

## **Working-Class History in English Canada in the 1980s: An Assessment**

James Naylor

Volume 19, numéro 1, autumn 1989

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad19\\_1re01](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad19_1re01)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Naylor, J. (1989). Working-Class History in English Canada in the 1980s : an Assessment. *Acadiensis*, 19(1), 157–169.

# Reviews Essays/Notes critiques

## Working-Class History in English Canada in the 1980s: An Assessment

SLIGHTLY MORE THAN A DECADE AGO "the new working-class history" emerged in Canada. It was an occasion marked by considerable enthusiasm as ringing manifestos promised "to bring back ordinary working people from their long exile on the margins of Canadian history".<sup>1</sup> Existing institutional histories of trade unions and industrial relations, it was pointed out, told us remarkably little about the experience of workers or, in more general terms, about the nature of social class in Canadian history. On the basis of this critique of the existing historiography, a new generation of working-class historians set out an ambitious agenda. The complexity of workers' experience could only be understood in its totality, requiring an understanding of social relations as they evolved within workplaces, neighbourhoods, ethnic and fraternal associations, political parties, and (as somewhat of an afterthought) families. Only this level of investigation could reveal the myriad of interconnections which provide the texture of what historians were coming to recognize as an autonomous working-class culture. Herein lay the key to understanding working-class activity.

Naturally, this was a tall order. Labour historians were challenged to move far beyond the bounds of trade unions and labour parties to understand class-based behaviour. And, in the 1980s, the order continued to grow taller. An interest in workers' daily life soon meshed with feminist historians' concern to understand the determinants of women's position in both the workplace and society. The two forms of women's participation in production, as (often temporary) paid workers in the labour force and as unpaid domestic workers in the household, it was soon apparent, could not be viewed in isolation from each other. Also, the rapid growth of ethnic history forced labour historians to reconceptualize what they had always known but rarely integrated into their work. Just as the Canadian working class was not exclusively male, neither was it native-born and white. The presence of women and immigrants had been acknowledged, but usually only as sources of division and conservatism. Any understanding of class in Canada, however, has to recognize that ethnic and gender differences did not derail class development, but were intrinsic to the formation of the working class. Women and immigrants were there from the beginning.

The agenda of "new" working-class historians, then, has evolved, itself a sign of vitality. It also makes the task of the reviewer somewhat more difficult. The boundaries of working-class or labour history are no longer very distinct. Rather, they merge imperceptibly into a broader social history. Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto, 1976), p. 7.

even if we confine ourselves to a discussion of work and workers, the enthusiasm which marked the emergence of the new working-class history continues to bear plentiful fruit. A huge body of work in article form, largely in the journal *Labour/Le Travail*, testifies to the innovative character and diversity of the field. Two recent anthologies provide an entry into this literature. *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings* (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1987) is edited by David J. Bercuson, an intellectual opponent of the new historians. Indeed, the editor reprints a now classic 1981 interchange between himself and Gregory S. Kealey on the emergence of the challenge to the "old labour history". While Bercuson appropriately points to the ideological gulf separating the "old" and "new", the wide range of subjects and methods in this volume implicitly refutes his assumption that there are but "two approaches" (p. 231). While debate among new working-class and social historians in Canada has been more muted than in the United States, and particularly Britain, the anthology edited by Bryan Palmer, *The Character of the Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986) reflects a diversity of interests and approaches. Certainly, the articles by Ian McKay, Craig Heron, or Gail Cuthbert Brandt, each of which focuses in different ways upon the structural constraints and transformations of various industries and labour markets, are not specifically concerned with working-class culture which Bercuson considered as the defining character of the new working-class history. Despite such diversity, the agenda which was set out a decade ago remains a useful yardstick with which to measure subsequent production. How much has recent work helped us to understand the complexities of working-class life and the character and direction of labour activity? The answer here is mixed, but let us begin with the more successful endeavors.

