Ethnologies

Residual Radicalism
Labour Song-Poems of Industrial Decline

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Résumé de l'article

La composition de chansons chez les travailleurs de l'acier en Amérique du Nord constitue une tradition importante, bien que peu étudiée. L'industrie de l'acier a joué un rôle majeur dans l'économie et le paysage de l'île du Cap-Breton depuis le milieu du XIXe siècle. La première aciérie a été construite à Sydney Mines dans les années 1870, et une usine plus grande a été construite dans la ville naissante de Sydney, le plus grand centre urbain de l'île, en 1901. Des traditions distinctes de travail et de loisirs ont commencé à émerger au sein du quadrillage de rues et des habitations de la compagnie pour ses travailleurs et gestionnaires. Dans les premières années du XXe siècle, une conscience de la classe ouvrière avait pris racine au coeur de l'industrie de l'acier à Sydney. Leurs chansons traitaient de sujets tels que les conditions difficiles de travail dans l'aciérie, les lieux et ses grandes personnalités, les tragédies, les conflits de travail dans les années 1920, et l'attitude des travailleurs envers la direction. Beaucoup de ces chansons étaient souvent teintées de satire et témoignaient d'un regard acerbe de la vie de la classe ouvrière.

Sydney, comme de nombreuses communautés nord-américaines, a profondément subi le processus de désindustrialisation de la fin du XXe siècle. Les dernières mines de charbon du Cap-Breton ont cessé leurs activités dans les années 1990 et l'usine Sydney Steel ferma ses portes en 2000. Cet article explore les questions suivantes: quel rôle a joué des chansons sur le développement d'une conscience de classe au cours du développement de l'industrie de l'acier à Sydney? Ces chansons ont-elles joué un rôle tout aussi important dans la dernière partie du XXe siècle, lorsque la communauté a subi les processus de désindustrialisation? Quels types de chansons sur l'industrie de l'acier trouve-t-on pour chacune de ces périodes dans l'histoire de Sydney? Une analyse de certaines de ces chansons révèle somme toute beaucoup sur la façon dont les êtres humains réagissent aux processus d'industrialisation et de désindustrialisation.

Residual Radicalism
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In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, an island on the eastern coast of Canada, heavy industry was a major employer for much of the 20th century.[1] The coal and steel industries blossomed between 1880 and 1920; workers immigrated to the region from other Canadian provinces as well as from the United States and Europe. They organized unions, engaged in several bitter strikes and won important concessions from employers (Frank 1999; Heron 1988; McKay 1983). The early years of the 20th century were marked by long, bitter struggles between workers and management. Coal miners in Cape Breton were effectively organized by local labour leaders such as J.B. McLachlan in the 1920s, while steelworkers did not have their union recognized until the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act was passed in 1937. (Frank 1999: 386, 314) These upheavals correspond with the development of an industrial "structure of feeling," which Raymond Williams describes as "[emphasizing] a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world view' or 'ideology' . . . [a structure that is] concerned with meanings and values as they are actually lived and felt" (1977: 132). In the late 20th century, however, these working-class structures of feeling became residual within the cultural landscape as deindustrialization effected the economic and political environment of large portions of Canada, the United States, and Europe.

In this paper, we explore songs and poems relating to the steel industry in Cape Breton. Many of these were written and published by local worker-poets during the 20th century, although we specifically examine song-poems that were created after 1967. These song-poems reveal how cultural

reflections of working-class life reveal the processes of economic divestment and capital mobility which continue to affect industrial communities around the globe. Our work is an outgrowth of the "Protest Song Project" at Cape Breton University (www.protestsongs.ca), which has identified more than 75 protest songs and poems that were written between 1910 and 1930 (MacKinnon 2008: 64-71). The majority of these songs deal with the coal industry and, as Donald MacGillivray notes, "the substantial amount of verse and song which came out of the working class struggles of industrial Cape Breton ... have concentrated little on the situation of the Sydney steelworkers (1991: 273-74). We have only identified 16 songs that focus on steelworkers or employment in the Sydney mill, and the majority of these were penned between the 1940s and the 1960s.[2] In addition, there are 7 popular songs and poems that were written after 1960, which reflect the cultural impact of deindustrialization and decline. Notably, industrial protest songs that were written in the early period tended to be composed by men who worked at the Sydney plant for local consumption, while the more recent songs and poems have been created by professional or semi-professional singer-songwriters.

These cultural practices date back to workers' early experiences of the industrial workplace. The exploitation and economic immiseration experienced within many industrial communities during the late 19th century prompted working-class men and women to craft a class culture based around notions of shared experience and solidarity to challenge the hegemony of the dominant capitalist elite. "Class is a relationship," E.P. Thompson famously argued, "not a thing;" (1980 [1963]: 11) in Cape Breton, coal miners and steelworkers asserted their agency not only through strikes for workplace control, but also in the cultural sphere.

Pre-industrial, "residual" traditions continued to exist within industrial communities in Cape Breton during the period of industrialization. These traditions combined with industrial experiences to inform "emergent" cultural traditions (1986: 22). Emergent working-class structures of feeling are revealed in many traditional practices, such as nicknames, songs, poems, May Day parades, and labour commemorations (Davey and MacKinnon 2001; MacKinnon 2008; Fraser 1992 [1926]; MacGillivray 1991; Heron and Penfold 2005; MacKinnon 2013). The re-imagining of pre-industrial

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2. In contrast, the majority of coal mining poems and songs were written during the labour wars of the 1920s. The reasons for this difference are unclear, although perhaps it is a result of the later unionization of the steelworkers. The steelworkers' union was not officially recognized at the mill until the passage of the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act in 1937.

