# The New Right And The Politics Of Work And Family In Hamilton

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper draws on a case study of Hamilton steelwork families to examine how the neo-conservative agenda is incorporated and resisted in a specific, historically constituted locality. Here the local conditions of capital led to strong labour movement and relatively good pay permitting the emergence of the breadwinner family. It is argued that these factors affect the ways in which new right ideology and feminism are apprehended and incorporated into local culture.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Cet exposé se base sur un cas d'étude de familles de travailleurs d'aciérie d'Hamilton pour étudier comment le programme néo-conservateur est incorporé et comment on y résiste dans une localité qui a été constituée historiquement.Ici les conditions locales du capital ont mené à un mouvement de travailleurs fort et une paye relativement bonne qui a engendré la famille qui a un soutien. On dit que ces facteurs influencent la façon dont la nouvelle idéologie de droite et le féminisme sont perçues et incorporées dans la culture locale.

## INTRODUCTION

Four years into the term of the first New Democratic Party (NDP) government, the summer of 1994 was one of discontent in Ontario politics. Headlines in the *Hamilton Spectator* reflected the hot issues in the news:

*NDP Staffers Bailing Out - Privately many MPPs concede electoral defeat* (June 6 A5)

*Rae softens Stand on Same Sex Proposal* (June 8 A1)

*Job Equity Law Will Hurt White Males* (May 24 B1)

When an election was called the following spring all the major parties agreed that deficit reduction and job creation were priorities. On what at first glance is an unrelated issue, each party declared that if elected they would not pursue spousal rights for same sex couples.

The election in June 1995 of a Progressive Conservative (PC) government, committed to cutting welfare programmes, slashing personal and corporate taxes and abolishing the pro-labour legislation enacted by the previous administration, follows similar swings to the Right in other western industrial countries. It is my contention here that these

electoral victories, together with the dominant issues which shaped campaign agendas, signal the success of the neoconservative Right[1] in naturalizing its agenda.

The economic project of neoconservatism is to free the market from state intervention, break down the social contract between the state, labour and capital, and allow capital to move freely. Wallerstein argues that purely economic policy measures are insufficient to meet this goal and that the terrain on which this project will be accomplished is culture, the "ideological battleground of the modern world-system" (Wallerstein 1990:39). Wallerstein implies a conceptual opposition between culture and economy, yet social reality comprises a complex set of arrangements in which each is closely implicated in the workings of the other. My position here is that the success of the neoconservative economic agenda and the New Right social and political one, depends not only on establishing new forms of hegemony in the sphere popularly called "the economy". It also depends on establishing a particular hegemonic concept of reality in the sphere of the family. While it is commonly held that it is "the economy" which is being restructured, in fact all aspects of society are targets for transformation. As this happens, older,

historically grounded and apparently stable identities are contested, shifting the ground on which gender, work, family[2], class and political identities are constructed.

This paper stresses the complementarity of the restructuring processes affecting work and the family, and mediated by the state, through a case study of Hamilton steelworker families,[3] following the manifestations of these processes among people in an historically constituted locality. My focus here is the everyday nature of the cultural battles Wallerstein refers to, the way that the neoconservative agenda is incorporated into a specific local context and articulates with local culture.

## FAMILIALISM AND THE MARKET OVER FEMINISM AND THE WELFARE STATE

In their study of the New Right and family in Britain and the United States, Abbott and Wallace (1992:19) argue that late 20th century New Right thinking draws on the late 18th century conservatives, who while promoting *laissez-faire* economic policies, identified the family as a central institution in maintaining society. These classic conservatives rejected the notions of equality and individualism in enlightenment liberalism, emphasizing instead tradition, custom and hierarchy. New Right ideology reasserts these ideals, in a backlash against post-1960 changes in family composition and social values. For Canada these changes are indicated by the rising number of single parent families, from 7.4% of all families in 1971 to 13% in 1991 (Baker 1995:33), the doubling of the divorce rate between 1970 and 1985, following revisions to the divorce law (Wilson, 1996:29), and the legalization of homosexuality after 1969. Another major shift was easier access to abortion after legalization in 1969, strengthened by the striking down of that law in 1988 (Mandell and Duffy 1988:182), and defeat of a new law limiting abortion in 1990. Welfare policies such as those entitling women to benefits even when they have a lover (Baker 1996:40), are seen by the New Right as facilitating and legitimizing these changes in social practice.