The first contributions to this new historiography focussed on the period of Canadian industrialization in the last half of the 19th century. Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer's *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982) crowned this formative period. Rooted in the authors' earlier studies of Toronto and Hamilton, this volume effectively challenges historians' assumptions that late-19th-century workers shared middle-class values of acquisitive individualism. Certainly wider influences of Gladstonian liberalism or Tory paternalism as well as a wide range of reform panaceas and ethnic loyalties pervaded the movement, but a belief in the nobility of useful labour underlay all of the Knights' activities. The impetus behind the movement's impressive growth was, of course, the emergence of industrial capitalism, against which distinct working-class values were articulated through every-day rituals and struggles. Some of the difficulties, as well as the necessity, of transcending the limits of community studies such as those previously undertaken by the authors are apparent. The significance of the Knights largely lies in the extent of its influence, but the reasons for its appeal, anchored as they were in the experience of daily life and work, are less easily

discerned in a broader study such as this. On the other hand, a particular strength of this volume is the extent to which an analysis of the "moral economy" of an emerging working class is rooted in an explicit discussion of the development of the region's industrial economy. This ability to link the material and cultural aspects of class formation has at times eluded those who write in the tradition of E.P. Thompson's cultural marxism.

Tackling the 20th century has proven somewhat more difficult. By 1900, an established working class was well-acquainted with capitalism and an analysis based upon the dynamic interplay of residual and emergent cultures no longer seems to apply. Indeed, Bryan Palmer's attempt to extend his study of Hamilton into the first decades of the century proved to be an awkward appendage to *Culture in Conflict*. Moreover, whatever the intention of the authors, the concentration on workers' initial responses to the emergence of industrial capitalism does little to challenge the popular notion, often explicitly expressed by "modernization" theorists, that workers reached an accommodation with capitalism and middle-class values. Even within the marxist tradition, some theorists argue that workers have learned to accept their own subordination, consenting in a system which offers them meagre rewards. However, examples of significant, and dramatic, resistance have been interspersed with apparent consent throughout this century. Explaining this dynamic requires a closer look at workers' lives. The most interesting and important works of the 1980s have taken their cue from Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1974). Essentially, Braverman argued that employers had succeeded in establishing control over the workplace by appropriating the skill once held by artisans and craftworkers. By deskilling employees through various forms of technological change and "scientific management", workers have been deprived of any control over their working lives.

*On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*, edited by Craig Heron and Robert Storey (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986), provides the best introduction to the growing debate on the labour process initiated by Braverman. The editors have drawn together an impressive array of case studies of workplaces from the forest to the office, from Burger King to the docks, while placing them all within the context of a coherent theoretical framework. Sensitive to the goal of bringing workers "back from the margins", the authors are generally critical of Braverman's failure to analyze workers' resistance to deskilling and to increasingly pervasive management. The failure of Taylorist scientific management, or the assembly line, to settle finally the question of control is apparent in other management strategies up to and including the auto industry's Quality of Working Life Program discussed by Don Wells. As David Frank reminds us in his article on Cape Breton miners, the workplace remained a contested terrain. In this case, the author demonstrates that the persistence of an autonomous workplace culture rooted in the significant control miners maintained over the

production process explains both the scope and nature of their radicalism. Both miners' strike tactics and, eventually, their strategic demand for the nationalization of the mines were the product of "common assumptions about their right to exercise a powerful latent authority within their workplace" (p. 109).

Not all workers shared these assumptions. Office workers and fast-food employees enjoyed few workplace traditions. Many workers were unable to exercise much control over the definition of skill. As several authors point out, notions of whether a particular job requires "skill" is only partially intrinsic to the task; in large part it is socially determined. As Graham S. Lowe argues in *On the Job* and in *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987), changes in the labour process in the office went hand-in-hand with the feminization of the workplace. Focusing on the role of management in shaping an emerging workplace, Lowe analyses the emergence of the office as a low-paying female job ghetto. Still, the subject remains grist for the social historians' mill, as the women workers themselves are, by Lowe's admission, largely left out of the study. Their story cannot be understood solely in the context of the office, largely because it was within a broader patriarchal society that their skills were discounted, occupational constraints imposed, and aspirations shaped.

