

1984

# Women in nineteenth-century Canadian industry a comparative approach.

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Canada

WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
CANADIAN INDUSTRY:  
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

by

Gregg Matthew Olsen

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Sociology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of Master of Arts at the  
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Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
1984

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## ABSTRACT

The present study examined the role played by women in industry in late nineteenth-century Canada relative to that of their British counterparts earlier in the century. It was observed that British industrialization in the early 1800's was centred around textile production, which employed chiefly women (and children). However, by mid-century, the British state intervened via a series of "protective" factory acts which resulted in the large-scale dismissal of females from factory employment. Through this legislation, the state was both responding to working-class agitation and serving the long-term interests of the capitalist class by preventing the over-exploitation and exhaustion of the labour force. In Canada, due to its position as a colony, its agricultural orientation, and vast open lands, industrialization occurred much later and focused on the production of iron, steel and wood products, rather than on textiles. Consequently, relatively few women were engaged in factory employment in nineteenth-century Canada. As a result, the Canadian state of the period, a ruling oligarchy of economic and political elites, did not need to be as concerned about protecting women's capacity to reproduce workers and could freely pursue immediate profits. Although factory legisla-

tion very similar to Britain's was passed in the 1880's, it was not enforced and, hence, was ineffective. It was concluded that this legislation was a symbolic response to the demands of working-class trade unions and, to a lesser extent, middle-class reform groups.

For my parents, Ralph and Joan.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work under the supervision of Dr. Barry Adam. The ideas presented in this thesis could not have been developed without his knowledge, insight, and creativity. His generosity with his time and his encouragement throughout the writing of this thesis were invaluable to its completion. Dr. Adam's concern with and approach to the study of social inequality provided the initial impetus for my entry into the field of Sociology as an undergraduate and my decision to continue graduate education in this area.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Seymour Faber for his interest and helpful reviews and criticisms. Dr. Wendy Mitchinson also offered valuable comments and suggestions for which I am grateful.

The support and encouragement provided by my family, particularly my parents, Ralph and Joan Olsen, has been boundless and is deeply appreciated. I would also like to thank John Durrant for his interest and assistance.

Finally, I owe an immeasurable debt to Joan Durrant for her support and understanding as well as her editorial and computer skills. It is largely her encouragement and assistance that led to the completion of this thesis and made it a rewarding experience.



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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

An important achievement in Marxist-feminist scholarship has been the creation of a political economy of sexual divisions. Consequently, the privatization of domestic labour has been identified as a fundamental basis for women's oppression under capitalism. As Chris Middleton (1979:147) has pointed out, "Women's responsibility for children and housework no longer passes unnoticed - a natural, unchanging phenomenon unworthy of serious consideration - but has come to be considered in both historical and comparative perspective."

However, much of Marxist-feminist theory has focused on the role of the capitalists and the functional needs of the capitalist system in the development of this sexual division of labour. A criticism of this "ahistorical" approach has been made by Bruce Curtis (1980:131), who states that the separation of household and industry under capitalism and the sex-based division of labour which it involves is "reproduced by the state through the separation of women from industrial wage labour, and through the maintenance of the existence of labour power as a commodity."

According to Wally seccombe (1974:6), the emergence of industrial capitalism created two of the distinct characteristic labourers of capitalist society - the housewife and the male proletarian. Yet, in Britain, the rise of industrial capitalism initially led to a large influx of women and girls into the emerging factories. It has been argued by Bruce Curtis (1980) and Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison (1978) that in Britain it was state intervention, through the passing of factory legislation, which was largely responsible for returning women from the industrial labour force to the domestic sphere.

There is a relative scarcity of literature in the area of women and work in Canada, - an area to which the present investigation attempts to contribute. Specifically, the present study seeks to compare the roles played by women in nineteenth-century Canadian industrialization to those of women in Britain earlier in the century. Further, the present investigation examines and compares the roles of the Canadian and British states in relation to women's employment during the rise of industrialization. Important differences in the political economies of the two countries (i.e., history/chronology, type, and scale of industrialization, the relationship between the state and economic elites, the amount of agricultural land available, and the nature of the working class) suggest that important differences also exist in the roles played by women as well as the roles played by each state.

A brief review and critique of the Marxist-Feminist explanation of the sexual division of labour and women's relegation to the domestic sphere will first be presented to demonstrate the need for an examination of the part which the state has played in this development. This will be followed by a discussion of women's participation in British industry and the state's role in their removal. Finally, an investigation into women's involvement in the nineteenth-century Canadian economy and the response of the Canadian state will be presented and a comparison between the British and Canadian situations will be made.

#### 1.1 THE MARXIST-FEMINIST APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

Much has been written on the privatization of women outside history during the developing stages of capitalism. Recent Marxist-feminist scholarship has argued that women's relegation to the domestic sphere, and their concomitant dependence on the male wage, was engineered by capitalists in order to maintain the capitalist economy. Thus, women's unpaid labour in the household was seen as profitable to those who owned the means of production because they gained the labour of both the male worker and his wife for one wage (Benston, 1972). Marxist-feminists have also argued that women functioned as a reserve army of labour in an economy that could not expand enough to put all women to work as part of the normally employed labour force (Benston, 1972;

Connelly, 1978; Simeral, 1978). Moreover, the processes involved in domestic work were seen as supporting capitalist society. Women produced and reproduced workers for both the paid and unpaid labour forces and took care of the men and children in society (Hartman, 1981; Eisenstein, 1979). Women also stabilized the capitalist economy through their role as consumers (Eisenstein, 1979).

These arguments have forcefully demonstrated that female domestic labour is functional for capital and have contributed to an explanation of the continued existence of it in capitalist society. However, they do not demonstrate the way in which domestic labour, which existed in pre-capitalist society, became articulated within the capitalist mode of production. According to Marx, wage labour exists not because it is necessary for capitalist production, but because of historically specific conditions which led to the appropriation of the means of production from the workers by the emerging capitalist class (Marx, 1977:873-895). Likewise, domestic labour performs social functions which are necessary for capitalist production, but it too was shaped by historically specific conditions. "We can explain neither the existence nor the origin of domestic labour by simply considering the economic interests of capital" (Curtis, 1980:1120).

## 1.2 CRITICISM OF THE MARXIST-FEMINIST APPROACH

Contrary to much of feminist scholarship, Bruce Curtis (1980) argues that domestic labour was not a source of profit to capitalists, but rather constituted costs. He states that it is analytically incorrect to view capitalists as engineering the maintenance of domestic labour out of a reluctance to pay housewives for their work because it is possible to pay them for their domestic labour without any redistribution of wealth between labour and capital (Curtis, 1980:112-113). The wages paid by the capitalist employer to the husband are based upon the minimum cost of reproducing both that worker and his wife (or family). Thus, technically, the employer can divide that same wage between the husband and wife, thereby directly paying the latter for her domestic services without increasing costs. In addition, employers preferred hiring women because they could be paid much lower wages than men, thus allowing for larger profit. Furthermore, the rise of capitalist industry did not incarcerate women (and children) in the household, rendering them dependent on fathers and husbands, but rather tended to destroy pre-existing domestic relations by bringing them into the wage labour force (Curtis, 1980:122). According to Curtis, it was the state which played a key role in returning women from wage labour to the domestic sphere.

The following chapter will briefly describe the ways in which the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution

significantly altered the economic role of women in England, creating a female proletariat. This will be followed by a demonstration of the central part played by the state in returning women from the labour force to the domestic sphere, as proposed by Curtis (1980) and McDonough and Harrison (1978).



## Chapter II

### NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

In pre-capitalist England, the household was patriarchal in its authority relations. However, while women and children were subordinate members within the feudal family, the contribution of all members was visible and socially recognized. Distinctions between production and consumption, work and home, work and housework, and public and private were not well developed. According to Roberta Hamilton (1978:31), the roles of husband and wife were integrated with the economy of the household and the labour of both men and women was directed toward fulfilling the needs of the household. Joan Scott and Louise Tilly (1975:43) also acknowledge the interdependence of family members. "Consequently, there was no idea of the woman's economic dependence on the man in marriage; it was not the duty of the husband to support the wife, nor was it the duty of the husband to support the children" (Oakley, 1976:21).

Middleton (1982:147-168) has argued that during the late twelfth to early fifteenth centuries, the "high watermark of English feudalism", the peasantry was not a monolithic class and there were distinctions between male and female labour in certain factions, i.e., among those families

paying rent for their land holdings through labour or wages.

Scott and Willy (1975:44-45) agree:

Sex role differentiation clearly existed in these societies. Men and women not only performed different tasks, but they occupied different space. Most often, although by no means always, men worked the fields while women managed the house, raised and cared for animals, tended a garden and marketed surplus dairy products, poultry and vegetables. There was also seasonal work in the fields at planting and harvest times. ...

Women labored not only on the farm, but at all sorts of other work, depending in part on what was available to them. In most areas their activity was an extension of their household functions of food provision, animal husbandry and clothing making.