Scottish tradition in Cape Breton coal towns during the early 20th century is one particularly useful example. By the 1920s, the Gaelic language remained common in many industrial communities, Scottish Catholic Society gatherings occurred frequently, and traditional fiddle and bagpipe styles were combined with the brass band traditions of other ethnicities to furnish the cultural environment of the Cape Breton industrial town (Frank 1985: 206). David Frank and Donald MacGillivray note, "by the end of the First World War there existed in the mining communities of industrial Cape Breton a sturdy and independent working-class culture, a way of looking at the world characterized by specific ideas about morality, political economy, and the community" (1992: xiii).

These industrial structures of feeling faced significant challenges after the 1950s, when industry in Atlantic Canada was hard hit by the economic currents of the decade. Workers faced the threat of plant closures not only within Canada, but also in many areas of the United States and Europe during the following decades. The Sydney steel plant, for example, had fallen behind its Canadian competitors by 1954, when more than 1,200 steelworkers were laid off. This shrank the total workforce at the mill from 4,791 to 3,530 employees (Crawley 1995: 238). In August 1957, A.V. Roe Canada purchased all holdings of the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (Dosco). At the time, Dosco held the controlling interest in the Cape Breton coal industry and directed operations at the steel plant in Sydney. In 1962, A.V. Roe was subsumed under the Canadian division of the Hawker Siddeley Group, which gained control of Dosco as a result. Although the new owners promised that there would be no immediate closure, they began redirecting Dosco profits towards other holdings in central Canada (Cape Breton Post 1957). In 1966, Hawker Siddeley announced that they would begin phasing out operations at local mines, and the following year they revealed plans to close the Sydney mill (Bishop 1990: 168).

Unlike in the United States, where historian Judith Stein describes bipartisan rejection of public ownership as a viable response to deindustrialization, the Canadian government took action to prevent massive social and economic fallout in Cape Breton (1998). The federal government established the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco) in 1967 to assume control of the island's collieries in 1967, and the provincial government formed the Sydney Steel Corporation (Sysco) to direct operations at the steel mill in the following year (Donald 1966: 35; Bishop 1990; Kent 1988, 2001). The following decades were marked by turbulence in world steel markets, and in the early 1990s, Sydney Steel laid

off nearly 800 employees as part of a modernization plan (Globe and Mail 1989; Cape Breton Post 1991). Despite attempts to maintain production and fill orders, Sysco ended production in 2000 and the majority of coal mines in Cape Breton were closed by 2001 (Cape Breton Post 2000-2001).

The closure of Sydney Steel, and the impact of deindustrialization more globally, has prompted artists and songwriters to consider the past, present, and future within the scope of cultural production. The former industrial site in Sydney has recently been transformed into the "Open Hearth Park," which is complete with walking tracks, soccer pitches, playgrounds, green fields and athletic facilities. The location once known as "the worst toxic waste site in Canada," the Sydney Tar Ponds, has been remediated and covered with concrete and grass. Songwriters and poets have since produced reflective prose that corresponds with these social, political, and economic reconfigurations, and it is in these manifestations of local and regional culture that the impacts of deindustrialization and its aftermath are revealed.

Industrial songs and poems are referred to by various terms in the scholarly literature: "labour lore," "industrial lore," "industrial folksong," "protest song," "propaganda song," "occupational folklore," "occupational folklife" and "organizational folklore" (American Folklore Society, 1984; Denisoff 1966; Fowke 1969; Frank 1985: 213; Jones 1985; McCarl 1978: 176). Clark Halker's term "Labor song-poems" perhaps best describes the genre as some were sung, some were recited, and some were circulated in print by broadsides and pamphlets (1991: 78-85). Folklorists such as George Korson, Archie Green and John Greenway pioneered the studying of these kinds of materials at a time when other scholars failed to see their importance (Korson, 1927, 1938, 1943; Green 1972, 1993; Greenway 1953).

Examples of this material from the 1920s have often been explored as a convergence of working-class experiences and "residual" expressions of pre-industrial folk culture. The work of Dawn Fraser, a Cape Breton poet who wrote extensively about labour conflict during the 1920s, is representative of these converging forms. David Frank, writing of Fraser, argues that "his work articulated many of the events, issues, and ideas of the 1920s and in this way both reflected and encouraged the growth of a new 'emergent' working-class culture" (1985: 215). Fraser is only one example of a broader working-class tradition; as MacKinnon writes, "a host of other self-identified composers were frequent contributors, and a select group of song and verse writers used pseudonyms and abbreviations to partially

conceal their identities" (2008: 59).

Another Cape Breton poet, John "Slim" McInnis, wrote extensively of his experiences working at the Sydney steel plant between the 1930s and the 1970s. McInnis, who also wrote under pseudonyms such as "Beachcomber," "Little Twisted," "Slim" and "Anonymous," published his poem "Doscomocracy" in 1943. In context, this was written just a few years after the steelworkers had achieved union recognition through the 1937 Nova Scotia Trade Union Act and just before the commencement of the 1943 steelworkers' strike at Dosco. Doscomocracy, drawing upon an extensive local tradition of labour song and verse, describes the physical effects of the industrial workplace on workers' bodies and decries low wages at the Sydney plant (MacGillivray, 1991: 272).