New Right thinkers advocate instead a return to a patriarchal form of family (although the term patriarchy is never used), where men are independent economic actors and family breadwinners with power and authority over their family members (Gittins 1993:36), while women remain dependent, caring for the home and children. In this model women operate outside the market, and are not full citizens in their own right (Abbott and Wallace 1992:2). This view of complementarity between men's and women's roles in the family is consistent with functionalist analysis popular in social science in the 1950s, which bolstered the prevailing ideology and supported and justified circumscribed roles for men and women as natural and necessary to maintaining a stable society (Beechey 1987: 19-25; Hale 1990:326-329).

A feminist critique of this analysis emerged in the 1960s as scholars systematically demonstrated "the family" to be socially constructed, revealing the middle-class, ethnocentric bias inherent to functionalist theory (see Rubin 1976; Coontz 1992; Rapp et al. 1979). Women's domestic role, the work it entailed and its relationship to the capitalist system, in particular the ways unwaged work facilitates the operations of capital, was questioned and analysed (Seccombe 1974; Delphy 1977). This critique by both academic and activist feminists helped make way for the legislative and policy changes such as those noted above. These permitted the emergence of a plurality of family forms and a range of choices for individual men and women.[4] It is thus hardly surprising that those struggling to recapture the dominance of the patriarchal family identify "feminists" as their main enemy (Adamson et al. 1988; Eichler 1986; Erwin 1993).

Dubinsky (1985:33) notes that the strength of the New Right derives from its ability to link economic conservatism with a return to a "traditional" patriarchal family. The precise nature of the connection between the two is not always clearly explained, although it is vital to understanding why neoconservative economic policies require changes in thinking about the family. Those promoting a return to "family values" identify a breakdown in family roles and responsibilities, leading to increased crime, sexual deviance and divorce, seen generally as moral

decline. It is argued that this is accompanied by economic decline, as government spends excessively on the apparatus of the welfare state and the criminal justice system. In a circular fashion dependency on the state is reinforced. Thus the balance of responsibility between the state, private enterprise and family has to be reconfigured. While the welfare state's role was to compensate for the inadequacies of the capitalist system, this responsibility shifts to the family as the welfare state contracts, and the patriarchal, self-reliant, nuclear family is re-established as natural and desirable, efficient and functional. As Abbott and Wallace point out :"to stem the economic decline of the capitalist countries it is necessary to re-moralize them" (1992:7). The remainder of the paper then explores one example of the processes by which these shifts are being accomplished.

## RESTRUCTURING IDENTITIES THROUGH NEW CORPORATE AND FAMILIAL HEGEMONIES

Unlike many Hamilton Steelworkers, those interviewed still have core sector, full time, unionized jobs, the kinds against which emerging non-standard jobs are measured, and often seen to fall short. Yet while attention is paid to such "new" jobs, what is often missed is the way that restructuring challenges the meaning of old blue-collar jobs. Once secure in their status as family breadwinners, the experience of restructuring has shaken the foundations of Steelworker identity, as well as that of family members and coworkers.

Kobena Mercer suggests that:
> identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty .
> (Mercer 1990:43)

Moreover, an ensuing identity crisis is necessarily mediated by the ways people understand the objective conditions underlying the crisis.

To begin to grasp their understanding of the situation, it is helpful to draw on Gramsci's idea of a hegemonic project. Gramsci's (1971) position is that the dominant economic and political forces in a society are able to obscure the real material conditions which result in class conflict. A broad consensus of opinion and belief is diffused throughout society and conveyed as being in the general interest. In this way acceptance of the capitalist system is generated, and any alternative system becomes difficult to imagine.