Early capitalist relations penetrated the domestic sphere through the Putting-Out System, "so called because merchants 'put out' materials - raw wool, yarn, metal rods, as the case may be - to dispersed cottage labour, to be worked up into finished or semi-finished products" (Landes, 1977:13). Women's work was important to the domestic system of textile production. Since women were unskilled and could thus be paid lower wages, large numbers of them were engaged in textile and garment manufacturing. Inventions such as the Spinning Jenny, Arkwright's water frame, and Crompton's mule further expanded employment opportunities for women in textile production (Oakley, 1976:35). As these machines were improved, enlarged and adapted to sources of power, such as water and, later, steam, they could no longer be contained in cottages.

Due to the capital generated by the slave trade (triangular trade), primitive commodity production, and mercantilism, as well as the need to control the workers, production was becoming centralized in manufactories and cottage industry was rapidly disappearing. With the decline of domestic industry, large numbers of working-class women and children joined men in the manufactories and the emerging industrial factories unrestricted by Victorian ideas about womanhood, which evolved later (Adam, 1983; Scott & Tilly, 1975:22). In the early stages of the industrial revolution, women and children came to predominate in the factory labour force. "In the textile industry, the leading edge of capitalist industrialization, women and children formed more than 75% of the wage labour force by 1838" (Curtis, 1980:124). While male workers predominated in the relatively few skilled occupations, the unskilled labour force was composed chiefly of women and children. The cotton industry in Lancashire in 1851, for example, "employed very large numbers of women and girls, and many branches employed them to the almost total exclusion of men" (Anderson, 1971:22). In silk production, printing, paper making, pottery production, and mining, women and children were also present in large numbers.

In 1841 in Britain, 115,425 females were employed in cotton manufacturing alone (Pinchbeck, 1930:318). In garment manufacturing (dressmaking, millinery) another 89,079 females were employed. Over 20,000 females worked in both

wool and lace manufacturing, while almost 30,000 were employed in the production of silk (Pinchbeck, 1930:320). A further 10,500 females were employed in the manufacture of boots and shoes. Although the major area of employment for women was domestic service, they were clearly engaged in factory work on a large scale.

According to Ann Oakley (1976:40), Ivy Pinchbeck (1930:184, 197-98), and Scott and Tilly (1975:39-40, 52) the bulk of the female labour force was young and single. For example, in the cotton mills of Lancashire in 1833, most female factory workers were between 16 and 21 years of age. In 1841, 75% of the same population of women were single. Scott and Tilly (1975) argue that the reason most female factory labourers were single was that

daughters were expendable in rural and urban households, certainly more expendable than their mothers and, depending on the work of the family, their brothers. When work had to be done away from home and when its duration was uncertain, the family interest was best served by sending forth its daughters.

Yet, according to Scott and Tilly (1975) and Jeffrey Weeks (1981), these single women were soon forced to marry, out of economic necessity. "Marriage was essential for the young working-class girl, indeed an economic necessity, for she could scarcely have survived unmarried" (Weeks, 1981:68). Once married, these women usually left the labour force (Scott & Tilly, 1975:58). For example, "at Greenock girls left the mill immediately on marriage" (Pinchbeck,

1930:198). Of course, they were soon replaced by more single women and girls.

The large-scale influx of women and children into the factories was partly due to technical advances and organizational innovations, such as the task division of labour. Furthermore, "the subordination of women and children in the patriarchal household and in society at large made them more susceptible to factory discipline, less able and likely to form unions, and less susceptible to socialist agitation" (Curtis, 1980:124). Women and children in particular were subjected to super-exploitation in industry, as described by the writings of Marx, Engels, E.P. Thompson and others, and were paid much lower wages than their male counterparts. For example, while a woman of twenty worked for 2s. a day, a man of the same age commanded 3s. 6d. (Neff, 1966:73).

Capital destroyed the economic base of the working-class household when it virtually eliminated domestic industry, thus forcing women and children to work in the factories - under squalid working conditions and at wages which barely provided subsistence. Since they were paid much lower wages, unskilled women and children increasingly came to replace the higher-paid, skilled male workers. Economic development during this period was uneven. "Housework" was not commodified but remained in a pre-market stage unaffected by technological development until the twentieth century. "Capital destroyed the economic base of the domestic produc-

tion of elements of working-class subsistence while maintaining the necessity of domestic production for the reproduction of the class" (Curtis, 1980:126).

Thus, in The Conditions of the Working Class in England, Engels comments that "family life for the worker is almost impossible under the existing social system.... All the same, the worker cannot escape from his home and must live with his family" (Engels, 1968:145). Capital created the conditions for the existence of domestic labour and a condition of mutual dependence between the wage worker and the domestic worker (Curtis, 1980:129).

## 2.1 THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN BRITAIN

Although the structural features of capitalism reveal the bases of domestic labour and the working-class family, they do not explain why it was women (and children) who composed the industrial reserve army. According to Curtis (1980:130), "The age and sex of the industrial reserve army is specified by the state."

Workers struggled for the limitation of the working day and for political and economic emancipation from capitalist exploitation, but the English bourgeoisie defended the rights of "freeborn Englishmen" to sell their labour as they saw fit (Curtis, 1980: 126). The workers were thus forced to wage their struggle within the laissez-faire ideology of the ruling class, which opposed state intervention. Since

the rights of "freeborn Englishmen" did not extend to women and children, the "struggle to limit the working day became a struggle to limit the participation of women and children in industrial labour" (Curtis, 1980:126-127). However, the British state responded only selectively to the agitation of the organized workers' movement.

The struggle for a normal working day and for the removal of women and children from the industrial labour force was part of a broad struggle on the part of the socialist workers' movement for political rights for women, for universal education under working-class control, for the abolition of women's domestic slavery and other similar social policies. The state did not respond to these demands (Curtis, 1980:130-131).

Scott and Tilly (1975) and Weeks (1981) disagree with Curtis concerning the motives of the trade unionists. They argue that labour unions sought to eliminate competition in their attempts to have women (and children) removed from the labour force. Furthermore, working-class males were very aware of the necessity of women's labour in the home (Weeks, 1981:68).

Labor unions demanded higher wages for men so that they could support families and keep their wives at home. Some socialist newspapers described the ideal society as one in which 'good socialist wives' would stay at home and care for the health and education of 'good socialist children' (Scott & Tilly, 1975:64).

Whatever their motives, the demands of the working class were partially responsible for the establishment of factory legislation in the first part of the nineteenth century. In 1833, a law was passed which forbade the employ-

ment of children under nine years of age, with the exception of the silk mills, and restricted the hours which children under the age of thirteen could work to eight hours per day. The work of children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen was limited to twelve hours per day (Neff, 1966:70). However, this ultimately led to an even greater influx of women workers into the factories to replace the children affected by the law (Neff, 1966:70).

In 1840, Parliament moved that an inquiry into the conditions of work outside the textile industries be made as well. The Children's Employment Commission was formed and investigated the conditions of work for women as well as children. Its report, published in 1842, "surpassed in horror" any of the earlier records.

Women told how they worked in the coal pits until the day their children were born and then returned a week later. Miscarriages were frequent. One mother reported that four of her children had been stillborn. Many children died in infancy (Neff, 1966:72).

In spite of such powerful presentations of the physical hardships suffered by women in the mines, it was the "moral dangers" which the government chose to underscore and magnify.

In 1842, the Report of the Royal Commission on the Mines, with its description of the working conditions of women and children in the collieries, 'shocked and horrified the whole of England'. 'Chained, belted, harnessed, like dogs in a go-cart,' said one Commissioner about women colliery workers, 'black, saturated with wet, and more than half-naked, crawling upon their hands and feet, and dragging their heavy loads behind them - they present an appearance indescribably disgusting and



unnatural.' This dramatic report - coloured by the upper-class idea that women's proper place was in the home - made it appear that the employment of women outside the home was an evil in itself (Oakley, 1976:43-44).

Thus, factory employment for women was also seen as immoral by both the state and the aristocratic upper class, particularly if men and women worked together. However, this "concern" of the state was patently contrived. As Weeks (1981:58) notes, factory life "actually inhibited social intercourse, particularly with the perpetual noise, the physical separation of machines, and the power of overseers, all of which was fully recognized at the time."

In 1842, the Mines Act was passed which removed both women and children from employment in the mines, in spite of vigorous opposition from some capitalists who argued that women were adults and as such should be "free agents." In 1844, another bill was passed which limited the working day for women and young persons thirteen years of age and older in the textile trades to a twelve-hour day, between 5:30 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. It also

provided safeguards against the evasions of the law practised by unscrupulous employers in the increased power given to the inspectors, in the exclusion of protected persons from the workroom during meal-time, in the appointment of fixed periods for meals, and in the regulation of the hours of work and meals by a public clock approved by the inspectors. The fencing of machinery was also a special gain for women (Neff, 1966:74).

In 1847, a bill was passed which limited the hours of labour to 58 per week for women and young persons above

thirteen years of age. The Law of 1847, however, had failed to fix the time when the ten hours was to be worked, which led the capitalists to utilize a relay system. Female labour, because it was so cheap, worked doubled shifts. However, in 1850, the Government passed a law which attached limits to the time women could work their ten hours - between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. or between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Perhaps the most profound result of the factory legislation was that

The manufacturers began by here and there dismissing a number of young persons and women they employed, in many cases half of them, and then, for the adult males, restoring night work, which had almost disappeared. The Ten Hours' Act, they cried, leaves us no other alternative (Marx, 1977:398).