> My back is bent from a lifetime spent
> In the dirt and steam and snow
> In the General Yard, where the work is hard
> And the wages mean and low.…
> My eyes are dimmed from the years spent in
> The glare of the Open Hearth
> And my lungs are shot from gasses caught
> In DOSCO'S hell on earth.
> My heart is strained and my legs are sprained
> And a din roars in my ears
> From toiling in moulds and greasy holes
> That has shortened my life by years….
> Now my health is ruined and I'll soon be doomed
> To a cold dark debtors grave
> Is a few cents raise in my last few days
> Too much for a lifetime slave?[3]

McInnis' work, spanning from the early period of emergent industrial culture in Cape Breton to the hard times of the 1960s and 1970s, provides an avenue to explore how industrial decline and lost work have been culturally framed. As we are reminded by Sherry Lee Linkon, Tim Strangleman, and James Rhodes, representations, "whether material or intangible, tell us about how the meaning of deindustrialization is changing over time. By studying representations, scholars are able to analyze not only the immediate experience and effects of deindustrialization but also, and importantly, its evolving, contemporary significance" (2013: 17). In Cape Breton, the emergence of "deindustrial" song and verse forms is reflective of David Frank's observation in 1985, that "in some ways the old emergent culture

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3. Throughout this paper we are quoting excerpts from these song-poems; some are quite lengthy.

of the early twentieth century has now become part of a new generation's residual culture" (1985: 218).

MacGillivray closely examines the "work poetry" of John McInnis in a 1991 article in the Canadian labour journal, *Labour / Le Travail*. He includes several examples of McInnis' poems from the 1940s, with titles such as "From Breadlines to Battlefields" and "The Steel Strike." These early poems deal extensively with themes of working-class resistance; descriptions of strikes, indictments of working conditions at the plant, and calls for higher wages are all frequent topics of discussion. One of McInnis' most popular songs amongst steelworkers during the 1940s, called "Dosco's Inferno," described work in the Open Hearth department of the plant. Although he used the pseudonym "Little Twisted" to publish the piece, most Sydney steelworkers knew the identity of the songmaker.

DOSCO's Inferno

…All my toil filled life has been fraught with strife
And all that I have to show
Are the callused palms of these workworn hands
And a faltering step and slow. …

I've shovelled ore thru a furnace door
In the heat of the boiling steel
Where the stink and glare of the poisoned air
Makes a man feel faint and reel.

Oh! I've grown sick of the look of brick
And the paddles and tongs and pails
Of the mud and the mire and McIntyre
And the flame that never fails. …

The charging cars and the hammer and bars
And the smoke of the metal trains
The ladles and pans, the barrow and fans
And the screech of the hoisting cranes. …

Then we'll produce for the common use
For the man in field and ditch,
And we'll liquidate the profit rate
Along with the idle rich. … (MacGIllivray, 1991: 277-78.)

Clearly the songmaker is familiar with the diverse conditions a worker would encounter at an operating steel plant, including shoveling ore,

smelling chemical odours, molten steel and much of the material culture implements including furnaces, ladles, pans, tongs, pails, charging cars, barrows and hoisting cranes. MacGillivray points out that this song by MacInnis continued to circulate amongst steelworkers long after it was originally composed; the song captured the collective experience of many of Sydney's steel workers. This song expresses what Peter Narvaez has termed, the "collective consciousness" of a group of workers. In his study of Buchans, Newfoundland protest songs, he defines collective consciousness as "a form of achieved knowledge wherein the members of a group perceive the mutuality of their socioeconomic position within a larger society through a holistic understanding of the power relations within that social hierarchy. The result of such understanding is a developing sense of 'us' and 'them' in everyday relations." (Narvaez, 2012: 124).

With the release of McInnis' 1970 poem "The Steelworkers Lament," he moves beyond his earlier themes of working-class resistance and collective consciousness to reflect upon his experiences at the plant in light of his planned retirement at 59 years of age (MacGillivray, 1991: 271-274). He describes work processes at the Sydney mill; he "loaded their rails and packed their nails," "gasped and choked in the poison smoke," and "burned his feet in the hellish heat" of the open hearth department. In the poem's conclusion, McInnis notes:

> I've shoveled their ore from the stinking floor
> Of ships from beyond the seas,
> And my stomach turned, when the gas was churned
> From shoveling manganese….
>
> For a man that toils in a steel mill spoils
> His chance for a ripe old age,
> For the hazards to health are early felt,
> And he's old at middle age.
>
> Now these are but few of the jobs I do,
> That briefly I've made mention
> And I feel in my heart that I've played my part,
> And I've earned an early pension (MacGillivray 1991).

In this poem, McInnis reveals the improvements in workers' rights between his early days at the plant and the 1970s. Although a large focus remains on the hard work and tough conditions at the mill, McInnis implies that organized labour has won many battles in order for him to take his "early pension."

