

## Women's History and Working-Class History

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# Women's History and Working-Class History

Bettina Bradbury

WOMEN'S HISTORY AND working-class history in Canada have both undergone rapid expansion over the past ten years as well as major transformations and reorientations in their foci. Women's history has broadened its early preoccupation with middle-class women and reform movements to include the work that all women did. In the process, Canadian feminists, like their colleagues elsewhere, have had to broaden their definition of work to include both paid and unpaid labour and to consider women both as producers and reproducers. Labour and working-class history has moved in similar fashion away from an initial focus on the labour movement and skilled workers to a broader approach which aims to encompass the "totality of the working class."<sup>1</sup> These two important aspects of Canadian social history seem poised now at a moment of potential convergence.

This paper examines the extent to which the writing of the history of women and of working-class history have come together over the last ten years, suggests other ways in which integration of the two could be sought, and also suggests some basic conflicts between the paradigms of each which point to areas where integration seems unlikely. If the goal of writing a history of the totality of the working class is a shared one, as I believe it should be, then areas of intersection between the two fields must be consciously sought out and a reconceptualization of approaches considered. In some cases the meeting places are relatively obvious, forced upon us by evidence which does not ignore the role of women or unskilled men. The wage labour of working-class women, the organization of working women, and the attitudes of the left to the "woman question" are the three most obvious areas where the interests, approaches, and sources of the two fields converge. Important research has already been done in these areas, which I shall discuss in the first section of the paper; more remains to be done. Treatment of these topics is relatively unproblematic for working-

<sup>1</sup> Gregory S. Kealey, "The Structure of Canadian Working Class History," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985), 23-36 at 23.

Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), 23-43.

class or labour historians. These women, in one way or another, entered the male domain, and hence are evident in some of the traditional sources of *working-class history*. Examination of women who were wage earners or activists requires no major redefinition of what constitutes a worker, how we define work, or, more importantly, who makes up the working class.

Even within those areas where women's history and working-class history seem to converge, understanding women's behaviour as workers requires asking different questions and using different analytical frameworks. Nor should we let these obvious points of contact tempt us to ignore less evident, but perhaps more fundamental ones, nor ignore those areas where integration poses problems of conflict between feminist and working-class history. To write the history of the whole working class, we must seek other ways of integrating the history of women and of the working class with each other. This requires a reconceptualization of the way we define the working class and work, examination of the processes of class reproduction, and acknowledgement of the importance of examining how gender definitions are transmitted, shaped, and reshaped.

How do we reconceptualize the working class and integrate consideration of women, whether they earn wages or not, into our history of that class? Obviously this is a complex theoretical problem, one which has already been wrestled with at length. While we can take some valuable lessons from the domestic labour debate<sup>2</sup> and disagreements surrounding the relative weight of class and gender,<sup>3</sup> it seems to me we can also learn from recent sociological work that seeks to go "beyond employment" and consider the family, household, gender, and subsistence, to modify slightly the title of a recent book.<sup>4</sup> At the simplest level, we have to cease thinking of male and female wage earners as autonomous individuals or as sex categories, and to conceptualize the importance of their marital status and their role in the family economy. Those studying the history of women's wage labour have been forced to do this because a job was so clearly a life-cycle stage for most women. Most working-class history, however, offers no hint that here we are talking about male heads

<sup>2</sup> For Canadian contributions see Bonnie Smith, ed., *Hidden in the Household, Women's Domestic Labour Under Capitalism* (Toronto 1980); Pat and Hugh Armstrong, "Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex: Towards Feminist Marxism," reprinted in Pat Armstrong et al., *Feminist Marxism or Marxist Feminism: A Debate* (Toronto 1985), 1-37. For a critique of aspects of the debate see Roberta Hamilton, "Working at Home," *Atlantis*, 71 (1981), 114-126.