A series of studies of the labour process in various industries has demonstrated the potential of this debate for understanding work in the 20th century. Three of these volumes are of particular value. In Ian Radforth's *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987) changes in the labour process, the labour market and the industrial relations system are intricately interwoven to provide an insightful picture of workers in an important industry. Workers' responses to grueling work, isolated conditions and meagre rewards are carefully traced. Engaged in largely seasonal work often drawing on a semi-proletariat of marginal farmers and immigrants, woods workers had little control over the labour market and few traditions upon which they could construct a claim to craftworkers' status, in spite of the considerable degree of knowledge required on the job. An inability to claim skilled status, along with the common experience of the bush camp, and the specific experience of immigrant workers, particularly Finns, together account for the radical industrial unionism which emerged in Northern Ontario in the 1920s and 1930s. In an interesting discussion of developments since 1945, the author takes Braverman to task. While innovations in technology, management and transportation have transformed the industry in the direction of modern factory production, there is little evidence of deskilling *tout court*. Some old skills persisted, while new tasks associated with expensive machinery, required new skills. The introduction of new methods, Radforth documents, involved ongoing struggle and negotiation; consequently, the modern wood-worker maintains a high degree of discretion at work.

Craig Heron draws a parallel conclusion in *Working in Steel: The Early Years*

in *Canada, 1883-1935* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1988). Steel typified the mass production industries which took root at the beginning of the 20th century. As such, it seems to represent a definitive break with the world of the craftworkers which compelled the attention of the new working class historians of the 1970s. Unskilled or "semi-skilled" sojourners from Europe or migrants from the Canadian countryside, steelworkers had few industrial traditions to draw upon. Yet Heron carefully documents the extent to which employers remained dependent upon the knowledge and experience of key workers. A homogeneous and easily replaceable workforce may have been the dream of managers, but they busied themselves with intricate schemes of punishment and reward as a means of maintaining workers' loyalty and diligence. Heron draws several general conclusions from this study, but perhaps the most salutary is an understanding that the "working class was not born once and for all time in the nineteenth century" (p. 168). Social relations at the workplace were made and remade as industries retooled, new labour processes developed, and new sources of labour were tapped. The various forms of protest which emerged, as well as the great variety of industrial relations at different steel plants, can be explained, in part, by the unevenness of this process.

Most recently, Eric Sager has applied the tools of the new working-class history to the merchant marine. Although there is a vast historical literature on ships and shipping, Sager's fascinating study, *Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), demonstrates that viewing sailors as (in David Alexander's phrase) "working men who got wet", and applying the insights of social history, enables historians to penetrate the social relations of this apparently unique workplace. For instance, beneath the presumed imperatives of technology and social hierarchy necessary to coordinate the work of the crew, Sager discovers the great range of "social choices and assumptions" (p. 88) revealed in the uses of technology and in shipping legislation. Moreover, the changes emulated those in land-based industries as social distinction between owners, managers and workers grew and an increasingly sophisticated division of labour was created. The decision to concentrate knowledge and skill in the hands of the officers, Sager explains, was not the product of "a simple technological imperative." (p. 263) One of the consequences of the peculiarities of the "industry", such as an interventionist body of maritime law, was the type of documentation left to the historian. It is hard not to imagine the possibilities if factory managers were required to maintain daily logs, and workers had to sign detailed articles of employment! But the critical distance Sager maintained from such sources, and the theoretical framework within which he was able to utilize them, makes *Seafaring Labour* a testament to the sophistication of the best of the new working-class history. When viewed in combination with Judith Fingard's portrayal of shore life in *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982), misleading and superficial conceptions of sailors as misfits and

outcasts are effectively laid to rest.

Despite such impressive contributions, the agenda of the new working-class history is far from fulfilled. While we know far more about some workplaces, and have developed the tools with which to probe others, the broader context within which class develops and evolves has been the subject of far less work. The works by Radforth, Heron and Sager examine overwhelmingly male workplaces, although Radforth and Heron point out important exceptions to this rule. The working-class culture which emerged in such settings would, of necessity, also be a male culture. Its features are yet to be systematically explored. Not surprisingly, there has been a sustained interest in working class women both in the household and the workplace, although still relatively little has appeared in book form. Most important in forcing us to rethink some of the assumptions of Canadian industrialization in a manner which includes gender has been Marjorie Cohen's *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 1988). She convincingly demonstrates that a pre-industrial division of labour whereby women produced household products for domestic use and for the market was a basis upon which staple production developed. In an already well-known study of dairying, the process by which women were excluded from production as it moved into the factory is clearly documented. All of this is indeed salutary although the lessons of the new social history could be applied here. Cohen's women do not appear as active agents in this process; did they resist or acquiesce in these developments? What were their concerns? While Cohen effectively demonstrates that an important element of control was lost by farm women as they were excluded from the market, her description of the incessant, grueling work of farm women leads one to wonder what they thought of the changes taking place. Moreover, attempts to generalize beyond this case are largely constructed upon the narrow basis of the Census; her conclusions regarding the marginalization of women's labour must be considered provisional.