In her work on restructuring in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, June Nash traces the cultural construction of corporate hegemony. She argues that the defeat of the communist unions in the 1920s and 30s signaled the weakness of the American labour movement, and permitted large corporations to take leadership in establishing the dominant patterns for industrial organization (Nash 1989). Corporate hegemony in Pittsfield has been virtually unresisted through the remainder of the century, and Nash shows how this effectively obscures the workers' position in the global system, and undermines the potential for action in defense of their collective interests. She tells how during the 1970s and 80s managers at the Pittsfield General Electric plant laid off workers, while demanding increased productivity from those left to keep the plant open. When the corporation announced in 1986 that it would close, only a few, older workers objected (Nash 1994:22).

Since World War II corporate hegemony in Canada has been bolstered by a stronger social contract than in the US, ensuring labour peace and continued production, and providing a social safety net to protect the working class during economic downturns. Before the welfare state the family was expected to cushion the impact of economic crisis, providing the institutional framework for working class survival by pooling and redistributing its resources (Hareven 1982). This usually meant that women intensified paid and unpaid labour, to absorb the shocks of an unstable economy. More recently the state has been actively involved in ensuring the reproduction of the family and its members (Ursel 1992), and in the post-war period many important social welfare policies have centred on the nuclear family.

Within the hegemonic field of the postwar

period, with its particular ideas concerning work, the family, and the state, people carve out social identities as workers and family members. But this is also shaped locally in the dynamics of specific actors: capitalist enterprises, workers, their organizations and families. Restructuring has brought about changes in the terms of hegemonic control at both global and local levels. As business retreated from the social contract through the 1980s, corporate hegemony emphasized free trade, competition and mobility. Moreover, the state's retreat from providing full social welfare to its citizens is accompanied by a new common sense ideology promoting reliance on the family or self sufficiency. The sense of social and cultural fragmentation associated with these major changes (Harvey 1989; cf Jameson 1991), is then at least partly offset by the hegemonic project of the Right as it promotes economic cooperation and a return to so-called traditional cultural values.

## MEN AND WOMEN, STEEL AND RESTRUCTURING

On a hot, humid evening in July, sticky and damp from the drive, I emerge from my car outside the Gray's house in a small town outside Hamilton, just as their older and somewhat rusty station wagon pulls into the driveway. Dad Steve and daughters Sarah (14) and Jenny (11) jump out of the car, while still inside Mom Sue tries to persuade Cory (8) to put his shoes on. They are arriving home from Jenny's baseball game where Sue has been coaching, the others active and vocal spectators. As they leave the car, Sarah is commenting on Jenny's ability to catch, and they are soon arguing hotly. We all tumble into the house, sweaty and thirsty, and as the family dog greets us enthusiastically the kids disappear towards the fridge. The adults retreat to the living room to seek refuge from the escalating argument, and Steve makes a foray to the kitchen for drinks for us, and to try to calm the combatants.

When he returns, drinks in hand,

Steve says "It's way better now that I'm on 12 hour shifts. It used to be really hard to be involved in anything outside work, and it's still difficult to do anything routine." As our conversation ranges over work and play, home and the steel mill, Steve and Sue share their worries about Steve's job security, fears of downsizing and the competitive market for steel. Sue has worked part-time since their youngest was about 3, arranging her schedule at first around Steve's shifts, relying on their next door neighbour to cover odd hours when they were both working. Now Sue works at two jobs, but has the flexibility to coordinate them "around my kids". Their spare time is spent mainly socializing with family and some close friends. Sue coaches both Jenny's and Sarah's baseball teams, which takes up four evenings a week. They love to travel and have crossed the continent, usually choosing destinations where they have family to visit.

A brief glimpse into Steve and Sue's life in the summer of 1994 provides a window on how steelworker families perceive and live family and work relations. To understand how restructuring is reforging identities for steelworkers and their families requires first a description of some of the work-related changes that have affected their lives in the last 15 years.