Indeed, the years between 1950 and 1970 resulted in many gains for Canadian labour and workers at the Sydney steel plant. Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker argue that "workers in the resource, mass-production, and transportation industries joined . . . the ranks of organized labour" throughout the postwar period. In the mid-1950s, the typical union member was a relatively settled, semi-skilled male worker with a large industrial corporation" (2001: 308). This period was marked by widespread support for the welfare state, Keynesian state spending, and what has been referred to as "a period of advances in social provisions for Canadians" (Finkel 2006: 281). Despite layoffs in the 1950s, Sydney steelworkers benefited from the higher wages and increased health and safety standards that resulted from the expansion of unionism during the 1940s. Although there was some worry among steelworkers that A.V. Roe would dismantle some sections of the plant after the 1957 purchase, it was not until 1967 that another crisis occurred.

It was on "Black Friday," October 13, 1967, that Hawker Siddeley announced the sudden closure of the Sydney steel plant. The plant, which at that point employed more than 3,200 workers, was scheduled to complete production by the following April. The local response was immediate; citizens wrote into newspapers across the province challenging the decision, USWA leaders voiced their displeasure with the news, and local clergy urged their congregations to protest the decision. Father Andrew Hogan, a professor of theology at St. Francis Xavier University and later an NDP Member of Parliament, explained his position: "[We need] an intensive development of the resources we already have . . . the modernization of the Sydney steel plant" (1968: 7). The call for modernization or nationalization was common in the days and weeks following Black Friday. On November 19, 1967, nearly 20,000 community members showed up in downtown Sydney for a "Parade of Concern" over the future of the Sydney steel plant.

At this moment of conflict, with the city poised on the edge of economic ruin through the sudden closure of the plant, one steelworker and singer-songwriter responded within the tradition of protest song and verse that had so illuminated the regional labour wars of the 1920s. "Let's Save Our Industry" written by Charlie MacKinnon on the evening prior to the protest, became intimately associated with the "Parade of Concern" in the collective memory of industry in Sydney.[4] The lyrics offer:

> Let's Save Our Industry
> Let's Save Our Industry

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4.   No relation to the authors.

Let's Save Our Industry
The industry we need.

It brought us joy and brought us tears,
It's been here over sixty years,
It built our homes and stilled our fears,
And made this island what it is. (Chorus)

We need the help of Ottawa,
We are also part of Canada,
They can subsidize Ontario,
Expo and the seaway too. (Chorus)

We stand united one and all
The Maritimes must never fall
So let's all get behind the wheel
And save our coal and save our steel. (Chorus) (Cape Breton's Magazine
1991: 50)

When MacKinnon performed his song at the protest, former steelworker Syd Slaven writes, "there was not a dry eye in the crowd by the time this pleading song from a proud and strong people was finished" (Slaven 2014). MacKinnon's daughter, Sherry MacKinnon MacNeil, described the performance in a 1991 interview with *Cape Breton's Magazine*:

He was so wrapped up in the moment . . . that when he tried to stop, his hands and his knuckles and his fingers were almost freezing from the cold. And it was an effort to play that guitar. But the people just wanted more and more, and they were carrying on the song and consequently he had to keep going (Cape Breton's Magazine 1991: 50).

Although the federal government was unwilling to take responsibility for Sydney Steel, it was only three days after the Parade of Concern that Nova Scotia Premier G.I. Smith announced the planned creation of Sysco and the transition of the plant to public ownership (Bishop, 1990: 169).

"Let's Save Our Industry" draws upon the local tradition of protest song and verse to call for resistance and demand government action in response to deindustrialization. In the first verse, MacKinnon refers to the "love-hate" relationship between Sydney's steelworkers and industrial life; this theme is also visible in Slim McInnis' poetry, wherein the tough working conditions and constant struggle at the plant are juxtaposed with working-class solidarity and culture. Next, MacKinnon, through the use of nationalist imagery, calls upon the federal government to respond to the local crisis: "we are also part of Canada." This is not an uncommon cultural

response to the immediacy of industrial closure. Steven High writes that Canadian communities often rally around national identity to challenge the politics of deindustrialization; this is especially true in areas where Canadian workers are employed through large multi-national corporations (2003: 12). In Sydney, Charlie MacKinnon reconstituted an industrial structure of feeling that had emerged and was common in early 20th century Sydney to frame an answer to the planned industrial flight of 1967.

Despite the creation of "Let's Save Our Industry" in 1967, Frank argues that by the 1970s the industrial folk song tradition in Cape Breton was on the wane (1985).[5] Although there still exists in Cape Breton a songwriting tradition that includes industrial themes, the structure of feeling that had emerged through a combination of rural traditions and industrial experiences underwent a major shift following the nationalization of industry. Historian David Byrne, writing of deindustrialization and culture in the U.K. and Poland, argues that "the industrial to post-industrial transformation [a 'radical phase shift'] happened essentially between the late 1970s and mid-1980s" (2002: 285). Until this point, industrial song and verse were largely characterized by themes of resistance and solidarity in response to malevolent outside action, oftentimes by the employer or strikebreakers. Workers and working-class community members who have had direct experiences of industry, as was the case with John "Slim" McInnis and Charlie MacKinnon, were the most frequent authors of these songs and poems (MacKinnon, 2008).

Cape Breton throughout the 20th century existed within a dominant framework of capitalist production; private property, urbanization, and industrial production were "common sense" features of modernity. Working-class poets and songwriters drew upon collective consciousness and an emergent industrial structure of feeling to oppose this dominant culture and present a bottom-up perspective of the industrial worker. Why then, despite the continuation of steel production under provincial ownership after 1967, did this industrial structure of feeling become residual in Cape Breton by the 1980s? How have these traditions been reflected alongside the deindustrialization of Sydney and the surrounding communities?