In *On the Job*, Mercedes Steedman most effectively links the notion that women in the needle trades were doing "inferior work for inferior wages" (p. 167) to women's place in the family and the difficulty of overcoming dependence upon it. Women and men experience paid labour very differently; the fact that struggles over skill which fuelled the craft union movement would never have the same kind of impact among women workers does not point to any kind of conservatism, only to different goals. As Steedman demonstrates, women's weakness in the union movement was due less to apathy than to discrimination and their lack of strategic position in an industry which depended on skills inaccessible to them. The contribution of feminism to understanding women's work within a broader framework is reflected in Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1988). Women most often entered the paid labour market when family demands allowed or required it, most often as adolescents or in times

of financial crisis. Therefore, the decision to take a job, and the attitude towards that job was shaped by a variety of considerations, many quite remote from the workplace. Moreover, the unpaid labour of managing the household as well as shifting ideological constructions of proper behaviour for women all combined to shape women's experience of work.

An indication of the growing awareness of diversity in class formation is *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia*, edited by Rennie Warburton and David Coburn (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1988). Although the authors come from a variety of academic backgrounds and deal with diverse topics, the centrality of race and gender to their concerns is striking. Several refer to, and attempt to refute, Peter Ward's claim that British Columbia society is more deeply divided racially than along lines of class.<sup>2</sup> This has led several authors to resurrect the history of militancy on the part of the province's natives and Asians while, of course, acknowledging deep currents of racism. In the post-World War I strikes in New Westminster and the 1931 Fraser Mills strike, events ably analyzed by Allen Seager and Jeanne Meyers respectively, battle lines were clearly drawn between classes regardless of race. Nevertheless, few demands of specific interest to workers of colour seem to have been posed. What did Asian and native workers bring to this alliance? Or did they participate on the terms of white workers? Answers to such questions, of course, require that the light of historical research be cast directly onto native and Asian workplaces, cultural practices and communities. In the meantime, there are important insights which Gillian Creese makes in her contribution to the volume. The region's working class was racially segmented from the outset as the result of explicitly racist decisions regarding labour recruitment and employment. Attempting to demonstrate the primacy of race or class in British Columbia's history misses the important point that neither has existed independently of the other; it is a gordian knot which will not be untied without undue violence to the texture of historical experience. Similarly, *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on The History of Women's Work in British Columbia*, edited by Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro (Victoria, Camosun College, 1984), takes as its starting principle an understanding of the diversity of women's (paid and unpaid) experience in the context of racial and class divisions.

Although the historians of the labour process, and those who have examined gender and ethnic relations, have added immeasurably to our understanding of workers in the 20th century, much of the recent work on working-class politics and organizations remains unenlightened by these insights. Indeed, many of the criticisms initially made by the "new" working-class historians continue to ring true. A number of historians have been drawn to the 1940s and 1950s when the

2 W. Peter Ward, *BC Studies*, 45 (Spring 1980), pp. 17-36.



union movement took its current form, both organizationally and politically with the emergence of large industrial unions with a social democratic leadership. The conflict which resulted in the Communists being driven out of the labour movement has attracted both academic and popular interest. Much of this work retains the flavour of the cold war, as authors display more interest in fighting old battles than understanding the sources of conflict within the labour movement.