In the tradition of Hamilton steelworking, generations of men have followed family members into the mills since mid-19th century. Steve chose Stelco over Dofasco (the other major Hamilton steel works, which is non-union) because his grandfather had worked there, and people at the plant still remembered him. Well-paid jobs in the steel mills, with a strong union and history of successful strikes, provided an incentive to leave school early. The masculine culture of the steel mills was shaped in the coke ovens and blast furnaces, machine and electrical shops, but steelworkers who enjoyed male shopfloor culture were often quick to say how much they hated the work (Corman et al. 1993:49). This culture was challenged in the late 1970s when after a struggle

women won the right to occupy well-paid steelworker jobs, forcing reluctant change in long held shopfloor practices (Livingstone and Luxton 1989). Encountering women in the workplace presented an everyday challenge to the construction of male steelworker identity, as well as to women's identities both at work and in the family.

In the 1980s, as the steel industry faced crisis on a world scale, the workforce at Stelco was 'downsized', a word which, Steve says, "makes me really nervous when I hear [it] on TV". In accordance with seniority provisions almost all the women in the male-dominated jobs were laid off (Corman et al. 1993:139), though numerically layoffs affected far more men than women, as workers with longer seniority lost their positions. In 1981 the average seniority was 13 years, by 1989 it was over 20 years (Corman et al 1993:35).

The other side of the coin for steelworker families concerns the particular configuration of local capital and the relations of power, privilege and exploitation that prevailed which allowed male steelworkers to earn a "family wage" until the late 1970s. Steelworkers' wives were thus able to stay out of the labour force and live the domestic ideal of staying at home to look after their families (Luxton and Livingstone 1989). In fact, Hamilton had the lowest rates of women's employment in Canada from 1945 to 1981 because of high wages in the steel industry, as well as patterns of discriminatory hiring practices (Corman et al. 1993:263).

## FAMILY MATTERS

The implications of this contracting labour force (both numerically and in terms of diversity) are several. Changes in the composition of the workforce have increased the average age of a steelworker in the 1990s since massive layoffs. At 45 and with 20 years seniority, Steve was the youngest in his shop and could anticipate more years of this with little prospect of new hiring in the near future. This was not simply an issue for the 'junior' in each department, but more generally aging steelworkers recognized difficulty performing the work of more physical jobs.

Demographics affected union involvement and perceptions of union-management relations as well. Workers noted a shift from past steelworker militancy to a more cooperative and collaborative approach, attributed partly to the aging workforce: "when we were young we were more likely to take them on". There remained much support for the union, and some regret for its recent accommodations to management, yet with some exceptions workers agreed that the climate for labour relations had changed. As one put it "I don't think there is anybody, management or labour, that can afford a strike". Seccombe and Livingstone (1996:157) refer to the "jointness" of the corporate project, one that requires both management and labour for its success. Steve commented:

> I don't see so much the management-worker thing anymore. We've got together. I think you are in together to do something, to make a profit....They seem to be pretty tolerant of each other now. You can't do something if you are fighting with someone all the time. You're losing track of what you are there to do....
>
> Companies and unions have to work together. I think the day of ranting and raving and standing outside with a placard is over. You have to to sit down and talk seriously.

Most steelworkers interviewed were unequivocal about giving teachers the right to strike, because "everyone should have a voice," and there was overwhelming support for the recently adopted NDP anti-scab legislation. There was slightly more equivocation from their wives on both of these issues.

Like Sue and Steve, every family had children living at home. Family activities structured leisure time and time spent with me. The Grays talked about family holidays driving in Canada and the United States, usually to visit family, attend family weddings and sightsee. Though costly, such trips were anticipated with excitement and fondly recalled.

Parents expressed concern about college expenses and their childrens' job prospects. Sue said "I feel sorry for my kids, I don't know what's in store for them. A huge deficit. You have to have an education or you get nothing. And even when you do have an education chances are you still could get nothing." Employment equity policies were criticized for the direct and negative impact on their sons' futures.