In Sydney, significant capital investment was required following the provincial takeover of the steel plant in 1967. While there was a significant investment in the plant's infrastructure in 1973, this effort at

5. Frank does provide some other examples of the continuation of the industrial folksong tradition in the 1970s, such as Rita McNeil's song "Working Man," or the comedic tradition of the Cape Breton Summertime Revue.

modernization was long overdue. This investment provided some upgrades to the aging equipment at the mill, but fell short of the amount needed to replace the aging blast furnaces – a major demand of the steelworkers' union throughout the 1970s. This failure denied Sysco the opportunity to meet increased global demand for steel in the years following the 1970s oil crisis. Meanwhile, debates over public ownership at Sydney Steel became a mainstay of provincial politics; successive Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments were criticized for using the modernization of the plant as leverage for partisan politicking through the 1970s and 1980s (Bishop 1990).

World steel markets began to slump during the 1980s. Sysco required further capitalization to remain competitive with other Canadian steel producers. In 1986, the provincial and federal governments came to a cost sharing agreement that resulted in nearly $40 million being invested in the remediation of the toxic waste site adjacent to the plant – the "Sydney Tar Ponds." A portion of these funds was intended to contribute to the "modernization" of the plant; this would see the closure of the integrated steel mill and the transition to an "electric-arc mini-mill." The blast furnaces would be replaced, although the new processes of steelmaking were far less labour intensive than older practices. Ultimately, this transition would come at the cost of nearly 700 jobs out of a workforce of 1,500 employees (Cape Breton Post 1991). The majority of the "deindustrial" folk songs that we have identified through this project were written after the 1980s, corresponding with the modernization and decline of Sydney Steel.

John McInnis published his final poem in the Cape Breton newspaper, the *Northside Tribune*, on August 10, 1988. It was entitled, "Tramping Down the Highway," and it dealt with the massive layoffs suffered at Sydney Steel as the result of the ongoing modernization. McInnis wrote:

> When you're tramping down the highway,
> And you haven't got a dime
> And you've spent the summer searching
> For a job you couldn't find.
> . . .
> And the whole darn Constitution
> Wouldn't buy a single meal
> When you're tramping down the highway
> Or laid off at Sydney Steel.
>
> Still we laud the Trudeau Charter

> There's no other left to choose
> As we're tramping down the highway
> With the cardboard in our shoes. (Northside Tribune 1988)

"Tramping Down the Highway" is the last poem from the generation of poets and songwriters that documented the strikes and struggles of early industrial Cape Breton from firsthand experience. Through his career, McInnis' poems spanned calls for solidarity and resistance, reflections upon the character of industrial work and pride over workers' gains, and – with his final poem – ruminations on the negative effects of industrial decline. His references to the Canadian political climate of the 1980s – "Still we laud the Trudeau Charter, There's no other left to choose" – imply a deeper consideration of a road not taken for the Canadian labour movement. Was deindustrialization the inevitable result of the co-option of unionism by business interests in the postwar period? Was the compact between labour and capital doomed to failure?

Scholarship on deindustrialization in the 1980s often reflected the view that industrial decline and the "runaway shop phenomenon" was the direct result of neoliberal globalization and capital movement resulting from trade liberalization in the 1970s. In 1982, economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison published *The Deindustrialization of America*. The cause of industrial decline, they argue, is the breakdown of the *Pax Americana* – the postwar compact between capital and labour that resulted in workers' turning towards business unionism in exchange for stable employment, better wages, and union rights (1982).

More recently, benefiting from a longer historical view, historians and sociologists of deindustrialization argue that it is not simply the result of specific policy decisions since the 1970s, but a fundamental process of global capitalism that results in industrial decline. Despite the fixed, large-scale investments in places like Sydney, it soon became clear that – as Steven High argues: "capitalism is never stationary, constantly creating the new and incessantly destroying the old, its path is not predetermined" (2007: 2). Similarly, Christopher Johnson has traced the processes of deindustrialization through capitalist investment and disinvestment in France beginning as early as the early 1700s in some regions (1995). This does not imply that deindustrialization is an inevitable process or that working-class people have no agency in the way it unfolds; rather, the example of Sysco's creation in 1967 reveals the value of localized and regional protest in influencing material conditions.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, there is a clear shift in the types of songs and poems that are written about the steel industry in Sydney. Whereas much of McInnis' work, and other poems from the island's industrializing period, deal with the power of solidarity and working class resistance, by the 1990s we begin to witness the emergence of the "inevitable decline" trope. This is particularly visible in the 1992 song, "Man of Steel," written by award-winning Prince Edward Island musician Lennie Gallant in reference to the recent layoffs at Sydney Steel.

> He got the news this morning,
> It came without a warning: They're gonna shut the whole thing down,
> Seven hundred men out of work.
> Another paper promise gone down.
>
> Oh, he's only forty-five but he's still alive,
> 'Cause he's never fought a fight he hasn't won;
> A man of steel says, "Don't ever break, until the job is done."
> …
> Oh, what's a man suppose to do,
> When they want to retrain you,
> And they tell you something will come along?
> You start whistling a familiar tune,
> When you hear them sing the same old song.
> …
> Yesterday he saw his little girl at play,
> It's a game he played when he was nine;
> Paper and stones and scissors of steel,
> Paper winning every time. (Gallant 1992).

