill-equipped men were forced to try and eke out an existence by cutting pulpwood. Wages were so low, however, that many found themselves not able to earn money to pay for their food and equipment, a fact which was made painfully clear in the Bradley Report of 1934 (Neary, 1985). In the face of failure many men abandoned woods work and tried to force a passage home on the train. Almost 100 men were jailed for this in 1934 (*Fishermen's Advocate*, 20 July 1934). Another serious incident occurred in connection with a work scheme for the unemployed in Labrador. Men sent to cut wood at Alexis Bay went on strike in July and a body of almost fifty policemen had to be sent to deal with the situation. Work projects continued to be a source of tension and difficulty for the government. In August 1935 a dispute over who would be employed on a government project led to a disturbance and several arrests. The men arrested had then been freed. Eventually a police posse from St. John's took control of the situation (PANL GN 1/3A, 1934, File 353).

The winter of 1934-35 saw the government's improved relief system being put into action throughout Newfoundland. Although the situation was somewhat calmer than it had been for some time, the government was still uneasy about the unemployed. In particular, it was feared that any incident in connection with relief might embarrass the new government, making the unemployed the focus of attention for those who were opposed to the new regime. Although many people in Newfoundland had openly embraced commission of government there were some who were opposed to it and prepared to exploit any apparent weaknesses that it might have. It was for this reason that the government felt that it was vital to have a finger on the pulse of the unemployed, especially any dissidents. This they achieved by extensive police surveillance. From 1934, the police force was greatly improved. Men were sent to Scotland Yard for training and a small, but effective, security force was developed. All meetings held by the unemployed were attended by the police and all proceedings were recorded.

By late 1934 it was clear that the unemployed of St. John's were organizing to pressure the government for further improvements in relief. There were differences amongst the leaders of the unemployed about how to proceed. By early 1935 Pierce Power had emerged as leader of the St. John's unemployed. He urged militancy and pushed for a confrontation with the government in order to gain concessions. He was strongly opposed to commission of government and under his leadership the unemployed movement took on a distinctly political character. Power's aim was to form "the masses" into a force of opposition to what he called the "dictators" (PANL GN 13/1, Box 238, File 45). There was also a group of Liberals which included J.R.

Smallwood who had an interest in the unemployed. The issues raised by the unemployed in the winter of 1935 were many. They demanded improved rations, security against eviction, the relaxation of regulations governing the use of brown flour by the unemployed (introduced to prevent beriberi in 1934), and improved treatment at the hands of the relief officials. These demands were presented and supported by parades of the unemployed in early 1935. Several tense situations developed during this period, but no outbreaks of violence. And meanwhile the police and the government attempted to undermine the strength of the unemployed by refusing to deal with the militant leaders and encouraging the existing tensions within the movement (PANL GN 13/1, Box 172, File 2). When a major confrontation did come it was in May and it was over the issue of relief work. In the previous months, some limited concessions had been given to the unemployed, but the government had made a decision to hold the line on relief increases.

Celebrations had been organized in St. John's for the Royal Jubilee early in May 1935. The unemployed decided to organize a parade for the Jubilee to press the government for work. A local news reporter who was involved with the unemployed intended to photograph the parade and use the photograph to publicize the plight of the country in the British press (PANL GN 13/1, Box 155, File 14). To offset these plans the government announced that relief work would be provided for some men in St. John's. Jubilee Day passed without incident although a dispute developed between the unemployed and the authorities about the control of the relief work and the means by which men would be selected for work. The unemployed committee requested that the government recognize them as representing the unemployed and give them some control over the work (*Evening Telegram*, 8 May 1935). This the government refused to do. On May 10th the unemployed took their case to the Colonial Building. When the parade was confronted by the police, violence broke out. The leaders of the unemployed were beaten and the crowd soon dispersed. Later in the day, however, the crowd assembled again and windows were smashed and stores looted. Several arrests were made. In the following days the leaders of the unemployed were arrested and tried for conspiring to cause a riot. The decision to arrest them was a political one (PANL GN 38, S1-1). The government had decided to take the sting out of the unemployed.

The May riot in St. John's was a very political event. The unemployed had decided to confront the government and the government had decided to refuse the demands of the unemployed in the full awareness that this might lead to trouble. According to the government, the unemployed were being manipulated by "professional agitators" and this had to be stopped (PANL GN 1/3A, 1934, File 353). The police action on May 10th was calculated to "have an excellent sedative effect," which did happen to a large degree. After May 1935 the unemployed were never able to regain their momentum. By this time, however, other groups were emerging to oppose the commission of government. Through such organizations an effort was made to restore responsible government to Newfoundland, but without success.