While many had identified with the NDP in the past, they now considered alternatives, some moving relatively far to the right. After four years in office and the very bumpy passage of the Social Contract, the NDP was unpopular with both its long and short term supporters, and its defeat in the imminent election was expected. Steve, who had voted Liberal in the past, revealed his vote "for Preston Manning" in the federal election, rather to his wife's surprise.

The debate over spousal benefits for same sex couples, which was a hot issue on the political agenda at the time, was often raised. Spousal benefits extend the social wage associated with individual employment into the family, but rely on a societal norm of a nuclear, heterosexual family. There was little support for the government's position in favour of benefits, and during the fieldwork period the NDP amended the bill to restrict adoption. One man argued: "I don't think they have a right to be recognized as a family because they're not a family the way I perceive a family". This kind of view was echoed in the *Spectator*, where provincial Liberal leader Lyn McLeod was quoted as saying "For me it goes beyond the extension of sick leave and health leave benefits to give adoption rights and change the traditional definition of family. That's not something I can support" (*Hamilton Spectator* June 1 1994: A3). At about the same time a CTV news poll concluded that "we still like 2-parent heterosexual families" (*Hamilton Spectator* June 13: A3), a view consistent with the actual composition of the families interviewed. Three couples had split up during the 10 year period, and two of the men had remarried. Five out of six letters published on June 1 1994 concerning the so-called same sex bill were against the principle.

Lax government policies were perceived as partly responsible for the large number of "welfare bums". People said they objected to the government "handing money over to people who refuse to work or even try and work" and of "everybody getting a free handout...". Late in July a number of newspaper articles discussed the opposition's investigation of welfare and health care fraud. Steve commented: "I realize there has to be welfare for people that are in situations. But I see abuse of the system, that's the part that annoys me."

In the space of a few years corporate restructuring has reconstituted a remarkably homogeneous workforce of white, middle-aged men, making a "good" steelworker wage, and facing similar family responsibilities. One man observed that "just about everyone has a mortgage to worry about." Yet any complacency which might have acccompanied settling in to middle-age and middle-class[5] life is eliminated by fears about job security. While some workers had dealt with a recurring pattern of layoff and recall for years, and knew the cycle of uncertainty well, others considered even their regular year-round jobs in jeopardy, since at any moment the company could "bring in a machine that'll wipe out a thousand jobs and they don't care". In addition to their main job many men had taken training in a new field, some beginning during a strike, others as a strategy in anticipation of layoff.

A few had set up a micro business "on the side", usually run with the help of family (mainly wives') labour. The faith that the steel industry would provide a job for life that prevailed when they entered the mill 20 years ago has been painfully shattered as they saw their coworkers being laid off.

Eleven of the seventeen wives had not worked after having children, but financial insecurity had led ten of these to assume at least a part-time job during the 1980s, as did Sue. Economic vulnerability was very real, despite acknowledging that they were better off than many. One woman remarked "it wouldn't take much for us to go under, really". Most wives had worked first as a temporary measure during their husband's lay off or strike, but the income had become a regular part of the family

budget. This represents a major shift from the traditional single breadwinner family characterizing steelworkers in the recent past.

The change from the breadwinner norm was not taken lightly. Women described how they had expected to stay home with their kids, but financial pressures had forced them to find a job. Men and women sometimes saw these jobs as a source of disruption and loss of family rhythm. Considering her daughters' futures, Sue lamented "They probably won't have the chance to stay home with their families that I did, because I can see things are just going to be too expensive. They can't afford a one income family. I don't think that's healthy in the long run". Along with a large number of the wives (and many of the husbands), Sue expressed disapproval of working women such as one she knew who:

> drops the baby off at 7.30 in the morning. I can't understand that. I wouldn't know how I would cope with dropping a child off, it's a baby. You know, winter dark, she picks her up I think around 5 pm. I think that's just the way it's going to be all the time. So who is raising their kids? Day cares and babysitters but that's not you.