<sup>3</sup> Historian Jane Lewis gives a review of the issues in "The Debate on Sex and Class," *New Left Review*, 149 (1985), 108-20. Useful collections of articles on the topic are Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, eds., *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker* (CT 1977); Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan, and Judith Walkowitz, eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London 1983), and Eva Gamarnikow, David Morgan, June Purvis, and Daphne Taylorson, eds., *Gender, Class and Work* (London 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Nanette Redclift and Enzo Mingione, *Beyond Employment, Household, Gender and Subsistence* (Oxford 1985).

of families with specific family responsibilities, or, equally relevant in other cases, about young unmarried males. Since historians of the working class consider the family as simply another working-class institution (and perhaps a rather dubious one at that, because it looks suspiciously contaminated by bourgeois ideals), what I suspect were some very important aspects of working-class survival, working-class culture, and also male working-class psyche are hidden. Considering the family poses equal problems to some feminists, for whom the institution represents a source of oppression within which "men and women . . . perceive and occupy separate realms, separate and in conflict."<sup>5</sup> Yet to ignore the family, I would argue, is to eliminate one of the important bridges between women's history and working-class history, a bridge that has the potential to tell us much about working-class survival, class reproduction, and the social construction of gender in Canada's past. In the sections that follow I shall attempt to illustrate ways in which consideration of the working-class family could change our picture of Canada's working-class past.

# I

## Women's Wage Labour

THE FIRST QUESTION THAT historians interested in ordinary women, rather than the relatively visible élite, had to ask themselves was quite simply what work working-class women did? Initially, work was defined to be paid labour. Published census material was used to delineate those areas of the economy within which women were concentrated. Suzanne Cross' 1973 article was important in showing how women in late nineteenth-century Montreal were concentrated in a few specific, labour-intensive industries, notably the garment trades, textiles, tobacco and shoemaking factories, and domestic service.<sup>6</sup> Gregory Kealey showed similar concentrations in Toronto during the same period.<sup>7</sup> Nikki Strong-Boag's examination of the work done by women across Canada in the 1920s showed how job concentration persisted, although monopoly capitalism and the influence of scientific management had made clerical work a much more significant sector of the economy, and at the same time a very different task from that of the nineteenth-century male clerk.<sup>8</sup> Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart's examination of women's work in Montreal between

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History, 1970-1982: An Historiographical Analysis," *Canadian Historical Review*, 63 (1982), 513-33 at 532.

<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in Nineteenth Century Montreal," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 6 (1973), republished in S. Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History*, Vol. 1 (Toronto 1977), 66-86.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 300.

<sup>8</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920's," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 131-64.

1900 and 1940 showed women's continued, though decreasing, involvement in specific manufacturing sectors, in personal service, and their growing involvement in office work." Women's continued segregation in specific job ghettos after World War II has been confirmed by province-based and nationwide studies.<sup>10</sup>

Such studies were important in mapping out the contours of women's wage labour, in confirming the continued existence of specific female job ghettos, that changed somewhat in response to structural changes in the nature of production, the economy, and the state. The earliest studies of specific female occupations, including domestic work, teaching, and dressmaking clearly demonstrated the terrible working conditions most women experienced, the low rates they were paid, and identified some strikes. Such research helped to begin to add women to the history of workers.<sup>11</sup>

What most of these studies did not make very clear was just who these women workers were, how their role within the family influenced their involvement in wage labour, and what women who were not "working" were doing. Most were written before either the domestic labour debate or some of the new methods of family history had had much impact in Canada. Furthermore, the main source used – the published censuses – did not identify the age or marital status of women earners before the twentieth century. For instance, Suzanne Cross did not have figures on whether the women she was describing were married or single. Finding that the Catholic church was running daycare facilities or *asiles* for pre-school aged children, she assumed that this pointed to a new trend: the involvement of married French Canadian

<sup>10</sup> Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart, "Les Travailleuses montréalaise entre les deux guerres," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 170-83; Marie Lavigne et Jennifer Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses montréalaises, 1900-1940," in Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard, *Travailleuses et féministes. Les femmes dans la société québécoise* (Montreal 1983), 99-113.