In "Man of Steel," it is clear that there has been a break from earlier themes of resistance, solidarity, and labour battles. Past successes are referenced (He's never fought a fight he hasn't won), but it is clear that Gallant's steelworker is not going to win the battle against final closure and international capital (Paper winning every time). The refrain chorus after each verse speaks of bureaucracy winning over the hot, hard work of the steelworkers:

> Oh, the fires are fading in the plant tonight,
> But they're burning in his body and his mind;
> He said, They want to melt my heart down,
> But it's not yet time
> "I felt the temperature rising,
> Though the blast furnace was dying;
> As he fell to his knees upon the ground.

> In the end it took a piece of paper
> To cut the steel man down."

This song was an important song for Lennie Gallant, helping him to win Male Artist of the Year for the East Coast Music Awards and receiving two Juno award nominations in 1991. Furthermore, he was given the Order of Canada in 2003. As Adrianne Clarkson, Governor General said at the time: "Songs like Peter's Dream, Island Clay, Man of Steel and The Hope for Next Year, articulate the feelings of many caught up in desperate situations beyond their control, and at the same time celebrate the beauty of lifestyle and landscape with their strong poetry and stirring narratives" (Gallant biography: www.lenniegallant.com). While it is a moving song, with sympathy for the soon-to-be unemployed steelworkers, there is little reference in the song to the many diverse sections and work patterns of a large, multi-purpose steel mill.

Gallant's lyrics also clearly reflect historian Michael Frisch's assertion that "by the early 1990s ... [deindustrialization] had become naturalized in the sense of seeming a natural and inevitable 'stage' in the anthropomorphized growth of the body politic and economic and historicized in the sense of seeming an ineluctable stage in the positivist movement of modern history" (1998: 247). This is also explored in international cultural representations of deindustrialization, a sentiment that is visible in one assessment of Bruce Springsteen's 1995 song, "Youngstown." The song, which is "deeply pessimistic and ... ends in resignation and bitterness," reflects the "loss of community and lost masculine pride in hard manual labour" (High 2002: 108). This is not a new trope however, as there are many examples throughout the world of songs about decommissioned mines and mills; two that come readily to mind are Si Kahn's "Aragon Mill" written in 1974 about the loss of mill culture in Aragon Georgia and "North Country Blues" by Bob Dylan in 1964 about the closing down of an iron ore mining town. ("Aragon Mill"; "North Country Blues").[6]

It is interesting to note that the disappearance of resistance in the deindustrialized folk song tradition corresponds with an increasing number of references to working-class masculinities. In 1988, Wayne Krszwda - a former construction worker at the Sydney steel plant – wrote the song "Strong Man" when he was being laid off from the plant. The song was also chosen to be included in a documentary film being made by the National

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6.   There are also many examples of 19th century broadsides that address the issue of changing industry and technology, and its impact on working conditions. An exploration of these types of songs would make for an interesting further study.

Film Board and Cape Breton University to document the history of Sydney Steel. Although the subjects of industrial folk songs are almost universally working-class men, the characteristics of "manhood" or masculinity are rarely explicit.[7] In the deindustrial folk song, however, assertions of masculinity are specifically mentioned. They reflect a particular kind of class experience, one that is rooted in the immediacy of threatened closure. Sherry Lee Linkon, describing worker-produced poems, essays, and stories, writes, "these works . . . often focus on documenting the work being lost ... it is more about industrial work than the legacy of deindustrialization" (2013: 39-40). Krszwda's "Strong Man" lyrics read:

> He worked night and day in the dirt and the heat
> He tried to earn a dollar to make ends meet
> He was a strong man
> He was a strong man
>
> He never realized through all of his years
> From all of his sweat and all of his fears
> He was a strong man
> He was a strong man
>
> But some folks across the Strait are trying to knock him down.
> They just don't realize they also need his strength around
> He's a strong man
> He's a strong man (Making Steel 1988)

Matt Minglewood, an award winning Cape Breton rock and blues songwriter, explored similar themes in his 1999 song "How High is High Enough?" These lyrics include:

> He was a boy from a steel town,
> He soon had a look in his eye,
> Not the look of a child but the wild look of fury,
> Like an animal caught in the wire
>
> School was the streets of town,
> His lessons he learned with his fists,
> Not a mean man he just felt alone,
> Like a wolf on a hill in the mist. (Minglewood 1999).

Cultural reflections of gender reveal how working-class men and women respond to economic transformation. Canadian historian Craig

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7. One example of an industrial folk song that does not deal with male experience is "The Old Song Resung," which was written in 1924 to describe a working-class woman's experience of an unwanted pregnancy.

Heron argues, "Masculinity is best seen as a complex expression of male practices consciousness, and cultural representation developed in specific contexts ... working-class masculinities were not fixed, static, or universal, but shaped in specific ways" (2006: 7). The emergence of hyper-masculinity within the deindustrial folk song corresponds with the decline and loss of well-paying, traditionally male employment in factories and heavy industry. The lyrics to "Strong Man" and "How High is High Enough" reflect a male breadwinner ideal that faced rapid decline alongside the loss of industrial jobs in places like Sydney. In an anthropological study of deindustrialization in Galesburg, Illinois, Chad Broughton and Tom Walton support this point; they argue, "as deindustrialization hits home, a chapter closes on the forms of masculine identity that carefully intertwined work and fatherhood, but new strategies and adaptations point to the historical fluidity of what constitutes a gendered identity" (2006: 10).