While the general principle of equal opportunity for women was supported by steelworker families in the 1984 study (Luxton and Livingstone 1989), ten years later blame for continuing gender struggles was often firmly placed in the hands of "feminists". Feminists were seen by some as having "gone too far" in their demands for equality. As one man stated, "I think the feminist movement has been detrimental. There's been some good points to it but I think not all of it has been good." Another man described himself as "not one of those equality nuts...a woman shouldn't say, well, I should have that job because I'm a woman which is happening right now the way they have the law all made out with this equity stuff". These sentiments were not only expressed by men. A woman remarked "I think sometimes the feminists have gone too far, that they've really gone radical some of them, and they haven't made anything better."

Yet at the same time that this negative view of feminism was expressed verbally, its power is undermined by the changes in the sexual division of labour that had taken place in most households during the 10 year period. Men now expected to be called upon to cook suppers, take care of children, and perform housework, and usually did it willingly. Although there were contradictory reports of the amount of time men spent in housework, and the degree to which decision making was a truly shared responsibility (cf. Luxton 1990), there seems to be no doubt that there had been a shift towards greater equality within individual households. There was often joking between couples about domestic tasks, especially laundry:

> **Steve:** Basically whatever has to be done, has to be done. If there is laundry down there...
> **Sue:** (Laughing) No, you're not supposed to touch the laundry
> **Steve:** Well you don't like the way I do the laundry, but I don't do a bad job.
> **Sue:** But he did dishes, he set my son vacuuming while I was out this morning. They neatened up the house while I was gone.
> **Steve:** We are fairly flexible. I mean, if the grass needs cutting Sue will do it. The laundry needs doing, I'll do it.

Yet a double standard still pertained, as Sue points out:

> Even with Steve, he does a lot around the house, but what he does when he comes home from work is he eats his food, he sits in front of the TV and reads the newspaper. I can't do that. I can't come home from work and sit and grab the newspaper and expect that my meal is going to be sitting in front of me.

## A BATTLE ON TWO FRONTS: AT WORK AND IN THE FAMILY

Reflecting on these observations the precariousness of production relations, which has led

to an intensification of work activities on all fronts, was quite striking. Equally striking, however, was the way the politics of family kept emerging, whether it was the micropolitics of everyday family life, or the broader politics of homosexual rights, welfare entitlement, daycare, and divorce.

In his analysis of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall (1988) argues that New Right ideology relies on a two-pronged approach. The first is to accomplish the economic project of neoconservatism, but the inevitable result of this is to render economic life expectations for the majority extremely unstable and insecure. To combat that insecurity, the second feature is then brought into play. This involves reconstituting the idea of family, as the crucible of moral values, hard work and based on traditional gender roles (During 1993:14). While the material reality disrupts peoples' lives, New Right ideology obscures the contradiction between labour market flexibility and family values.

Thatcher's views on the family are illustrated by quotes such as this one:

> The family and its maintenance really is the most important thing not only in your personal life, but in the life of any community, because this is the unit on which the whole nation is built. (Margaret Thatcher 1989, cited in Rutherford 1990:12).

Family and nation are intended here to signify the nuclear, heterosexual family, and white, "English" nation. Thatcherism consciously played on the idea of the "enemies within" - "others" in both sexual and racial terms (During 1993:14). Homophobic ideas, for example, clearly shape and are shaped by both the contemporary demands of capital and the state. For example, one way that the state meets its apparent need to dismantle social welfare programmes is by establishing categories (such as homosexuals) of those who do not deserve assistance.