<sup>11</sup> Ann B. Denis, "Femmes: ethnic et occupation au Québec et en Ontario, 1931-1971," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 13 (1981), 75-90; Francine Barry, *Le Travail de la femme au Québec, 1940-1970* (Quebec 1977); Pat and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto. Canadian Women and their Segregated Work* (Toronto 1978); Paul and Erin Phillips, *Women and Work: Inequality in the Labour Market* (Toronto 1983). On women's work during World War II, see Ruth Roach Pierson's "They're Still Women After All": *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Claudette Lacelle, "Les Domestiques dans les villes canadiennes au XIXe siècle, effectifs et conditions de vie," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 15 (1982), 181-207; Catherine McLeod, "Women in Production: The Toronto Dressmakers' Strike of 1931," in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, et al., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto 1974), 409-25; Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Community and Class Consciousness among Toronto Women, 1893-1914* (Toronto 1976). New work is appearing examining women in specific sectors. See especially Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store 1948 to 1952* (Toronto 1982); Elaine Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers' Union* (Vancouver 1982).

women in wage labour. English-speaking Scottish, Irish, or English women, she suggested, did not work because they had no daycare.<sup>12</sup> Not only does this interpretation overemphasize the importance of formal wage labour for married *québécoises*, it also downplays the potential importance of other babysitting strategies, and neglects other reasons why working-class women might have used such daycare. Micheline Dumont has quite rightly suggested that overcrowded lodgings might have provided an equally important reason to make use of such daycare.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, historians of women were beginning to integrate analysis of women's position in the family and of the family and individual life-cycle more explicitly into their work. This was made possible for the late nineteenth century by analysis of manuscript censuses and for the more recent past by interviews. My research on the work of family members in two Montreal wards suggests that the number of workers in any family was closely related to the class position of the head; few married women engaged in formal wage labour and it was co-resident children of all ages who were much more important as secondary wage earners.<sup>14</sup> Women's involvement with wage labour emerged as a "temporary and intermittent experience — something they did at the most for four or five years, usually between the ages of 15 and 20."<sup>15</sup> Joan Sangster makes the same point about the work experience of women at Bell Telephone in 1907. Most "were single women, about 17 to 24 years old, who stayed less than three years" and then "left to marry."<sup>16</sup> Among the matchmakers of Hull, Quebec, male unionists, and the priests involved in their union, the concept of women's work as a life-cycle-based phenomenon was solidly entrenched in the 1920s. Gail Cuthbert Brandt's careful recreation of the "Life Cycle and Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec Between 1910 and 1950" suggested that by the 1940s changed timing of marriage and childbearing had altered this pattern. Women were starting to work in the factory later, working only five rather than fifteen years prior to marriage, and returning to paid employment once their now smaller families had grown up.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority."

<sup>13</sup> Micheline Dumont, "Des Garderies au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle: les salles d'asiles de sœurs Grises à Montréal," dans Nadia Fahmy-Eid et Micheline Dumont, eds., *Maîtresses de maison, maîtresses d'école. Femmes, familles et éducation dans l'histoire du Québec* (Montreal 1983), 261-85 at 265.

<sup>14</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City, Montreal, 1871," *Historical Papers*, 1979, 71-96.

<sup>15</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "Women and Wage Labour in a Period of Transition: Montreal, 1861-1881," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 17 (1984), 115-31, at 119-20.

<sup>16</sup> Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 34 (1978), 109-30.