A brief period of heightened production followed the modernization of Sysco in the late 1980s. Slackening global steel markets of the 1990s resulted in diminished returns, however, and the provincial government began seeking a private purchaser for the plant. Despite several potential buyers, hope was fading by the end of the decade (Demont 1993: 44; Northern Miner 2004). Progressive Conservative candidate John Hamm promised to close Sydney Steel with or without a sale during the 1999 provincial election campaign, and he was elected with a majority government on July 27. The final rail was rolled at the Sydney steel plant on May 22, 2000, and the next day nearly 300 employees were laid off. Although the government entered into talks with the Duferco Steel Company, this deal fell through in 2001 and Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm announced the liquidation of the plant (Cape Breton Post 1999-2001).

In the period following industrial closure, songs written about the Sydney steel mill continued to include industrial themes; however, the majority that were written following Sysco's closure were created by professional musicians or community members who had had only brief experiences working at the Sysco. This differs from the industrial folk song in earlier periods, where songwriters like John McInnis worked at the plant for most of their lives. This transition from class-based to popular culture, following the experience of large-scale deindustrialization, provides a window into how the economic violence of deindustrialization is contextualized within rural, single-industry economies. James Rhodes, writing of cultural responses to steel closures in Youngstown, Ohio, argues that popular culture can "represent a more complex interaction of space

and time as aspects of the past are alternatively disavowed, recovered, rearticulated, and reconstructed in relation to shifting economic, social, and cultural contexts (2013: 56). This assessment holds true in Sydney, where songs emerging after the final closure reveal a more contested view of the industrial past than was present in earlier cultural iterations. The lyrics of Tom Mills' 2006 "Steel Winds," for example, read:

> Cranes reach the clouds with dangling hooks
> Boxcars lie waiting by tar-filled brooks
> In that rail and bar mills if only they'd known
> Like statues awaiting their turn to go home
>
> Gone are the memories of all hands on deck
> No lunch pails are packed from Dutch Brook to Baddeck
> Conscience upended I left it behind
> The poisonous gas And a tormented mind
>
> A river of gold Blood it conceals
> A hearth that once breathed fire and steel
> Days fill with night but their ovens still rage
> Merely a beacon to these men of old age
> This hand me down sludge, they pretend it's ok
> They truck it and bury it and wish it away
> Now all that's left are pillars of rust
> And these warm Steel Winds
> That choke in the dust (Mills 2006).

The first verse of "Steel Winds" describes the blighted landscape of deindustrialization. Abandoned cranes, boxcars, and tar-filled brooks are all referred to as memorials to industrial closure. This imagery of abandonment and decay is sometimes referred to in deindustrialization literature as "ruin porn" (Clemens 2011; Strangleman 2013). Ruin porn has been used to describe the aesthetic commodification of industrial abandonment imagery, whether in coffee table books, photography, or film. While white, middle-class bohemians, urban explorers, and artists who revel in industrial rubble have been referred to as "the colonizing arm of the middle class," Tom Mills defies this label. Mills is currently a Sydney-based professional singer songwriter, who spent a year working at Sydney Steel when he was 20 years old. Mills notes that he wrote the song in 2006 to relate the personal experience of working at the plant. He reflected in a brief discussion that after working only one year at the plant, he realized that it was not something he intended to do for his entire life.

"Steel Winds" draws upon industrial imagery to reveal the continued

relevance of class politics in the post-industrial period. This is particularly true in lines such as, "No lunch pails are packed from Dutch Brook to Baddeck," "This hand me down sludge, they pretend it's okay, They truck it and bury it and wish it away." Alongside the continuing class implications of lost work, this song refers specifically to the environmental and health effects of industry that remain in Sydney.

The full extent of the environmental effects of a century of steelmaking became clear during the 1980s, when high cancer rates in the Sydney neighbourhoods of Ashby and Whitney Pier began receiving national attention in Canadian newspapers and other media (Barlowe and May, 2000). This theme, of the environment and health repercussions of industry, is not present within the deindustrial folk songs from that decade. Rather, these themes appear to emerge within popular culture only after the plant's final closure. The contested politics that surround deindustrialization are also visible in "Steel Winds;" Mills critiques the public costs of industrial decline in terms of environment and health (They pretend it's okay . . . They wish it away), while also lamenting the economic and political impacts of the deindustrialization process. This conflict between environmental impact and the availability of industrial work replaces the frequent discussions of "hard work" and working conditions that characterized pieces written during the plant's decline or themes of worker/managerial class struggle from the early period of the industrial folk song.

John Campbelljohn, another well-known blues singer-songwriter from Sydney, has included Sydney Steel as a setting for his recent work. Campbelljohn was also a steelworker for a brief period, and his father was also employed at the plant. His 2006 song, "Down at Sydney Steel," reflects many of the same themes of contested memory that are visible in Mills' work. His lyrics read:

> Dan would get the call tonight, "the power lines are down,"
> And momma's home praying, "Danny come home safe and sound,"
> Uncle Johnny smoked his pipe and his stories were so real
> But the open hearth was all he knew,
> Down at Sydney Steel
>
> The sparks are thick as fireflies, the molten metal glows
> She'll find a way to kiss you, buddy, burning through your clothes
> You love the work, you hate the work, your back's against the wheel
> But I never dreamed they'd lock that gate,
> Down at Sydney Steel.