Groups like the Newfoundland Independence Association nevertheless caused the government some anxiety. This was especially the case where it managed to make links with the Fishermen's Protective Union in rural areas. In the late 1930s this union was enjoying a period of revitalization under the leadership of Ken Brown. In particular, it had gained strength amongst the loggers of the North East Coast. Brown was a man "prepared to say anything that is detrimental to the Commission of Government" (PANL GN 13/1, Box 135, File 74), and under his leadership a new mood was taking hold of the people of Northern Newfoundland. In the political climate of the late 1930s this new mood was to be a source of political problems for the government.

The period following the riot of May 1935 was a relatively quiet one. Throughout the country relief rates were now higher than they had ever been, although many argued that at about \$2.00 per adult per month (in food) for those residents outside St. John's they were still far from providing even basic subsistence. The government had also been forced to relax its policy of cutting relief in the summer months. Some measures were used to keep people fishing during the productive season, but some 20,000 more people were on relief in the summer of 1936 than had been the case in 1934. From later 1936, attention began to be devoted to the question of rehabilitation in Newfoundland. The summer relief situation was particularly alarming, with the fear being that a major portion of the population might be permanently pauperized. The problem facing the government was that, without any general improvement in conditions, it was not possible to limit the dole unless funds were allocated to create work. In the summer of 1937 some work was provided and it was made possible for many to fish by means of subsidies, which was accompanied by the limiting of relief. This, in turn, led to an upsurge of protest and some violence, although not on a serious scale. In fact, there had been a slight improvement in economic conditions which took the edge off unemployment that year.

Even though Newfoundland under the commission of government was being financially supported by Britain, this did not mean that there was a great willingness on the part of the British Treasury to spend large sums of money on the country's rehabilitation. The commission of government was under considerable pressure to keep spending down in Newfoundland and, in particular, to ensure that any spending which did occur would not create an infrastructure which the country would not be able to maintain in the long run (Channing, 1982). Parsimony shaped the government's approach to rehabilitation, but it was not the only consideration when it came to limiting relief, as Thomas Lodge, one of Newfoundland's Commissioners, made clear.

The tragedy of Newfoundland is not that the scale of able-bodied relief is so low. It is that the scale differs so little from the standard of living enjoyed by the workers who manage to retain their complete independence and keep off the "dole." To make relief more attractive, or less unattractive, in a community in which one-quarter is already forced to apply for it, is to risk the complete collapse of the social structure. (Lodge, 1939: 233)

Some tentative moves in the direction of a rehabilitation program for Newfoundland along the lines set out by T.H. Gorvin in 1938 (Gorvin, 1938) were being undertaken when economic conditions began to deteriorate in the late 1930s. In 1938 there was a further collapse of fish markets and prices and setbacks in the pulp and paper industry. Government spending on reconstruction projects was increasing, but not at a sufficient rate to counteract the growing economic crisis. In addition, the political climate was becoming tense in Newfoundland as the union movement gained strength and agitation for a return to responsible government increased.

By mid-1938 an explosive situation had developed in Newfoundland. The focus of much of the problem was the north-east coast. At first there were mass demonstrations by men against the dole ration and for work. When work projects were set up these became a further source of dissatisfaction. They provided only a limited amount of work and those not fortunate enough to be employed forced the employed to quit work as a means of pressuring the government to distribute work equally (PANL GN 1/3A, 1938, File 89). And once the government had acceded to the demands of the unemployed in one area, this encouraged the efforts of the unemployed in other areas (PANL GN 13/1, Box 166, File 73). This was a particular source of alarm for the government since such a movement might very quickly get out of hand. In the face of mounting agitation the government practiced firmness, but it did yield to pressure where this was thought necessary to prevent a major confrontation. And meanwhile further efforts were undertaken to strengthen the police force and to arm them with up-to-date rifles (PANL GN 1/3A, 1938, File 89).