Typically, the right wing neoconservative agenda in Canada has been adopted in a low key and fairly unobtrusive fashion. Carroll and Ratner (1989:35) argue that the absence of a **national** working class culture tenaciously in contention with bourgeois hegemony (as it was in Britain), together with the federal state's capacity to displace responsibility for crisis to the provincial level, has resulted in a "low-profile passive revolution". The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States and the NAFTA brought the economic debate into public discourse, but the anti Free Trade forces were weak during the federal election of 1988, and this election laid the groundwork for securing the deal.[6]

It is consistent with Hall's framework for understanding this transformation that while this "passive revolution" in the economic sphere was taking place in the 1980s, forces were being marshalled to promote a return to the "traditional family". This struggle coalesced in Canada around REAL women, a so-called pro-family movement, committed to "family values" and openly fighting a feminist agenda. Their work centred on abortion, women in the workforce, the social devaluation of the housewife, and rights for gays and lesbians (Erwin 1993:406). In the political arena the Confederation of Regions Party unveiled a platform in 1994 supporting "a return to basics in education, support for family values and Canadian heritage and traditions" *(Hamilton Spectator* May 24 1994 B1). Both the federal Reform Party and the Ontario Conservatives have explicitly linked family and economy, telling Canadians to rely less on the state for support in the future, and more on their families.

Reflecting on the political consciousness of workers and their families in Massachusetts, Nash compared them to mining families she had known in Bolivia. She saw the American workers "retreating into privatized misery rather than, as the miners of Bolivia, protesting publicly the lack of responsibility of the mining corporation" (Nash 1994:23). The vigour with which steelworker families throw themselves into family activities reflects the importance of and reliance on family in times of economic insecurity. It also reflects the success of the hegemonic process in conveying the message that solutions to problems should be sought within the family rather than in the political sphere through class struggle.[7]

The success of the New Right lies not simply in its ideological constructs, but has a material basis, demonstrated in Thatcher's Britain, for example, by rising real wages, increased home ownership and tax cuts (Sparks 1996:95). In Ontario in 1994 the parties of the Right promised private sector job creation and benefits from privatization, and the Conservative party was already promising a 30 per cent tax cut if elected.[8] This resonated with Steve's feeling that "eventually you have to stand up and say enough is enough, I'm paying too much."

The success of the New Right results from the successful interpellation of this segment of the working class by ideologies of self-sufficiency, traditional family values, smaller government and the free market. State intervention inhibits self-sufficiency, as another steelworker noted:

> You just try to live your life and yet it always seems there's some politician or somebody stepping in the way, saying well no you can't do that no more.

Moreover, workers used the discourse of free trade when discussing the company's actions:

> If you are going to stay in business you're going to have to be cost competitive, you're going to have to have a good quality product.

Yet the ideology of the dominant class expressed in such a comment, combines with what Gramsci called common sense, which derives from direct life experiences, and results in a contradictory class consciousness (Seccombe and Livingstone 1996:150-151). Qualitative research can reveal the contradictions in peoples' thinking and practices, and is important in political terms for pointing to the spaces potentially open to counterhegemonic strategies. While steelworkers comfortably use the discourse of free enterprise and competitiveness, they still call upon their trade union history to help define their values, leading to difficulties in reconciling contesting points of view. One steelworker agreed that Canadian companies should

be required to invest in Canada rather than being free to invest where they please, but argued that this should be self-regulated rather than monitored by government.

During the election campaign in Ontario all parties placed economic competitiveness first, and none was willing, through promoting same sex benefits, to fight for a more inclusive definition of family. Mercer (1990:53) argues that the Right has been successful in monopolizing what he calls "the imaginary horizon of the future", appropriating the future exclusively to themselves, and relegating the Left and its preoccupation with class to the past. To claim a role in the future, old parties of the Left, like the Ontario NDP, have moved further to the right but in so doing have virtually closed the counterhegemonic space they could provide.

In this political context and fearing for the future, it is not surprising that there has been a shift towards attitudes of apparent self-interest. These indicate the effectiveness of the new corporate and familial hegemonies while at the same time revealing places where people's agency counterposes the apparent seamlessness of new ideologies. Steelworker families adopt the neoconservative economic arguments which may protect their company in an unstable industry. They modify their union militancy while holding fast to seniority rights and the anti-scab law to protect their jobs, and they continue to cherish many traditional labour movement values. At the same time they turn to exclusive, sharply defined views of family which may protect their jobs by maintaining married women in a secondary economic role, and may protect their access to the shrinking social safety net. It is hardly surprising that among Hamilton steelworker families, for whom the breadwinner family has been the norm within recent experience, New Right views of the family are relatively easily and comfortably embraced. But there is also recognition that many women have no choice but to work, and that the welfare state is an important corrective to the free market, views that may be based in the labour politics that have shaped their lives so importantly in the past. These findings emphasizes the partiality of the acceptance of New

Right thinking, and the importance of culture and history to the ways in which processes of economic restructuring are apprehended.