The oft-told tale of the battles between the Communist-led Canadian Seamen's Union and Hal Banks' Seafarers' International Union, is a case in point. Unfortunately, the quality of the narrative does not improve with the telling. Two recent works, Jim Green's *Against the Tide: The Story of the Canadian Seaman's Union* (Toronto, Progress Books, 1986) and William Kaplan's *Everything that Floats: Pat Sullivan, Hal Banks, and the Seamen's Unions of Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto, 1987), although written from opposed perspectives, suffer from a similar myopia. In Green's account, Communist Party policy directly reflected the interest and concerns of the seaman and resulted in the construction of a union noted for its democracy and militancy. In Kaplan's view, the CSU was an instrument through which "Canadian seamen were being used — in the interests of the Soviet Union" (p. 65). Neither version presents a convincing multidimensional picture of the Communist Party through this period. Indeed, the relationship between the party and unions is an important historical question which has not been adequately addressed from any quarter. What did union members think of the Communists' repeated changes of policy through the wartime and post-war period? Green is silent here. Kaplan's willingness to accept anti-Communist politicians' claims that workers were "duped by Communist lies" (p. 65) is both contemptuous and unconvincing. Why did CSU members around the world, fight with such tenacity in a struggle which, in his mind, "served no trade union purpose" (p. 64)? Here Green provides more answers in his description of the rank-and-file ships' committees built by the CSU, and their educational work. He fails, however, to contemplate the possibility that anti-Communism could have any basis besides gangsterism and company unionism. Kaplan's account of the 1963 SIU demonstration in defense of Banks and against government trusteeship of the union serves as evidence that conservative unions had convictions for which they would fight.

In *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Vancouver, Harbour Publishing, 1984), Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam attempt to address some of the sources of radicalism and conservatism in the west-coast logging industry. Unfortunately, the schematic character of their analysis which largely attributes political cleavages to ethnic differences and uneven development in the industry cannot itself account for the specific character of the local unions' different trajectories. Here, the experiences of particular groups of workers need to be more closely examined, as does the relationship between unionists and the Communist Party. Although the authors

make a strong case for rank-and-file support for the union's Communist leadership, can this be equated with union democracy? Certainly, the Communist leadership appears democratic in contrast to the machinations of the pro-CCF leaders who eventually defeated them. (There is not much new here. Irving Abella described these events in *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* a decade earlier.) In a telling section of the book, the authors defend the ill-fated secession from the international union without dealing with what the incident reveals about the functioning of the union. The decision was essentially made by the Communist Party and not the union; popular support for a particular leadership does not necessarily mean that it functioned democratically. There remains much to be examined in the character of unions of both the "left" and the "right" in this period.

Proceeding in this direction requires a closer examination of the functioning of such unions, of the experiences of workers in them and of the political culture which emerged. Few such studies exist in Canada; only one union local which stood at the centre of this conflict has been studied: Local 240 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. In *"Remember Kirkland Lake": The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1983), Laurel Sefton MacDowell analyzes a key conflict which galvanized the mushrooming industrial union movement and forced the federal government to reconsider its policies toward labour. Although MacDowell presents a picture of social conflict within the town as, for instance, churches grappled with the issues, politics within the local is never brought into focus. This is particularly unfortunate as the Communists played an important role in "Mine-Mill", both in the international and the local. MacDowell suggests that "political divisions were weakening the Kirkland Lake local" (p. 76), but fails to pursue this conflict. Much is made (quite rightly) of the importance of the Kirkland Lake and similar conflicts in boosting the fortunes of the CCF. But the Communist Party remains but a shadow in this narrative. This is particularly troubling as, in the midst of the strike, "the key guy for the Communist Party" in the union was elected to the town council (pp. 73, 147). Clearly, there is much we still do not know about the views and aspirations of these workers. Judging by the terminology of all these authors, "democracy" was an important goal for all tendencies in the labour movement. Democracy, however, comes in many brands; its content, in the minds of workers, still needs to be probed.

The potential alternate approaches to the study of working-class radicalism can be seen in Joan Sangster's *Dreams of Equality: Women On the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1989). In an analysis deeply rooted in debates in contemporary feminism, the author examines both the theory and practice of the Communists and CCF on the "woman question". In the midst of considerable diversity on the left, she discovers a general inability of the two major left-wing organizations to make meaningful advances in dealing with the question in spite of a strong commitment to "equality". While the study

is uneven — she appears to have a stronger grasp of Communist politics than she does of the more amorphous CCF — Sangster is attuned to important shifts in party attitudes and campaigns. That the Communists poured their energies into organizing women into the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers without, it seems, ever taking note of the specific concerns of women workers, is the type of paradox which can only be explained by this kind of feminist analysis. Although we still hear relatively little from women in the ranks of these parties, Sangster's sensitivity to language, and to the myriad of social relationships within the labour movement indicates the direction which future studies ought to take.