As a result, during the 1860's and 1870's, women and children formed an industrial reserve army. However, these women, expelled from industry, were not dependent "housewives", but rather worked primarily in domestic servitude or returned to work in the few remaining "sweated" branches of industry. In fact, the number of workers in domestic servitude was very large - half the total employed in industry. Women remained largely in domestic servitude until after the 1900's. Then came the production of domestic appliances and consumer goods and the penetration of electricity and telephones into households, and, perhaps most importantly, the declining birth rate, which reduced the labour necessary for the reproduction of these households (Curtis, 1980:127).

Clearly, many capitalists did not want to expel the female workers from the factories given the low wages they could be paid and the fact that they were much easier to control. The Factory Acts compelled them to discharge women because they were no longer more profitable than men, since they were allowed to work only ten hours per day, could not work night shifts, and were required by law to be given breaks and other considerations.

Following Marx, Leo Panitch (1977) notes that there were two important reasons for the enactment of factory legislation by the British state. First, it was a response to the demands of the working class movement which "daily grew more threatening", and second, it was an attempt to "save the bourgeoisie from itself" (p. 4). "The state's role in the class struggle over the ten-hour day was to make the issue resolvable without revolution, and at the same time promulgate the bourgeoisie's common interest, constituting thereby its political unity, so as to prevent blind competition from undermining its dominance" (1977:5). Sheila Rowbotham (1977:59) agrees: "While the short-term interest of the individual capitalist was to extract as much surplus value from workers regardless of age, sex or physical strength, the long-term interest of capital demanded some protection and guarding of future capacity." Thus, in Britain, women's dependence

was historically resecured in the first half of the nineteenth century by the intervention of legislation. This was done not directly in the fami-

ly, but indirectly by restricting the conditions under which female labour power could be sold. In other words, it was state intervention whose effect was to limit the progressive tendencies that replaced women in the home, rather than the logic of capitalism (McDonough & Harrison, 1978:35).

In summary, with the rise of capitalism and the development of industrialization, women were employed extensively in factories, particularly in textile-related occupations. These women experienced an extremely high rate of exploitation, that is, they were a tremendous source of profit to their capitalist employers. Thus, it does not follow, as the Marxist-feminist literature suggests, that the capitalists (especially those employing women) would desire women's removal from industrial employment. Rather, as Curtis (1980) and McDonough and Harrison (1978) suggest, it was through state intervention that women were returned to the domestic sphere. There were at least two important reasons for state intervention in the form of factory legislation which resulted in the expulsion of women from industry.

First, the state was under great pressure from the working class to enact such legislation and feared a revolution. Second, the state was concerned about preserving and protecting the future child-bearing potential of women upon which the factory had been taking its toll. However, it must be remembered that underlying the state's "concern" for the health and reproductive capacity of these women was the fear that there would soon be a severe shortage of workers. Acting for the ruling class, which is unable to act for it-

self because it is both divided (by competition between factions) and "blinded" by its pursuit of profit, the state set out to ensure the long-term interests of the capitalist class as a whole; in other words, to maintain the conditions necessary for the accumulation of capital. In short, the state was performing its functions of legitimation and accumulation.

### Chapter III

#### NINETEENTH CENTURY CANADA

The social organization of women's labour in nineteenth Canada was shaped by a political-economy which was significantly different from that found in nineteenth century Britain, where industrialization occurred much earlier. In this chapter, the position of women in the Canadian economy will be contrasted with that of the British women, which was discussed previously. First, an examination of their role in pre-industrial Canada will be presented to determine whether they were in a similar position to their British counterparts before the rise of industry. Then, the type of industrialization which occurred in Canada will be described in order to compare the opportunities for employment of Canadian women with those of British women. Clearly, the state would likely not find it necessary to intervene to protect the long-term interests of capital (in the form of women's future reproductive capacity) if only a relatively small number of women were employed in industry.

For the purposes of this study, the focus shall be placed primarily on Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec), which were among the first areas to be colonized as permanent settlements and where industrialization ini-

tially emerged and developed. An attempt will be made to dereify the "family" by examining class relations (Smith, 1981:159), and to distinguish between married and single women in industrializing Canada.

### 3.0.1 Pre-Industrial Canada: 1760 to 1849

Economic development in what is now Canada began with the fishing industry in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the Atlantic coast, but more conspicuously with the fur trade in eastern Canada during the eighteenth century. According to Innis (1982:21) the history of the fur trade in Canada was a "retreat in the face of settlement." In other words, after the Conquest of New France in 1763 Canada largely remained an unsettled hinterland supplying cod and beaver pelts to Britain. Although Britain was concerned with staple extraction, colonization was not yet envisaged, which meant that there were relatively few white women in Canada. Thus, fur trappers "married" Indian women on whose knowledge and skills they were dependent for their survival. However, this situation was to change as trade in agricultural staples, such as timber and wheat, came to predominate over the fur trade. "The arrival of the white woman can be seen as symbolic of a new era: the old fur trade order was gradually giving way to agrarian settlement which was unquestioningly equated with civilization" (Van Kirk, 1977:48).

From the late eighteenth century until approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, Ontario was a "toiler society." The basic economic unit in the toiler society was the lower class agrarian family. According to V.C. Fowke (1962), very few of these family farms were completely self-sufficient, since most farmers exchanged their agricultural surplus for the manufactured and processed goods imported by local merchants.

The women of these families played an essential role within the economy of toiler production through both their direct labour and the reproduction of children whose labour was crucial. Much has been said about the indispensability of women's work on these family farms. However, despite the prevailing ideologies which presume that such farms were egalitarian and non-exploitative economic units, Max Hedley (1981a, 1981b) and Dorothy Smith (1981) call attention to the unequal positions which were held by men and women.

Ownership of the means of production by the 'male head of the household', the 'normal' case in Canadian agriculture, endows him with the legal power to dispose of the means of production and the product of labour in a manner he sees as desirable. This provides him with a considerable amount of potential for controlling the behaviour of other family members who are dependent on him for their subsistence and/or for the transfer of resources to a new generation of producers (Hedley, 1981a:75).

Through homestead laws, women were legally excluded from obtaining free farm lands except through purchase, dower rights, or inheritance. Since they could not afford to



purchase land and seldom inherited land, which customarily was willed to sons, women were largely barred from owning land. Thus, Hedley (1981b:86) states that,

in a structural sense non-property owning family members (usually wives and children) are in a similar position to other non-owners of capital whose labour is hired. These non-owners have no rights to the product of labour which derive directly from ownership of productive resources. Of course, this does not mean that they have no rights to the products of their labour at all, but only that these rights stem from sources other than property ownership. Their rights stem from legal and customary obligations rooted in the structure of the family, the marriage contract and the obligations involved for maintaining dependents. That is, legal and customary factors enter into the determination of the distribution of the wealth created by their labour.

Thus, even in the early nineteenth century the government was preserving the patriarchal family by keeping women dependent on men and making men responsible for them.

Just as Middleton (1979) and Scott and Tilly (1975) had found a strict division of labour between men and women among agricultural families in pre-industrial Britain, Leo Johnson (1974:16-17) notes that there was a clear-cut division of labour between male and female members on family farms in pre-industrial Ontario.

While the men worked in the fields or woods, or sold their labour power off the farm, the women and children worked as a production unit in the area immediately surrounding the house, garden and outbuildings. There they looked after the livestock, tended the garden, picked and preserved fruit and vegetables, spun yarn, wove cloth, made clothing, prepared meals and did the thousand-and-one tasks which existed around the home. Although the wife-mother was clearly the leader of the mother-child work unit, there was little, except in skill level, to distinguish the mother's tasks

from those of the children of either sex. Of course, once a male child reached sufficient maturity to be useful as an aid to his father, he left his mother's production team and joined his father in the fields. Female children, on the other hand, remained in the home production unit until they married and left to found their own family work teams.

Even among the status elite (the Family Compact in Upper Canada and the Chateau Clique in Lower Canada) there was a strict division of labour.<sup>1</sup> However, the chief roles of upper class women were, primarily, producing a legitimate heir and, secondarily, overseeing economic management of the household. Upper class women also became involved in "charitable" and "moral" organizations.

Between these two classes there was a nascent but ever-growing stratum of "merchant-capitalists", that is, merchants, mill owners, money-lenders and small capitalists, who were becoming increasingly independent of the indigenous British elite. Wealthy women in this emerging capitalist class lived much like the wives of the elite, while the role of the poorer capitalists' wives was almost indistinguishable from the toiler women.

In addition to being "toilers", single lower class women could also become domestic servants to the status elite and wealthy bourgeois families. That lower class women preferred the hardship of farm life, in both Upper and Lower Canada, to the life of a domestic servant tells us much

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<sup>1</sup> The term "status elite" is used here in lieu of the term "aristocracy" used by Leo Johnson (1974).

about the burden and difficulty involved in the latter occupation. In Canada, a female domestic servant had

an avenue of escape not available to her British counterpart. Women were scarce on the frontier and toiler farmers were greatly in need of wives. In spite of the physical hardship imposed upon farm women in toiler society, it is clear that many women took the avenue of marriage to toiler farmers in order to escape from the servant class (Johnson, 1974:20).