A number of serious situations did develop, however, and this was somewhat embarrassing for the government. One such incident occurred at Bonne Bay in August 1938 when an angry crowd, demanding work, confronted one of the Commissioners (PANL GN 1/3A, 1938, File 639). This incident was especially problematic for the commission because it was widely reported in the foreign press. And in the late 1930s the British government was growing very sensitive about conditions in the colonies and any negative publicity concerning these. As Morgan (1980: 14-22) notes, Germany's quest for colonies had put the "colonial question" on the political agenda and this made Britain increasingly concerned about any signs of dissatisfaction in her colonies. The situation in Newfoundland became even more of a concern for the British government early in 1939 when the *Daily Express* reporter Morley Richards did a series of articles on conditions in the country (27-31 March; 1 April 1939). The articles produced a flurry of communication between St. John's and London and immediate action (PANL GN 1/13, Box 135, File 74). In the climate of the late 1930s the British government was much more prepared to look favourably on spending to create employment in Newfoundland than in earlier times. As a result, budget deficits in Newfoundland in 1939 and 1940 rose to over \$4 million compared with about half that figure in the preceding years of the Commission (Government of Britain, 1946: 5). The efforts of the unemployed in Newfoundland had played a key role in drawing attention to the country, but it was

the changing world situation which ensured that the British government was willing to spend money to help buy stability. And it was only during World War II, with its near full employment and high rate of inflation, that relief rates were substantially increased.

Conclusion

In *Regulating the Poor* (1971), Piven and Cloward offer what Adams (1984) terms a "functionalist account" of welfare systems. They analyze the relationship between the relief system and public disorder and the needs of the labour market. In a later work, they examine the factors which influenced the success and failure of *Poor People's Movements* (1977). Both books employ a "social control explanation" of the relief system (Friedland, 1983: 148). They point to the ways in which "social change disrupts the regulation embedded in daily life," seeing "political violence" as "but one expression of social deregulation which also surfaces in higher divorce, crime, drug addiction and suicide" (1983: 148). Relief, particularly in the form of work, is provided by elites in response to the unrest which results from the breakdown of social control which is associated with unemployment. Relief work, then, acts as a surrogate form of control. And once it has served its function of "regulating the poor," it is then cut back and the quiescent unemployed are forced into the low wage labour market.

The value of this perspective is that it does focus attention on the political dimensions of relief provision and the important question of the form in which assistance is provided. Relief systems are also clearly presented as ancillary to the labour market. For Piven and Cloward, elites use relief as a conscious means to control the poor and silence opposition.

The discussion of public relief policy in Newfoundland in the 1930s presented in this paper clearly shows a relationship between that policy and the rhythms of social unrest in the period. The relationship is, however, not the one identified by Piven and Cloward. In Newfoundland, it was government efforts to cut relief in the context of fiscal crisis and impending bankruptcy which triggered most opposition in the early 1930s. When violence occurred it was most often a result of government intransigence in the face of serious hardship. And violence seems to have been one of the few things which did move governments which were bent on limiting relief as much as possible. That violence was successful was an indication of the government's vulnerability in political terms and its inability to effectively police the country.

Piven and Cloward assume that the state has unlimited resources to control the poor. There appear to be no significant constraints on spending to create work for the unemployed. The situation in Newfoundland throughout the 1930s was very different from this, even if the Commission of Government did have slightly more flexibility than the preceding two governments. In reality, given the existing power structure and the devastating impact of the depression on what was in the best of

times a fragile economy, the state could not even afford to provide relief in kind at even a minimal level to all those who needed it. Much of the agitation by the unemployed in the 1930s was for the government to provide work relief. This provided a slightly higher income than relief in kind, but it also allowed the unemployed a degree of say over how the small income might be spent. For the most part, the government was not prepared to provide relief work for the unemployed unless it was forced to do so. But decisions about the provision of work, like decisions about relief rates, were always part of a wider political calculus. Whether or not concessions would be given depended on how serious the situation was and how much force was at the disposal of the state. In this sense the responses of state officials were never automatic. Nor was what they were prepared to concede set by "historical circumstances" in any simple way. In fact, those who argued that democracy could no longer be afforded in Newfoundland in 1932 and 1933, were making an argument that too much had already been conceded to the poor and this had driven the ship of state onto the rocks.

The limits to which the state was able to limit spending on relief in Newfoundland in the 1930s were set by the organized resistance of the unemployed. In the final analysis, the level of support was determined by what the unemployed could squeeze out of the government by political means, by protest, raids, and riots. What the government was prepared to concede depended on its political vulnerability, the general political and economic climate and the size of the police force. If there was a limit to the improvement of the relief it is to be appreciated in terms of the principle of less eligibility so well expressed by Thomas Lodge.