Another glimpse into this world is offered by a growing number of autobiographies and oral history. In *Which Side Are You On, Boys? Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto, Lugus Productions, 1988), Peter Hunter draws a compelling picture of the appeal of the Communist Party and the model of the Soviet Union in the context of depression and rising fascism. In the midst of such epic struggles and surrounded by obviously dedicated comrades, it is not difficult to see how any misgivings about the party appeared inconsequential. Howard White's oral history of Bill White (no relation) in *A Hard Man to Beat* (Vancouver, Pulp Press, 1983) is in many ways more informative. White was president of the west coast boilermakers' union during the Second World War. Due to the government's shipbuilding programme it was, at the time, the largest local union in Canada, and led by the Communist Party. Beneath the self-congratulatory machismo of the speaker (itself a telling document of the construction of gender on the waterfront), emerges a multifaceted description of the work of both White and the union. The strong base of support Communists developed in such unions was undoubtedly the product of their effective leadership and ability to make real gains for union members. Rank-and-file members of the boilermakers or woodworkers were far from the "dupes" Kaplan describes. Judging from White's account, Communist politics played little role in the union; Communist militancy was the key to their success. One would want to know more on this score. The best of this genre is *George MacEachern: An Autobiography, The Story of a Cape Breton Labour Radical* edited by David Frank and Donald MacGillivray (Sydney, University College of Cape Breton Press, 1987). Prompted by interviewers sensitized by the concerns of the new working class history, MacEachern invokes a rich description of working-class Cape Breton and sources of solidarity and radicalism in the workplace and in the community. Long a poor cousin of the Canadian historical profession, oral history has a secure place among historians dedicated to putting working people in touch with their past. Moreover, in the hands of social historians conscious of the complex dynamics between interviewer and interviewee, and the vexing problems of historical memory, oral history can cast light on secluded corners of the past (such as the social consciousness of "ordinary" workers) generally impenetrable to other methods. MacEachern's story is an important case in point. Despite a

good deal of literature on Cape Breton workers, the readers of this volume will have little sense of walking on well-trod ground.

The period since the Second World War has yet to be well served by Canadian historians, including those of the labour movement. Much changed for the labour movement, particularly as a result of the union security gained by P.C. 1003 and subsequent federal and provincial legislation which recognized the right to collective bargaining and created an apparatus to regulate industrial relations. The consequences of this development are immense, though often subtle. For large numbers of workers, the collective agreement, backed up by the authority of the state, established the "rule-of-law" in the workplace. The grievance committee and the labour relations board are new players in this game, and the state has a daily presence in ensuring its rules are followed. Social historians studying this period will not be able to ignore these developments in accounting for shifts in social consciousness and working-class activity. A provocative case study which reflects a keen understanding of the consequences of the more regularized interventionist role of the state in the guise of "industrial legality" starting in the 1930s is Ian McKay's *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax, Holdfast Press, 1985). McKay argues that the welcome guarantees of state-regulated collective bargaining resulted, by the 1950s, in a demobilized and bureaucratic union with rank-and-file members relegated to the sidelines.

The importance of labour legislation is clear in another autobiography: *My Life as a Newfoundland Union Organizer: The Memoirs of Cyril W. Strong, 1912-1987* edited by Gregory Kealey (St. John's, Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1987). While often ponderous in its account of individual conflicts (the table of contents reads like a trade union directory), it is an important document as it describes the process whereby Newfoundland workers were drawn into the mainstream of the continental labour movement, and into a state-supervised industrial relations system which also came to Newfoundland with confederation. Strong's is an important story also because of his account of the conflict in the late 1950s in the logging industry which prompted Premier Smallwood to dispense with this new legislative structure, and enter the fray with the purpose of driving the woodworkers' union from the province.