In the pre-industrial agriculturally-based economy of Quebec, women of the lower and upper classes were in essentially the same positions as their counterparts in Ontario. Similarly, lower class single women in Quebec were also involved in domestic service. Lavigne and Stoddart (1977:131) note that by 1825, one quarter of the urban work force in Montreal was composed of women who were, by and large, domestic servants.

By 1851, when the first census was taken, 85% of Canada's population of two and a half million still lived in rural areas (Wilson, 1982:70). However, a transformation of the political-economic structure had been taking place during the first half of the century, which would bring about the rise of industrialization in Canada. This, in turn, would lead to new roles for women in factories.

The first important change in the political economy was the rise of the Canadian capitalist class and the decline of the status elite (Johnson, 1974:22). This corresponded with the victory of the bourgeoisie and free enterprise over the aristocracy in Britain and was reflected in the repeals of

the Corn Laws in 1846 and the Navigation Acts in 1849, the granting of Responsible Government in 1848, and the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 between Canada and the United States (Cross & Kealey, 1982b:9-12).

Second, in Ontario, toiler farmers who had accumulated capital in the form of cleared lands, buildings, livestock and machinery became involved in production for the market. They began to produce fewer goods but in larger volumes and hence had to purchase many of the necessities that they previously supplied themselves. Thus, the capitalist aspect of agricultural production increasingly came to dominate the toiler society (Johnson, 1974:23). This, in turn, altered the role of the farm wife. Women now had the additional task of going out and purchasing those necessities no longer produced on the farm.

The third important change which took place during this period was the creation of a working class by, at least in part, the British government. This was accomplished through the government's ending its policy of "free" land grants to working class immigrants while still encouraging immigration. Famine in Ireland also led to mass immigration to Canada; "in 1847 alone, some 100,000 set out for the North American colonies" (Cross & Kealey, 1982:11). "By 1850, therefore, a growing scarcity of cheap land and a flood of immigrant Irish paupers created significant pools of proletarian labourers in cities such as Quebec, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto and Hamilton" (Johnson, 1974:23).

Until 1850, during the toiler society period, most commodity production, excluding agricultural production, took place in small workshops by skilled artisans and craftsmen, assisted by their wives and families. Such production still existed in Canada long after its decline in Britain and the United States because of poor or expensive transportation facilities which protected it against mass produced goods. However, Canada's growing population and improved internal transportation systems expanded the markets available to the manufacturer, which increased the number of manufactories and factories.

### 3.0.2 Industrialization: 1849 to 1896

Although Canada's industrial revolution began in the late 1840's, it was not until after the implementation of the National Policy tariff of 1879 that industry developed on a relatively large scale. Thus, even by the end of the nineteenth century "vast agricultural interests [were] still the most prominent" in Canada (MacLean, 1899:172), while the United States, Britain, France and Germany had already emerged as industrial powers. In 1891, only 14.1% of the Canadian work force were engaged in manufacturing, while 45.8% were employed in agriculture (Canadian Bureau of statistics, 1915:xx). In 1890, according to L. R. MacDonald (1975:270), the average fixed capital per industrial establishment in Canada was only \$2,280.00 and by "1900 or even

later most Canadian industry was dispersed and small scale." Consequently, in 1891, in an attempt to attract new immigrants to Canada, the Macdonald government reported seventy-two factories in a riding where none existed (Naylor, 1975:9).

Notwithstanding the predominance of agriculture, industrialization had taken firm root in Canada during the 1880's. "Signs of the industrial revolution were everywhere: the factory system spread; steam power was used extensively; finished iron and steel products surpassed the leading resource processing industry; and provincial and national markets for manufactured goods emerged" (Laxer, 1983:13).

Although industry in Canada was centred around extensive iron, steel and woodworking factories which arose and grew in response to large-scale production of agricultural staples, it was not limited to these. As a result of the National Policy tariff, an industrial revolution occurred "almost overnight" (Johnson, 1974:28). The textile industry experienced a "minor industrial boom" which created factory employment for women (Cross & Kealey, 1982a:11). The expanding boot and shoe industry, as well as the tobacco industry, also provided employment for women, although to a lesser extent.

In Ontario, wheat was the engine of economic growth. It had created the means and the need for transportation fa-

cilities and attracted capital and financial institutions, which led to the development of industry and the creation of a proletariat in the latter part of the nineteenth century. (McCallum, 1980:5-6). In Quebec, however, an increasingly unproductive agriculture and intermittent forest industry provided a weak base for urban and industrial development. It was primarily in Montreal, the hub of the country's transportation network and centre of capital accumulation, that industrialization developed to a significant degree. This was due to its location, the power available via the Lachine Canal, and, perhaps most importantly, to the poor agricultural conditions in the province which meant an abundance of cheap labour.

From 1851 to 1861, the number of people engaged in industrial employment rose from 71,000 to 145,000 in the Province of Canada (Eyerson, 1968:268-9). By 1871, Canada's population had reached 3,635,024, of which 187,942 (5.17%) were factory workers (MacLean, 1899:173). These factory workers were, of course, concentrated in the major urban centres, such as Montreal, Hamilton, Kingston, and Toronto. Greg Kealey (1982a:21) notes that "fully 70% of Toronto workers in 1871 worked in shops or factories employing over thirty men and women." By 1891, largely due to the tariff, there were 75,968 industrial establishments in Canada (MacLean, 1899:173).

There is considerable disagreement among historians and sociologists concerning the scale of industrial development in nineteenth-century Canada. Much of this dissent centres upon the designation of particular activities as industrial or mercantile. According to Wallace Clement (1975, 1978), R. T. Naylor (1972, 1973, 1975), and Jorge Niosi (1980), nineteenth-century Canadian economy was dominated by railways, export trade, and commercial finance, rather than industry. However, MacDonald (1975:266-8) argues that railroads, the second most important sector of the Canadian economy in the 1800's, should be considered as industry.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Stanley Ryerson (1976:42) maintains that "resource extraction is industry." In any event, it was activities such as these, whether designated as mercantile, industrial or both, which prevailed, as opposed to secondary manufacturing or other types of industry, excluding steel production. Clearly, the textile industry, the major industrial employer of women in Canada (and Western Europe), was not the "leading edge of capitalist industrialization" in

<sup>2</sup> There are many good reasons for classifying railroads as industry. First, railroads have a much higher ratio of fixed capital to circulating capital. In fact, in nineteenth-century Canada railroads had a higher ratio of fixed to circulating capital than any industry (MacDonald, 1975: 267). Second, transporting a product, like industrial activity, adds value to that product, whereas mercantile activities do not (Marx, 1981:207-229). Third, railroads, like industry, are concerned with the problems of technology and labour, rather than with business connections and market fluctuations. However, industry which existed in nineteenth-century Canada, such as railways and resource extraction, were largely oriented toward mercantile pursuits.



Canada, as it was in Britain (Curtis, 1980:124; Oakley, 1974:34). This curtailed employment opportunities for Canadian women in factories, as compared to those that had been available to their British counterparts.

Due to the particular nature and history/chronology of each country's economic development, the process of industrialization as it took place in Canada differed in another important respect from Britain. In Western Europe, according to Scott & Tilly (1975:51), a tremendous growth in the population was causing a land-shortage. This situation was further exacerbated in Britain by the Enclosure Acts, which had removed agricultural workers, mostly peasants, from their land in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. By the late eighteenth century, landless peasants were forced to work in the emerging factories. However, in Canada, the number of independent farmers engaged in agricultural production did not decline with the rise of industrialization but, rather, increased (Panitch, 1981:16). As industry expanded in southern Ontario and Montreal creating a proletariat, wheat production simultaneously shifted to the vast open lands of the West, expanding the class of petit bourgeois farmers there. Thus, even in late nineteenth-century Canada, the proletariat was not the largest subordinate class.<sup>3</sup> According to Panitch, Canada's pattern of

<sup>3</sup> The Western Canadian farmers were in a subordinate position in relation to the Eastern economic/political elite, paying high credit rates, high freight rates, and rates for manufactured goods which were artificially inflated

industrialization resembled that of the United States more than that of Britain.

Both societies were marked by the simultaneous expansion of an industrial proletariat and a class of independent farmers in the Western frontier. The relative decline of the latter class in North America therefore came later than in Britain, and in the context of Canada's later industrialization than the U.S., the rapid decline of the number of independent farmers after the Depression more directly coincided with the great expansion of white collar employment under monopoly capitalism and the interventionist state (Panitch, 1981:21).

Clearly, the role played by women in the pre-industrial Canadian economy paralleled that of women in pre-industrial Britain. Further, the development of industry in Canada created employment for women in the emerging factories just as it had in Britain. However, due to the agriculturally-oriented focus of this industrial development, Canadian women were employed on a much smaller scale. In Canada, industrialization was centered around the iron and steel industries, which produced the railroads and steamships required for the transportation of agricultural products. Thus, the textile industry, the leading industrial employer of women, did not develop on a large scale. The following chapter will examine the chief industries in which women were employed and the extent of their employment therein.