<sup>17</sup> Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving It Together: Life Cycle and the Industrial Experience of Female Cotton Workers in Quebec, 1910-1950," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7

Clearly women's life-cycles and their involvement with paid labour were dramatically altered by their ability to control family size. The working-class family economy was also transformed as more and more children attended school for longer periods, delaying their entry into the work force and their contribution to family finances.<sup>18</sup> These two changes would set the basis for the growth in the labour force of married women in the 1960s. A family economy based on the wage labour of father and children of all ages and the domestic work of wives would be replaced gradually by one based on the wages of both the husband and wife, prolonged dependency of children, and the domestic labour of (mostly) wives.<sup>19</sup> This shift has wrought fundamental changes in the family, in relations between spouses, and in the economic independence which some wives have been able to gain. Yet we have to be careful, I think, not to overemphasize the homogeneity of these patterns, for in so doing we ignore those who did not conform, who in some ways bore the price of policies or practices based on the most usual patterns, and we unjustly simplify the complexity of historical experience.

A careful reading of the literature on women wage earners in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests that a significant minority were neither young nor single, and that some of those who were young and single were responsible for the support of aging parents or orphaned siblings. For instance, in the two working-class wards which I studied in late nineteenth-century Montreal nearly 20 per cent of all women between the ages of 27 and 60 reported having a job.<sup>20</sup> In the same period, Marta Danylewycz found that over 5 per cent of lay women teachers living in three Montreal wards were married and up to 20 per cent of them were household heads. Some were widows, while others attempted to care for elderly, sick, or widowed parents on their meagre female salaries.<sup>21</sup> The particular problems of such women were recognized by their workmates during the Bell strike of 1907. Joan Sangster reports that "strikers who lived at home contributed money for those independent women who had to make rent payments."<sup>22</sup> In the Dupuis Frères strike of 1951, many

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(1981), 113-26; Michelle Lapointe, "La syndicat catholique des allumetières de Hull, 1919-1924," *Revue d'histoire d'Amérique française*, 32 (1979), 603-28.

<sup>18</sup> Thérèse Hamel, "Obligation scolaire et travail des enfants au Québec, 1900-1950," *Revue d'histoire d'Amérique française*, 30 (1984), 39-58; Rebecca Coulter, "The Working Young of Edmonton, 1921-1931," in Joy Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto 1982), 143-59.

<sup>19</sup> Louise Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "Women and Wage Labour."

<sup>21</sup> Marta Danylewycz, "Sexes et classes sociales dans l'enseignement: le cas de Montréal à la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle," in Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Micheline Dumont, *Maîtresses de maison*, 93-118.

<sup>22</sup> Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike," 114.

of the workers were either handicapped or widowed.<sup>21</sup> None of these women conform to the stereotype of single daughters living at home with their parents. The problems such women faced were clearly immense, given a wage system in which women's work was presumed to be secondary, temporary, and always unskilled. Even prostitutes, almost the stereotype of single women attempting to survive alone, included significant proportions of widowed and married women. The fact that most women did work only temporarily prior to marriage should not blind us to the experience of these other women, particularly during the nineteenth century, when the low marriage rate suggests that, whatever the ideals about marriage, many women would never marry.<sup>21</sup>

## II

### Organized Women Workers, Labour, and the Left

IN LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY twentieth-century Canada, few of these wage-earning women were organized. The short involvement they had had with wage labour, the kinds of jobs they had found, and the antagonism of male workers all militated against widespread organization. That the majority were not organized does not mean, though, that women workers were invariably passive or unorganizable.<sup>23</sup> It is now clear that women have organized and have protested working conditions at least since the 1880s. In the 1880s some women formed female locals of the Knights of Labor; others joined male locals.<sup>24</sup> In Vancouver and Toronto there is evidence of waitresses, bookbinders, shirtwaist and laundry workers, telephone operators, and many others joining unions in the early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Women have been militantly involved in strikes and in unions of textile workers and dressmakers in many Canadian cities.<sup>26</sup> In their actions, like those of the women organized by the

<sup>21</sup> Joy Parr, "Women Workers in the Twentieth Century," in Cherwinski and Kealey, *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History*, 79-88 at 85.