Stuart Hall argues that: "what Thatcherism as an ideology does is to address the fears, anxieties, the lost identities of a people" (Hall 1988:167). It is not accidental that Thatcher explicitly called for a return to Victorian values. For one thing it evoked a return to a glorious imperial past, when Britain was truly "Great", but it is worth remembering as well that the Victorian era saw the most profound insecurity and disruption in production relations, now matched in intensity by the conditions facing people in the late 20th century. In Victorian times this dramatic state of uncertainty implicitly relied on an ideology of domesticity to provide a stable structure to a society which was otherwise in dramatic and potentially dangerous flux.

What needs to be stressed is the way that the ideologies and practices of the Victorian era, while serving middle-class males relatively well, "secured the interests of capitalism and patriarchy at the expense of the working class, of women and of children" (Abbott and Wallace 1992:6). As feminist scholars and activists systematically document the impact of neoconservative policies and practices on women, men and children, families and communities, they will continue to be in contention with those who advocate a return to the "natural" social order.

## ENDNOTES

1. In this paper I use the term neoconservative to describe economic policies and practices and New Right to describe the political movement which embraces neoconservatism and incorporates conservative social and moral values. As Abbott and Wallace (1992:2) note, this should not imply that there is any single, cohesive New Right ideology.

2. I use the term "family" here, conscious that in popular usage it conflates discourse, ideology and actual gendered social relations, which need to be separated out analytically, while still recognizing that they are mutually constituting.

3. This fieldwork was funded by a University of Guelph New Faculty Research Grant and was the latest phase in a longitudinal study, the Hamilton Families Project, carried out by June Corman, David Livingstone, Meg Luxton and Wally Seccombe and funded by a SSHRC grant. I would like to thank the original investigators for generously permitting me access to their data and to the families I interviewed. Thanks also to Glynis George, Wally Seccombe and an anonymous reviewer for their very helpful comments on this paper.

In the original study 200 steelworker families were surveyed in 1983 with an extensive questionnaire, and of these 40 were selected for an in-depth follow-up interview in 1984. In 1994 I attempted to re-establish contact with those families who had been interviewed, to discover what had happened to them during the intervening 10 years in which Stelco had laid off about 30 percent of its workforce. The present sample comprises 18 Steelworker families and one single man living alone. Only three men no longer worked for Stelco: one was employed in another industrial job, the two others were self-employed, but had left Stelco voluntarily. Each was interviewed once between May and August 1994. Seven of the seventeen couples were interviewed together. In one the wife was interviewed alone.

4. This is not to say that such choices are not constrained by, for example, the principle of compulsory heterosexuality.

5. When asked to identify their own social class, informants invariably called themselves middle class. See Livingstone and Mangan 1996.

6. This is not to argue the absence of considerable popular anti-Free Trade activity since 1988. The point is that its ineffectiveness during the 1988 federal election campaign permitted the signing of the free trade agreements, which form the foundation for neoconservative policy (economic, cultural, environmental, social, etc.) for the foreseeable future.

7. Crabbe and Hanson (1994) point out how the New Right ideology of keeping family problems private and away from the interventionist state conveniently coincides with opening up the market to privatized services in medicine, old age care, child care, etc. which is consistent

with the direction of privatization in Ontario.

8.  It is significant that this was the most commonly referred to Progressive Conservative campaign issue in the local newspaper over the 4 month summer period, along with the views of political opponents.  See for example "Harris's election goodies criticized as 'unrealistic'" (*Spectator* May 4 A9).

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