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due to the National Policy of 1879. Further, they were forced to sell their agricultural products at low prices since there were few Eastern buyers (that is, a monopsony).

## Chapter IV

### WOMEN'S ROLE IN CANADIAN INDUSTRY

With the introduction of steam power came the development of the manufacturing industries and mills which opened their doors to women's entry into the paid labour force. The application of production techniques, such as the task division of labour, i.e., breaking complex jobs into simple tasks, and the replacement of muscle-power by machine power, allowed capitalists to hire women and children who could be paid extremely low wages because they were "unskilled" and "inexperienced." In 1891, Jean Scott (1891:101) noted that "the very fact of there being a number of employments requiring unskilled labour has led, no doubt, to the increased employment of young girls and women." Thus by 1891, 52,251 females or 26.7% of the female labour force ten years of age and over were gainfully employed in manufacturing. Moreover, they composed 23% of the total industrial work force in Canada. (See Tables 1 and 2)

Women tended to predominate in the textile industries (silk, cotton, wool) and garment manufacturing - a transfer from home to the factory of the traditional tasks and skills. As well as being textile workers, women also played an important role in other industries which had been infil-

TABLE 1

Total Number of Workers (10 years of age and over)  
in Each Occupation in 1891  
by Sex

OCCUPATION	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Agriculture	723,013	12,194	735,207
Building Trades	185,599	0	185,599
Domestic and Personal Service	38,275	101,654	139,929
Civil and Municipal Gov't	17,500	767	18,267
Fishing and Hunting	29,841	204	30,045
Forestry	12,812	0	12,812
Manufactures	174,829	52,251	227,080
Mining	16,124	3	16,127
Professional	42,572	20,051	62,623
Trade and Merchandising	101,714	7,918	109,632
Transportation	68,100	948	69,048
Total Employed	1,410,379	195,990	1,606,369

Source: Canadian Bureau of Statistics. Fifth Census of  
Canada, Vol. VI, p. xix.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Workers (10 years of age and over)  
in Each Occupation in 1891  
by Sex

OCCUPATION	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Agriculture	51.3	6.2	45.8
Building Trades	13.2	0.0	11.6
Domestic and Personal Service	2.8	51.9	8.7
Civil and Municipal Gov't.	1.2	0.4	1.1
Fishing and Hunting	2.1	0.1	1.9
Forestry	0.9	0.0	0.8
Manufactures	12.3	26.7	14.1
Mining	1.1	0.0	1.0
Professional	3.0	10.2	3.9
Trade and Merchandising	7.2	4.0	6.8
Transportation	4.9	0.5	4.3
Total Employed	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Canadian Bureau of Statistics. Fifth Census of  
Canada, Vol. VI, xx.

trated by technology and mass production techniques, such as boot- and shoe-making factories, match factories, tobacco industries, rubber factories, factories producing paper bags, and in printing offices where they carried out folding and stitching, rather than typesetting.

As in Britain, it was typically single, lower class women who were employed in these factories. Employers preferred hiring single women because they would be temporary workers who would, out of necessity, have to leave work to get married. "Most women who worked in the factories were young, between fifteen and twenty years old, and they tended to leave after a few years to get married, as indeed they virtually had to do in order to survive" (Phillips & Phillips, 1983:13). The continual turnover of single women who were kept perpetually "inexperienced" "not only enabled the employers to keep the wages of the women low but also permitted them to dub the women unreliable, uninterested in learning a trade or in applying themselves seriously to it" (Trofimenkoff, 1982:282).

Bradbury (1982) notes that in all but the most skilled working-class households, additional wage earners were a necessity. However, "only seldom did a wife and mother work for wages" (1982:109). The family required the labour of the mother to make the necessary purchases, cook, clean, and sew to maintain the father and the children who were working, as well as to care for the younger non-working chil-

dren. Thus, in her study of working-class families in Montreal in the 1870's, Bradbury (1979:86) states that only 2.5% of all wives living with their husbands reported an occupation outside the home. However, they occasionally took in washing, ironing, sewing, and mending and also babysat for neighbours, friends and relatives.

Scott (1891:107) found married women in Ontario to be in a similar situation.

The employment of married women in factories and stores in Ontario is not general. In a large number of factories and stores there are no married women at all; at most only one or two widows. Married women in Canada do not seem to go out to work as long as their husbands are at all able to support them. In canning factories, during the summer months, numbers of married women may be found; many work in laundries; and in a mill stock factory (preparing rags for shoddy mills) visited by the writer most of the women were married. Market gardening is a means of subsistence to some. Women whose husbands are dead or are not able to support them, will not go out as long as they have children at home to care for, but prefer, if they can, to engage in some work which will keep them at home. Women in poor circumstances go out washing and ironing to private houses or else take it home to do. In many cases they take in sewing or dressmaking, and do tailoring for the wholesale trade at their homes.

In Toronto during a greater part of the year there is a large student population gathered from all parts of the province, and accommodation for them needs to be ample, as well as for many other young men and women who find employment away from their homes; so that taking in boarders is a frequent resource for married women who have homes but need to increase their income.

As yet there seems no need for special legislation in the Factories' Act on behalf of married women as in more thickly populated countries.

In the early stages of industrialization, married women and their daughters worked in their homes, particularly in the garment trade, on machines that were either rented from or supplied by manufacturers.

In the clothing trade, mechanization revolutionized production both in and outside the growing number of factories. In a trade that was particularly unstable in the years before the initiation of the National Policy's tariffs, capitalists sought ways to keep costs as low as possible. "Putting-out", "sweating", or "homework" saved on overhead rental, machinery costs, and labour costs. As the old craft of the tailor or seamstress was deskilled, as immigrants from the countryside and abroad were drawn into the city, homework especially for women and children multiplied. Thus, labour that resulted directly from the mechanization of some parts of the labour process brought to these women no separation of work and home, but rather the increased likelihood of work for wages at home (Bradbury, 1979:87).

In some areas of employment, particularly the textile trade, employers hired whole families, which freed women from having to watch over their children while allowing employers to pay even lower wages. Married women and widows occasionally took jobs as housekeepers, charwomen, and small traders because these occupations did not require full time absence from the home. Bradbury (1979) notes that married women only worked outside the home out of necessity at crucial periods, such as when children were too young to work.

Montreal, the industrial centre of Canada in the nineteenth century, relied heavily on the labour of single women and children. From the middle of the 1800's to the latter part of the century, Montreal was a city in transition, une-



venly developed by industrial capital. Working-class families lived in close contact with disease, poverty and death (Bradbury, 1979, 1982; Copp, 1974). As ever-increasing numbers became divorced from the land, and immigration escalated, an urban proletariat composed of both men and women was being created to work in the emerging industries.

From approximately the middle of the century onward, women outnumbered men in Montreal. This was due to the influx of women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine who had immigrated to Montreal in search of employment in the nascent industries or in domestic service (Cross, 1977:68). It seems logical that the reason these women could not find employment in their own countries (Britain and France, primarily) was the establishment of factory legislation in the early part of the nineteenth century.\* Thus, they immigrated to Canada where industrialization was just emerging and creating opportunities for women no longer available in industrialized Western Europe. There was also a large demand for domestic servants in Canada, which further encouraged immigration (Roberts, 1979:195).

In Montreal, as in the rest of industrial Canada, few lower class mothers worked outside the home, but lower class single women and children constituted a vital part of the

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\* According to Howard Palmer (1975:5), immigrants to Canada before 1901 were primarily of British, French and, to a much lesser extent, German origin. Factory legislation resembling Britain's was passed in France in 1874 and in Germany in 1878 (Scott, 1891: 91).

industrial labour force. In the clothing manufacturing industry in 1871, they constituted 80% of the work force, while in the boot and shoe industry they formed 50% of the work force (Bradbury, 1979:75). Women and children comprised nearly 42% of the total industrial work force in Montreal and 33% in Toronto where there were fewer textile and garment industries.

In the industrial areas of Montreal, such as St. Louis, St. Lawrence, and St. James, women worked in factories, whereas in the upper-middle class residential areas of the city women were employed as domestic servants. While in the rest of Canada in the 1880's "there were far more women working as domestic servants than as factory workers" (Trofimenkoff, 1982:221), in Montreal in 1881 only 8% of the female population were employed in domestic service, while 16% were employed in the industrial labour force (Cross, 1977:84).

Prior to the establishment of factories in Canada, single, lower class women were compelled to rely on domestic service, cleaning, cooking, and caring for children for their livelihoods, or were engaged in the Putting-Out system, until they were married - usually at a very young age. However, with the rise of industrialization in Canada, women were increasingly leaving the home and domestic service, and were increasingly gaining employment (and being exploited) in the industrial labour force. "There were, however, pow-

erful forces working in opposition to such a 'liberation'" (Johnson, 1974:28).

As in Britain, it was the single, lower-class women who were employed in the various textile-related industries. In Britain, the working class had placed pressure upon the state to, among other things, protect women and children who worked in the factories. The British state enacted legislation which was congruent with its own goals (that is, maintaining social order and ensuring the conditions for long-term capital accumulation) and complied. In Canada, too, the working class, as well as sections of the middle class, pressured the state to enact similar legislation.