There is no evidence that it was a breakdown of social control caused by loss of work which led to social unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s. For the most part poverty weakened people and rendered them submissive. Poverty meant not only material impoverishment, but also the shrinking of needs and expectations. The poor policed themselves to a large extent. Many lives were squandered without protest. Nor is there any evidence of increased crime and suicide in the 1930s. Yet, in some situations poverty was protested. Such actions were never a simple response to poverty and they were not a result of deregulation. If some such actions appear to be spontaneous it is only because we do not know about the conditions and actions which gave rise to them. Most protests and confrontations were organized incidents in a long struggle to change government policy. Many had a strong political dimension to them. The most successful organizations of the unemployed were in St. John's and Conception Bay, both working-class strongholds with long histories of union activity. The struggle to maintain organizations of the unemployed was a difficult one. It was a struggle in which fights over leadership and tactics were important. It was a struggle in which the police and the government actively tried to undermine the power of the leaders of the unemployed whom they were convinced were manipulating an otherwise accepting population.

Attempts to force those on relief to perform work, and the introduction of limited

work schemes, both led to serious confrontations with the government. Making men work for their meager relief ration was more a way to discourage the able-bodied from applying for relief than a means of restoring social control. And employment on short-term relief works for a select group of men may have played a part in calming some dangerous situations, but it was conflicts over these work schemes which led to serious outbreaks of violence in 1932 and 1935 and again in 1938. Land settlement schemes were, however, partially motivated by a desire to remove the dangerous unemployed out of harm's way and to get them to direct their energies towards carving out the wastes rather than agitating for better dole.

Does the framework provided by Piven and Cloward provide a basis for understanding relief policy, popular protest, and public unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s? I would suggest that, while their model does provide a useful source of questions which can be asked about events in the period, it does not capture well the processes at work. In particular, the simple model of the breakdown of social control used by Piven and Cloward fails to provide a basis for understanding the causes of protest and unrest. And, similarly, their functionalist analysis of relief fails to capture the complexity of the forces at work in determining state policy in this area. Social control models do not have to be simple and mechanistic. As noted by Stedman Jones (1977), Donajgradzki (1977), and Higgins (1980), they come in a variety of forms. Social control is a broad and rather ill-defined concept. Stedman Jones (1977: 164), in particular, has noted its functionalist origins and its "loose common-sense form." He has warned against using such a "crude notion" as the breakdown of social control to explain events. Others have also seen the concept as problematic. Richard Johnson (1977: 78) sees it as "a relatively under-developed and persistently ambiguous concept ... in search of a theory," yet, suggests that it does provide a useful point of departure for considering authority relations. Donajgradzki (1977: 14) reviews the "long and varied" history of the concept of social control. He notes that it is a concept which fits within several distinct theoretical frameworks, but still regards it as of use in "illuminating some hitherto rather dark areas" for historians (1977: 15).

Piven and Cloward embrace a rather simple and mechanistic version of social control apparently without any reservations. They produce a framework, however, which does not fully illuminate the complex and changing relationship between state policy, economic and political crisis, and social unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s. In Piven and Cloward many of the concepts associated with the social control model are simply catch-all phrases to describe events and processes which are inadequately theorized (Alford and Friedland, 1985: 352-353; Higgins, 1980:22). We should not, however, forget about social control because it is clear that many state officials and decision makers use this concept to interpret the world and to guide their actions. And their actions have very real consequences.

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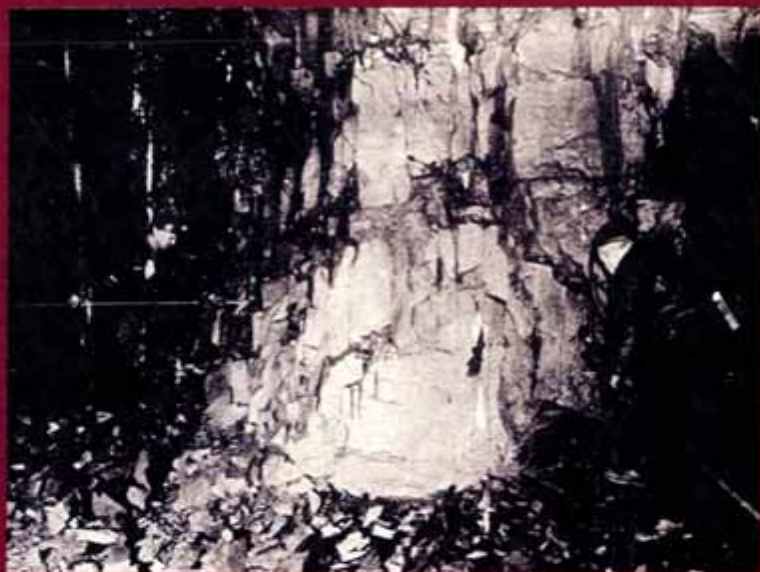
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