In *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms* (Toronto, Garamond Press, 1988), Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz examine such direct intervention by the state in the context of developments since the 1940s. They begin, at least, to consider the difficulty faced by unionists schooled in the modern industrial relations system in confronting new state policies which circumvented the rules (such as Trudeau's Anti-inflation Board). Unfortunately, we do not, as yet, have a study parallel to Christopher Tomlins' *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985) which analyzes the effect of state activity on the unions. But his analysis of the Wagner Act, which predated similar Canadian legislation,

would lead us to question the sanguine interpretations of state intervention put forward by MacDowell and Kaplan. While MacDowell considers that the Wagner Act remedied the imbalance of power between capital and labour (p. 15), Tomlins argues that it played a more subtle role of opening the door to other forms of state intervention which disarmed and demobilized the labour movement. Another autobiography, *Never Say Die! The Life and Times of James Stanton, A Pioneer Labour Lawyer* (Ottawa, Steel Rail Publishing, 1987), has a contribution to make here as well. Labour legislation has nurtured labour lawyers as much as it has unions, but Stanton does not concentrate on this aspect of his work. He notes that in large part, his job did not change in the 1940s. Fighting criminal charges arising out of picketing, or injunctions aimed at union activity, occupied him before and after P.C. 1003. Such legislation did little to alter the rights of property. Despite such continuities, the context of workers' lives in the late 20th century is very different from that which the first round of the new working-class history sought to understand. Much exploration awaits us.

A brief glimpse of the fishery, which has been the subject of a number of recent works, should serve to indicate the richness of ongoing work in a single sector of the economy. The title of Gordon Inglis' study of the Newfoundland fishermen's union, *More Than Just a Union: The Story of the NFFAWU* (St. John's, Jespersen Press, 1985), typifies the goal of recent working-class history. It reflects the fact that labour institutions such as unions and parties are deeply rooted in the wider world of workers' experiences. The dramatic success of this union, or of an earlier movement which straddled the boundaries between union, party and cooperative, which Ian D.H. McDonald studied in *'To Each His Own': William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics, 1908-1925* (St. John's, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987), cannot be understood in a narrowly institutional framework. In their own ways, each movement captured the imagination of fishers and plant workers in dozens of outports. Such movements appealed to the values and aspirations of their constituency in a manner reminiscent of the Knights of Labor or the industrial unions of the 1940s. The differences, of course, are enormous and the fishery itself is daunting in its complexity. Indeed, Wallace Clement's *The Struggle to Organize: Resistance in Canada's Fishery* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986), although predicated on an attempt to understand forms of resistance in the context of the varying social relations within the fishery on both coasts, has great difficulty in its avowed purpose of doing "justice to the complexity of the actions, ideologies, and politics" (p. 7) of the confusing array of unions, cooperatives and associations which have evolved. What is missing, in part, is the careful study of the people who make up the fishery, of their communities, workplaces, experiences, daily lives and hopes, which marked the goal of the new labour history.

Historians of the Canadian working-class have come to recognize the complexity of class formation in Canada. As the "new" working class historians have

consciously recognized the challenge of unraveling the complex development of class, gender and ethnicity, and have sought to develop the theoretical tools to do so, they will continue to challenge long-held assumptions of Canadian historiography. What has emerged so far has been a greater understanding of social structure, of culture, of the state and of class as they have developed in Canada. Not surprisingly, this is far from a finished task.

JAMES NAYLOR

### Hereditry and Environmentalism in the History of French Colonization

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE WORK OF Phillip Rushton at the University of Western Ontario gravitated partially around one of the most longstanding and major disputes within the discipline of psychology: hereditary versus environmentalism. Historians have not been unfamiliar with such debates within their own field, although the consequences of their discussion are less likely to have such profound effects on social policy as did the fraudulent studies of hereditarian psychologist Sir Cyril Burt on the English school system early in the 20th century.<sup>1</sup>

The environmentalist interpretation in Canadian history reached its apogee following World War Two. In the hands of Quebec writers like Guy Frégault and Michel Brunet, environmentalism was masked beneath the shroud of nationalism and stressed the uniqueness of the Canadian population to varying degrees. W. J. Eccles sounded the death knell to this approach in 1969 with his contribution to Ray Billington's ambitious frontier series.<sup>2</sup> While English-speaking scholars increasingly followed trends within American colonial history that emphasized the weight of inherited traditions in so many aspects of early American life, French Canadian historians adopted the methodology of the *Annales* in order to probe the realities of life from the bottom up. In an attempt to remove the stifling parochialism that had previously governed the contours of the historiography of New France, studies have become more comparative both in relation to their sponsoring societies and other colonies as well.

An interest in the formal document or expert treatise has remained, especially for the 16th century where records pertaining to French colonization of the

1 See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1981), ch. 6.

2 W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760* (Toronto, 1969).