The following chapter will provide a description of the provincial factory legislation which was passed in the nineteenth century. (The ineffectiveness of this legislation will be discussed in a later chapter.) This will be followed by an examination of the nature of the Canadian state at this period to contribute to an understanding of the reasons for the passing of such legislation (and why it was ineffective). Finally, an analysis of the role of trade unions and middle-class reform movements in bringing about the factory legislation will be presented.

## Chapter V

### FACTORY LEGISLATION

Factory legislation appeared in Canada during the latter part of the nineteenth century as industrialization escalated in the urban centres. Much of this legislation was aimed specifically at women (and children) who, as noted previously, composed an ever-increasing part of the industrial labour force. Of the seven provinces which comprised Canada in the 1890's, only Ontario and Quebec were industrialized heavily enough to warrant legislation. In Ontario in 1891, there were over 30,000 women and girls (aged 14-16) employed in factories. Scott (1891:89) notes that Ontario "found it necessary to subject [women's] labour to various restrictions in order to protect the interests of society." The employment of women and girls in factories in Ontario was to be regulated in a number of areas by the Factory Act of 1884 and the Amendment Act of 1889.

First, women, young girls, and children (under age 14) were to be limited to a ten-hour work day, or no more than sixty hours per week. Under particular conditions, an inspector could give permission to a factory owner to temporarily employ women and children for up to twelve-and-a-half hours per day, or seventy-two-and-a-half hours per week.

However, no woman, young girl, or child was to be employed earlier than six o'clock in the morning or later than nine o'clock in the evening, thus preventing night work. Second, it required that female workers and children be allowed one hour at noon each day for meals. Third, they were to be barred from cleaning any machinery while it was in motion. Fourth, provisions were made for separate "conveniences" for men and women. Separate "closets" with separate approaches had to be provided for women. Factory inspectors were to be appointed to ensure that these regulations were enforced.

Under the Shops' Regulation Act of 1888, the owner of any shop employing females was required to "at all times provide and keep therein a sufficient and suitable seat or chair for the use of every such female; and [to] permit her to use such seat or chair when not necessarily engaged in the work or duty for which she [was] employed in such shop" (Scott, 1891:92). Finally, under the "Act respecting Mining Regulations", women and girls were barred from working in mines.

In Quebec in 1891, there were over 20,000 female factory workers. Factory legislation which was almost identical to that passed in Ontario, occurred in Quebec in 1889. In addition to the restrictions which existed in Ontario, female factory workers in Quebec were also "forbidden to do any operation connected with belting or other modes of transmission" (MacLean, 1899:177). Moreover, the lieutenant-

governor in council was free to classify factories as "dangerous, unhealthy, or incommodious" if he considered them dangerous to the health of the operators, especially to that of children, young girls, and/or women (Maclean, 1899:176). Further, the work of females and children was restricted to the hours between six o'clock in the morning and nine o'clock in the evening (Scott, 1891:96).

Canada, even as late as 1899, had not experienced a "literal emptying of the country into manufacturing towns", as was the case in Britain and New England earlier in the century (Maclean, 1899:173). It has been shown, however, that as industry rapidly developed during the 1880's and 1890's women began to play an increasingly important role in industry in Canada. Following in the footsteps of Britain, the Canadian state enacted factory legislation. In order to understand the reasons for this, it is necessary to examine the nature and functions of the Canadian state, as well as the various middle- and working-class groups which influenced it.

### 5.1 THE CANADIAN STATE

It is generally agreed that during the latter part of the nineteenth century, political and economic elites were closely allied, forming a ruling oligarchy. Indeed, several well-documented accounts demonstrate that from Confederation to the turn of the century, these elites were dominated by

the same members. "The list of eminent financiers and railwaymen of the period is a veritable 'who's who' of Canadian politics for two generations" (Naylor, 1972:17). "To take but one example among many, a list of the board of directors of the Grand Trunk Railroad reads like a list of the Fathers of Confederation" (Panitch, 1977:11-12). Wallace Clement (1975) strongly supports this position as well:

It cannot be asserted enough that the early railway promoters and politicians - including cabinets and prime ministers - were intimate. Not only were they from the same social class, as occurs frequently in later years, but they were often the same people (p. 64).

For example, Minister of Finance A. T. Galt was issued charters for the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, Montreal and Kingston Railroad and the Grand Trunk Railway, in addition to being a commissioner of the British North America Land Company, Bank of Montreal, Northwest Coal and Navigation Company and President of Canada Guaranty Company (p. 56).

The close ties between members of the economic elite and the executive level of the political elite were also present in the legislature, which was composed of merchants, lawyers, manufacturers, ship building and lumber capitalists and insurance company presidents. As Clement (1975:64) states, "this was an era in Canadian history when it could correctly be said that an economic class ruled politically." Thus, it was during this period, more than any other, that the state was most clearly and largely the "instrument" of the ruling class. "Because businessmen constituted the dominant class in Canadian society, they assumed that the

state should be organized to meet their needs" (Armstrong & Nells, 1973:22).

Naylor and Clement have demonstrated that merchant-capitalists, i.e., bankers, merchants, and railway magnates, played important roles in the state. However, according to both MacDonald (1975) and Acheson (1973), industrialists (manufacturers) were also present within this ruling class. In his study of the industrial elites in Canada in 1910, Acheson notes that nearly one-third of them had held political office at some time in their careers. MacDonald (1975:266) further argues that mercantile and manufacturing enterprises were intermingled: "a close look at the evidence...shows that mercantile and industrial capital were inseparable and that even to range business on a spectrum from purely trading to purely industrial becomes arbitrary and ahistorical." Furthermore, he maintains that mercantile elites moved easily between trading and industrial pursuits. For example, George Stephen, one of three major stockholders controlling the Bank of Montreal, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the C.P.R., and close friend of John A. Macdonald, was also prominent in the Montreal steel industry and involved in textile manufacturing (Niosi, 1980:25; MacDonald, 1975:277). Clement (1975:71) cites further examples of merchant-industrialists, such as "Donald Alexander Smith of the C.P.R., governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, president of the Bank of Montreal and member of parliament; Sir Her-



bert Holt, financier and railwayman and Sir Hugh Allan of steamship, banking, insurance, telegraph and railway fame." An examination of the boards of directors of corporations in late nineteenth-century Ontario reveals a "strong rate of participation by merchants" and merchant and financial support of industry was even more pronounced in Montreal (MacDonald, 1975:274).<sup>5</sup> However, MacDonald (p. 275) goes on to state that

the most important evidence that industrial development in Canada always involved merchant assistance is that mercantile and industrial activities were fully intermingled in business well before the trusts appeared. ...In a large lumber yard, dealing and processing are carried on side by side. A large tannery also imports quality leathers in great quantities. A soap manufacturer is in addition a dealer in various brands of English soap.

Development of the Canadian economy, due to its mercantile orientation, hinged on the development of a powerful state and extensive state intervention (Naylor, 1972:19). Through the Act of Union in 1841, the Canadian state, complete with its government, bureaucracy, courts and legislation, was established. Municipal institutions were added in 1849 and a volunteer militia in 1855. Thus, Miliband's six elements of a state system were in place twelve years before Confederation (Miliband, 1973:46-51).

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly, R.J. Richardson's (1982) study of the economic elite in Toronto in the 1920's demonstrated that merchants and industrialists were not separate and distinct class fractions.

According to Panitch (1977), the capitalist state serves three primary functions - those of accumulation, legitimation and coercion. The first two, often contradictory functions, refer to the role of the state in attempting to create the conditions necessary for profitable capital accumulation, while at the same time trying to foster social harmony. The establishment of the National Policy with its associated tariffs, the creation of land and immigration policies to attract a labour market, and the financing of the railroads illustrate that the Canadian state was deeply involved in the process of capital formation in the nineteenth century. "Confederation itself was produced by the desire to facilitate capital accumulation by guaranteeing loans from London to build the railways" (Panitch, 1977:14).

The second function of the state, legitimation, refers to concrete activities, such as union protection, and government consultation with labour, which maintain or create social harmony. The functions of accumulation and legitimation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Through legitimation, the state ensures a social climate conducive to the accumulation of capital. For example,

During the early 1870's, the Conservatives under the leadership of John A. Macdonald, "in spite of the risk of antagonizing a large number of small manufacturers and businessmen ... determined to remove the anomalies of the law and provide trade unionism with a secure legal base." The reasons for this pro-labour policy flowed from the National Policy of the Tories, their willingness to use state resources to build up the country and prevent its absorption by the United States. To do this required large-scale immigration from Bri-

tain, and Macdonald said in defending the bill in the House of Commons, if British "working-men should learn that the old [anti-union] law remained unchanged, they would not come to settle in Canada" (Lipsett, 1976:26).<sup>6</sup>

It has been observed that in Canada, the political and economic elites were essentially composed of the same people in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, as shown in Chapter III, the various capitalist class factions usually present in an industrializing economy (financial, merchant, industrial, and so on) were closely related. This suggests that the state would be more directly controlled by capitalist motives; in other words, somewhat more concerned with immediate profit and somewhat less concerned with protecting the long-term interests of capital. This would be particularly true if there were a relatively small number of women in industry, about whom to be "concerned", since there would then be little danger that a future labour force could not be reproduced. In such a case, enacting factory legislation would not be an important consideration. However, the state would still be faced with the demands of the working class and sections of the middle class which it must placate.