> 30 years, they paid their dues
> And worked with all their pride
> But when they finally got the news, some just sat and cried
> But there was safety in numbers and solidarity
> And Charlie MacKinnon led the chorus, "Save Our Industry."
> ...
> Yeah they took it all away (Campbelljohn 2006)

Campbelljohn refers to the dangers and hardships of work at the Sydney mill, while also reflecting upon the successes of community solidarity and protest during the 1967 Parade of Concern. The song is full of references to the immediacy of working in a hot, dirty place where steel is made from the combining of limestone, coke and iron ore. He also makes reference to the love/hate relationship that many workers feel when working in a steel plant . The difficult work helps pays the bills but it is extremely dangerous and dirty. He also makes mention of the surprise that the mill was closing for good. This example is far more celebratory than Mills' "Steel Winds," as Campbelljohn never explicitly discusses the effects of final closure, present conditions within Sydney, or environmental repercussions.

The most recent deindustrial folk song that we have identified in Sydney is Lee Stewart's 2004 piece, "The Streets of My Hometown." This song is firmly grounded in the post-industrial period; it does not refer to the qualities of work at Sydney Steel or to community resistance, but to the social impact on daily life in the city following industrial flight. Stewart writes:

> I can recall not so long ago I'd hear that mid-night whistle blow,
> I'd watch the men, with their lunch pails in hand
> Down to the steel mill they'd go
> They made their living then, there in that devil's den,
> Where the searing heat turned boys into men
> When their shifts would end they'd head back home again
> Not knowing what tomorrow might bring.
>
> Now as I walk along, the streets of my hometown
> I no longer see the men I used to see around
> It seems they left the Island, since the mill shut down
> It's a lonely place now, the streets of my hometown
> ...
> To the colleges they go, sit in desk row on row
> They plan their future and their dreams
> Not wanting to be misled, by the words their teachers said
> They sit not knowing what tomorrow might bring (Stewart 2004).

The song contrasts the experiences of work in the Sydney steel plant with the current economic environment, where recent assessments have estimated nearly 18 per cent unemployment (Cape Breton Post 2013). Out-migration is another major problem in industrial Cape Breton; in 2012, a study by Medavie Health Foundation found that 18 per cent of the population was over 65 years of age. Unemployment and underemployment among youth is also an important factor in driving young workers off-island (Medavie Health Foundation 2012). Stewart describes a sense of "loneliness" that has become associated with the city since the loss of Sysco; this loss is jarring when juxtaposed with the sense of working-class camaraderie revealed in the first verse. Stewart's point is reminiscent of Simon Charlesworth's work on deindustrialization in the South Yorkshire coalfield in the U.K.; Charlesworth conducted dozens of oral history interviews in the city of Rotherham to conclude that deindustrialization has resulted in workers' feeling both bodily and culturally uncomfortable in areas where industrial work and its structures are no longer the norm (Charlesworth 2000). This notion of discomfort is revealed in Stewart's depiction of community members in Sydney, including former steelworkers and the current generation of workers and students, who struggle "not knowing what tomorrow will bring."

In our overview of industrial and deindustrial folk songs in Cape Breton, we have explored the transition from an emergent industrial structure of feeling during the early 20th century to one that remains influential in a residual capacity. In crafting this industrial structure of feeling, Cape Breton workers created a cultural edifice that challenged the intellectual hegemony of capitalist production in industrial towns. Local protest, such as the 1967 Parade of Concern, drew upon this history of industrial struggle to inform political protest against the processes of deindustrialization. As industry in Sydney and the surrounding coal towns declined, poets and local songwriters reflected this transformation in their prose; the loss of the perceived male breadwinner ideal, out-migration, and the notion of inevitable decline have all been included in these representations. Since the final closure of the plant in 2000, songwriters have examined the consequences of industrial loss and the marginalization of the working class in Cape Breton. These cultural creators have not yet linked the industrial past with an imagined post-industrial future; although Stewart discusses students of the "new" knowledge economy in "The Streets of my Hometown," ultimately they, too, fear for the future.

John Kirk, Steve Jefferys and Christine Wall remind us that the impact

of deindustrialization "on the identities and cultures that derive from the range of experiences, customs and traditions that earlier ways of living and working brought into being ... remains vital to an understanding of the future cohesion and identity of [deindustrialized] regions" (2012: 213). James Abrams in his study of cultural representation in what he terms, "the documentary landscape" of the Pennsylvania coal mining region, points out that, "deindustrialization, cultural tourism, and the media of nostalgia have generated a new international industrial heritage movement that unites workers of the world-as images. But surely these images and themes are consumed, resisted, and reinvented differently, in, for example, southwestern Pennsylvania and South Wales" (Abrams 1994: 27). We hope that our article has contributed to an understanding of issues surrounding deindustrialization, resistance and the development of cultural forms such as labour song-poems. We would like to conclude with a broader question: how can community members in deindustrializing and post-industrial regions draw upon residual structures of feeling to inform an emergent culture that challenges the destitution wrought by dominant neoliberal hegemony? This question remains important not only for former industrial communities like Cape Breton, but also for all areas struggling with deindustrialization in Canada and around the globe.

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