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<sup>6</sup> Another reason for Macdonald's introducing a pro-labour bill, according to Paul Craven (1980:169) was that there was a printers' strike at Liberal leader George Brown's newspaper. "Macdonald seized upon this double opportunity of embarrassing Brown and the Liberals and capitalizing on popular indignation with the state of the law, with an eye to the main chance in the coming campaign."

## 5.2 REFORM MOVEMENTS AND TRADE UNIONS

Victorian ideology was largely prevalent in Canada in the latter part of the nineteenth century, emphasizing Protestant morality and the family. Thus, it was during this period that numerous middle-class reform groups, often dominated by women, emerged. Although these groups were progressive in that they wished to increase women's power within the family, they were conservative in that they were equally committed to maintaining separate spheres for men and women. However, Victorian ideology was not limited to Protestants, women, or the middle class. "At this time, liberals, conservatives and some socialists; leading philanthropists, moral reformers and trade unionists; Protestants and Catholics - all had very much in common in their views on the woman worker" (Klein & Roberts, 1974:212).

Several middle-class reform groups, such as the National Council of Women and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, saw the increasing number of women in the work force as a threat to their definition of a moral society and thus set out to protect the "domestic ideal of women" (Mitchinson, 1982:201). The National Council of Women, self-defined as Canada's "national mother", was an organization composed of influential and wealthy women who vigorously promoted protective legislation for women and children in the factories. The N.C.W. was primarily concerned with women's ability to fulfill their roles as mothers. Thus, they demanded seats

for shop girls because they thought that extended periods of standing would be harmful to women's reproductive organs (Phillips & Phillips, 1983:19). They were no doubt influenced by medical journals and manuals of the Victorian era, which maintained that women should not work because they "needed to conserve their energies for the vital tasks of reproduction", and stated that certain maladies occurred frequently among working women who spent too much time indoors (Kealey, 1974:7-8).

The W.C.T.U. was established in Ontario in the 1870's, but by 1900 it had become a national union with approximately 10,000 members (Mitchinson, 1982:192). Underlying its members' manifest concern with temperance was the belief that intemperance was closely connected with crime and sexual immorality, and hence threatened their middle-class lifestyle. Like the N.C.W., a primary concern of the W.C.T.U. was preserving the conservative family by maintaining separate spheres for men and women (Bacchi, 1983:69-85). Goldwin Smith, a prominent social commentator of the period, expressed the attitudes of the members of such reform groups toward female employees in factories in the following manner: "They want, some of them say, to live their own lives, as though the life of a woman could be perfect without domestic affection" (cited in Klein & Roberts, 1974:218).

There was another, more mundane reason as to why middle-class reform groups of the period crusaded to remove

women from the factories. Factories were reducing the number of women available for domestic service. Thus, the N.C.W. established the Girl Guides, an organization whose program "was aimed at producing a new generation of young women better socialized to fit domestic values, both as servants and wives" (Klein & Roberts, 1974:231). Due to long hours, lack of privacy, and so on, the status of domestic servitude was quite low and deteriorated further with industrialization. In an attempt to correct this, in order to lure women away from the factories, the N.C.W. also established an "Honourable Order of Domestic Service." Ironically, groups such as the N.C.W. believed that they were saving women and society itself by advocating the transfer of women from factories into the domestic setting. Yet, Klein & Roberts (1974:233) note that, in comparison to women in other occupations including factory work it was domestic servants who were vastly over-represented on the records of inmates of the criminal and insane asylums of the period.

Closely connected to reform groups, such as the N.C.W. and the W.C.T.U., were the suffrage associations and societies which first appeared in Canada in 1877. Composed of middle-class men and women who were part of the larger reform enterprise, it is hardly surprising to discover that they were primarily concerned with censorship, temperance, compulsory education, child welfare laws and factory legislation. Each reform advocated by the suffragists was aimed

at preserving maternal capacity and did not challenge traditional sex roles. Female suffrage was, to them, chiefly a means of achieving these reforms and thus strengthening society. The suffragists advocated factory legislation for women and children because they were concerned with the "health of future citizens." According to Bacchi (1983:90), the suffragists were not concerned that protective legislation would burden women with a competitive hardship which made them less employable. In fact, "the majority of the suffragists wanted women out of the factories altogether, which scarcely constituted a plea for equal opportunity" (Bacchi, 1983:91).

Trade unionists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely agreed with the middle-class reform groups that women's proper place was in the home, not in the factory (Campbell, 1980; Johnson, 1974; Sangster, 1978). Concerned about the loss of their own jobs and reductions in their pay caused by female competition in industry, they argued that women would not have to work at all if male workers were paid a sufficiently large salary. The attitudes of the trade unionists of the period are represented in the following quote from one labour organization. "We think that women should not be allowed to work in the foundries, as it has a tendency to degrade them, to lower the wages of men and to keep a number of young men out of work" (cited in Klein & Roberts, 1974:220).

Leo Johnson (1974:28-29) argues that male workers were opposed to equal pay for women because they believed women to be naturally inferior workers. Later, according to Johnson, they advocated equal pay for women as well as factory legislation pertaining to them in the hope that this would make women less competitive and remove them from the labour market.

According to Bryan Palmer (1983:115), women were shunned by most labour associations. In 1881, the Knights of Labour finally opened its doors to women and advocated equal pay for them. "This practice of equality, however, was often tarnished by a retreat into the domestic ideology of the age and a chivalrous deference of femininity."

Similarly, Alice Kessler-Harris (1975:97) notes that the demands of the American Federation of Labour (AFL) in the United States for equal pay for equal services performed "was a double-edged sword."

Since employers clearly had important economic incentives for hiring women, male trade unionists felt they had either to eliminate that incentive, or to offer non-economic reasons for restricting women's labour-force participation. In the early 1900s they tried to do both. In order to reduce the economic threat, organized labour repeatedly affirmed a commitment to unionize women wage-earners and to extract equal pay for them. Yet trade unionists simultaneously argued that women's contributions to the home and their duties as mothers were so valuable that women ought not to be in the labour force at all" (Kessler-Harris, 1975:95).

According to Dorothy Smith (1981:182), the A.F.L., in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "played a



leading role in the organization of a sex-stratified (as well as racially stratified) labour market." These relations were then "imported into Canada as the so-called international unions came to dominate Canadian union organizations." Thus, the platform of principles upon which the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada took its stand in 1898 included the "abolition of child labour by children under 14 years of age and of female labour in all branches of industrial life, such as mines, workshops, factories, etc." (Logan, 1928:189). It was due to the demands of the working-class trade unions and middle-class reform groups that factory legislation similar to that established in Britain was passed in Ontario and Quebec in the nineteenth century. The ineffectiveness of this legislation will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter VI

### CONCLUSION

Clearly, Canadian women in industrializing late nineteenth-century Canada were, in many respects, in a position similar to that of their British counterparts earlier in the century. In both of these countries, extreme poverty forced women (through the Putting-Out System) to take part in domestic industry in order to help maintain their families. These women were usually involved in various forms of textile and garment production, which they carried out in their homes, in addition to their everyday "housework." However, the rise of the factory system brought an end to domestic industry. Due to their heavy workload in the household, married women, and particularly mothers, could not accept employment in factories unless the entire family was hired. Thus, in both Britain and Canada, the majority of the female workers were not only young and lower-class, but were also single.

The chief source of employment for these women in Canada, as well as in Britain, was in domestic service. However, another important source of employment for women in both countries was in manufacturing, primarily in textile and garment factories. Thus, the two major occupations in which

Canadian and British women worked closely resembled work traditionally carried out by women in the home.

In Canada, state intervention in the form of factory legislation, which regulated the conditions of female employment in factories and other areas of work, was almost identical to the factory acts passed in Britain. Moreover, in both countries factory legislation was, at least in part, a response to the demands of segments of the middle and working classes.

However, Canadian political economy in the nineteenth century was in many ways, radically different from that of Britain. Thus, Canadian women's roles in the economy differed from those of their British counterparts in many significant ways.

Canada's economy was shaped by its position as a colony which focused on the export of agricultural staples to Britain. Industrialization in Canada emerged largely as a by-product of this mercantile orientation and developed largely in response to the latter's needs. Thus, the textile and garment manufacturing industries, which had been the chief industrial employers of women in all of the industrializing Western nations, did not emerge on as large a scale in Canada. Rather, like other branches of industry, it was eclipsed by the large iron, steel, and woodworking industries required to build the infrastructure necessary for staple extraction. This, of course, limited employment opportunities for women in Canada.

In 1891, only 11.07% of the female population ten years of age and over were gainfully employed (Canadian Bureau of Statistics, 1929).<sup>7</sup> Of that small percentage, only 26.7% were engaged in industrial employment. It was noted previously that 23% of the total Canadian industrial labour force ten years of age and over was composed of females. However, it must be remembered that only 14.1% of the total labour force were employed in industry.

In 1891, there were three times as many agricultural workers in Canada as factory workers. Two important factors account for this relatively high proportion of agricultural to industrial workers compared to the ratio in Britain. First, Canada's commercial banking system was oriented to short-term loans suited to trade, not industry (Laxer, 1983:31). Thus, fewer technologically innovative industries could be developed in Canada, curtailing factory employment for both men and women (Laxer, 1981).<sup>8</sup> Second, there were

<sup>7</sup> In Britain, according to Tilly and Scott (1978:70-71), approximately 27% of the female population were in the labour force, comprising over 30% of the total labour force.

<sup>8</sup> According to Gordon Laxer, in some countries, such as the United States, powerful farmers' movements were able to force the creation of non-commercial banks which engaged in the large, long-term loans required by farmers to purchase land and agricultural machinery. An unintended consequence of the creation of such an investment banking system was that money was available for the development of innovative and costly industry as well. Such farmers' movements have also pressured governments to expand their boundaries to obtain more farm land. As a result, industry developed in response to the needs of such military expansionism. However, in nineteenth-century Canada, the farmers' movement was weak and unorganized, despite the large number of farmers, due to conflicts between anglo-

vast agricultural lands available to Canadians on the Western frontier. As Panitch notes, Canada industrialized late so that, by the time the class of independent farmers and available farm land in the West declined, industrial employment for females was already giving way to the white collar occupations associated with "monopoly capitalism and the interventionist state" (1981:21).

As stated at the outset of this paper, Marxist-feminist theory has provided an incomplete explanation for the sex-based division of labour and women's relegation to the domestic sphere of production by focusing only on the functional needs of capitalism. Curtis (1980), McDonough and Harrison (1978), and Rowbotham (1973) have argued that the British state, through the enactment of factory legislation, played an important role in returning women from the factories to the domestic sphere. In nineteenth-century Canada, such state intervention was not yet necessary. As noted previously, women composed a relatively small part of the industrial work force. Thus, there was no need to protect the long-term interests of capital by protecting women through factory legislation, since their ability to reproduce a future labour force was not seriously in jeopardy.

Although factory legislation was passed in Canada, it was not very effective. Factory acts were only passed provincially, by the governments of Ontario and Quebec in the

phones and francophones, thus inhibiting the development of technologically advanced industry.

nineteenth century. As Greg Kealey (1973:ix) notes,

Factory acts were introduced at nearly every session of the federal parliament in the eighties to control the worst excesses of modern industry, but no legislation was enacted. The question of the infringement of provincial constitutional jurisdiction provided the Macdonald government with a convenient excuse for legislative inactivity.

The factory inspectors who were appointed by the provincial governments were imported from among middle-class reformists and trade unionists. Like their British predecessors, they focused upon "moral issues" or "peripheral issues", such as the provision of lunch rooms, seats, good lighting, proper ventilation, regular breaks, and especially upon the importance of obtaining separate, clean lavatories for the working women, rather than wage concerns. However, few factory inspectors were hired. Further, this hiring did not occur until years after the establishment of the provincial acts. Moreover, certain industries, such as the canning industry, were exempt from the restrictive factory legislation (Department of Labour, 1945:16). Thus, provincial factory legislation in the nineteenth century has been described as "hardly rigorous" (Phillips & Phillips, 1983: 18) and "largely inoperative" (Kealey, 1973:xviii).

The passing of factory legislation in Canada appears to have been more of a symbolic political response to the demands of trade unions and working-class males and, to a lesser extent, middle-class reform groups.<sup>9</sup> Due to the history/  

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<sup>9</sup> Most of these reform groups grew larger and became well-organized after the factory legislation had been passed in

chronology, nature, and scale of industrialization in Canada, women were employed in factories on a smaller scale than they were in Britain. The Canadian state, then, did not have to be as concerned about "preserving the long-term capacity of the labour force" or "saving the bourgeoisie from itself." Furthermore, as Panitch (1977:8) notes, only "an empirical and historical examination of the relationship between the state and the capitalist class" can determine "the extent to which the state is acting on behalf of the dominant class." As previously indicated, there were numerous and intimate "formal and informal ties" between the economic sphere and the state. The fact that many of the owners and directors of the industries were simultaneously members of the state suggests that another reason why federal legislation was not passed and provincial legislation not enforced was because such intervention would interfere with the accumulation of capital.

Although the enforcement of factory legislation in Ontario and Quebec was lax, Phillips and Phillips (1983:20) suggest that it did tend to exclude women from the labour force. Klein and Roberts (1974:216) also maintain that the legislation "compounded their problem" of survival in industries like the garment industry, which was based on seasonal work, since it prevented them from working the long hours of overtime necessary to tide them over long periods of unem-

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the 1880's.

ployment that followed." Since Canadian records of many occupations were not compiled by sex for the year 1881, it is hard to determine whether the number of females employed in industry did decrease despite the fact that factory legislation was generally not enforced. Suzanne Cross (1977:74) notes a 5% decrease in the percentage of the female population of Montreal employed in industry between 1881 and 1891, after the passing of factory legislation in Quebec. However, this decrease was more likely due to the constantly shifting female population of Montreal as women and girls immigrated to Canada, or emigrated in search of employment to the U.S. (Cross, 1977).

An examination of the female labour force in industry in the first two decades of the twentieth century suggests that the provincial legislation had not discouraged employment of women in industry. By 1901, the percentage of the female labour force engaged in manufacturing (25.3%) remained approximately the same as it was in 1891 (26.7%), and by 1911 had increased slightly (27%). It was not until 1921 that the percentage of females employed in industry declined, which coincided with the rise of clerical work as an important occupation for women.

Marxist-feminist theories have argued that female domestic labour is functional and necessary for the maintenance of the capitalist economy. Clearly, having a reserve army of labour in times of crisis, such as during war, has



been functional for capital. Likewise, the reproduction and maintenance of male workers is necessary for the preservation of the capitalist system. However, as Curtis (1980) has pointed out, such an approach does not explain how women, who were increasingly joining the industrial work force, became confined to the domestic sphere. It was suggested by Curtis and McDonough and Harrison (1978) that the state was largely responsible for replacing women in the domestic setting.

In Britain, the state enacted and enforced factory legislation which made women uncompetitive in the labour market, resulting in their dismissal from industrial employment. Through this legislation, the state was acting in the interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole by preserving their long-term interests, although certain factions of the capitalist class (i.e., those employing women) were opposed to such state interference with the accumulation of capital. Concerned about maintaining social order, the British state was also responding to the demands of various segments of the middle and working classes to provide protection for women and children employed in factories.

In Canada, various middle-class reform groups and working-class trade unions also demanded protection for women and children in the factories. However, as seen, there were relatively few women employed in Canadian industries. Thus, the state did not find it necessary to intervene in order to

protect women's reproductive capacity. Moreover, the predominance of members of the economic elite in the nineteenth-century Canadian state, as well as the alliance of various capitalist class factions, suggests that the state would be somewhat more concerned with immediate profits, rather than long-term goals. Provincial legislation, which was passed because of the demands of middle- and working-class organizations, thus remained unenforced in the nineteenth century.

However, during the twentieth century, as the number of women in the labour force increased and the links between the state and economic elites became more complex and covert, an attempt was made by the state to "reinforce familial patriarchy" (Eisenstein, 1980:44).<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Smith (1981:183-4) explains how this was done in Canada.

From the early twentieth century through to the mid-twenties there are a series of legislative measures directed towards the family and women. These served to reorganize the legal and administrative basis of the family. Laws which earlier entitled the husband and father to appropriate the earnings of his wife and children disappeared. New legislation was passed requiring men to support their families whether they lived with them or not. Welfare policies were developed incorporating similar principles. These have been built into the welfare practices of today so that, for

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<sup>10</sup> Wallace Clement (1975), Dennis Olsen (1980), and John Porter (1965) have demonstrated that, in terms of class, ethnic origin, and social backgrounds, the economic and political elites of the twentieth century have been a rigidly homogeneous group. In addition, members of the economic elite have been appointed to the boards of Crown corporations and to regulatory commissions. Further, there are kinship links between members of these two (and other) elites, as well as a tendency for members of one elite to move into another at a later time.

example, a man sharing the house of a woman welfare recipient may be assumed to be supporting her and her children, hence permitting the suspension of her welfare payments. Unemployment insurance and pension plans, introduced subsequently, also created an administrative organization enforcing women's dependence on men in marriage.

In Canada, it was not until the twentieth century, and the emergence of monopoly capitalism, that a significant number of women were employed. Thus, it was at this time that the state attempted to secure the patriarchal family as had been done in nineteenth-century Britain. There is a need for future research to address this issue in further depth. Investigations of the nature of the state during this period, the extent of the increase in women's employment, and the ultimate effect of the type of legislation described above by Smith, are required for a thorough understanding of women's roles in the twentieth century.

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Gregg Matthew Olsen was born on March 13, 1956 in Windsor, Ontario. In June, 1974 he graduated from Walkerville Secondary School in Windsor. In September, 1975 he enrolled at the University of Windsor. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1980 as a part-time student. He returned to the University of Windsor in 1981 as a full-time student and completed his Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology in 1982. The following year, he entered the Master of Arts program. He has been enrolled in the Doctoral program in Sociology at the University of Toronto since September of 1983.