<sup>22</sup> This point is also stressed by Sonya Rose in her recent article on "'Gender at Work': Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism," *History Workshop*, 21 (1986), 113-131, at 115. Historians in France, England, and the United States have begun to turn their attention to single women and widows. See, for example, the special issue of the *Journal of Family History* on spinsterhood, 9 (1984); Arlette Farge et Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, eds., *Madame ou Mademoiselle: Itinéraires de la solitude féminine au XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Star Rosenthal, "Union Maids: Organized Women Workers in Vancouver 1900-1915," *B.C. Studies*, 41 (1979), 36-55.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Rosenthal, "Union Maids;" Roberts, *Honest Womanhood*.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Rouillard, *Les travailleurs du Coton au Québec, 1900-1915* (Montreal 1974); Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving it Together," Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "The Transformation of Women's Work in the Quebec Cotton Industry, 1920-1950," in Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto 1986), 115-37; Jacques Ferland, "Le Rôle des déterminismes sociaux



WUI in the 1930s in the Swift plant at Stratford who stopped plucking chickens at 2¢ a bird and walked out,<sup>29</sup> we see evidence of a militancy and a consciousness that belies images of passivity and quiet acceptance of outrageous working conditions and pay rates. Yet our relief at finding evidence of such "inspiring examples of women's militancy"<sup>30</sup> should not lead us to ignore the fact that most women workers in the past were *not* unionized, that those showing militancy and determination stand out for their uniqueness rather than their representativeness, and that to organize involved overcoming major ideological and structural problems.

Even among those who were militant, it is unclear why specific groups of women became militant or responded willingly to organization drives, while others, in situations that appear equally oppressive, did not. We have no comprehensive overview of all the unions or strikes in which women were involved. It would be interesting to try and identify the commonalities behind such action, to seek to understand the structural bases of female protest. Many of the instances where women have walked out appear as gut reactions of people to working too long and too hard, in response to changes in the organization of work, or the method of payment — often in direct response to speedups.<sup>31</sup> We need more studies that go beyond simple comparisons of male and female workers as categories and that very carefully examine the position of male and female workers within the division of labour of a plant, trade, or sector. Important work has been done already in Jacques Ferland's thesis on the Canadian textile industry at the turn of the century.<sup>32</sup> And in Gail Cuthbert Brandt's study of how the subsequent transformation of production and the redefinition of what was considered female work relegated women to relatively peripheral parts of the production process, removing them from control over strategic tasks, and thereby limiting their militancy.<sup>33</sup> Graham Lowe's examination of class and gender in the Canadian office suggests how important it is to highlight the connections between the sex structure of work arrangements, the

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dans le développement des forces productives de l'industrie textile du Canada — 1870 à 1910," (MA thesis, McGill University, 1982), especially 111-22, and his "When the Cotton Mill 'Girls' Struck for the First Time," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, Winnipeg, 1986; Catherine McLeod, "Women in Production," Evelyn Dumas, "The Shmata Strikes," in her book, *The Bitter Thirties in Quebec* (Montreal 1975), 43-69.

<sup>29</sup> Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Stratford Strike of 1933," in Irving Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949* (Toronto 1974), 79-91.

<sup>30</sup> Joan Sangster, "Canadian Working Women in the Twentieth Century," in Cherwinski and Kealey, *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike," 112; Cuthbert Brandt, "Weaving it Together," 123-4; "The Transformation of Women's Work."

<sup>32</sup> Ferland, "Le Rôle des déterminismes."

<sup>33</sup> Cuthbert Brandt, "The Transformation of Women's Work."

family system and the subordinate position of women within it, and the persistence of class-based inequalities in the larger society.<sup>34</sup>

An examination of how male and female jobs intersect within specific workplaces should clarify aspects of the material basis for women's militancy, and at the same time indicate rationales for male support or antagonism to the organization of women. Joan Sangster, for instance, suggests that one of the reasons that the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers showed little sustained interest in organizing the women workers during the 1907 strike stemmed from the fact that they did a different job and did not "threaten the earning power of other IBEW members."<sup>35</sup> In contrast, it was in the direct interest of the Toronto Knights of St. Crispin to try and organize female workers who might be hired to replace them.<sup>36</sup>

Further studies of workplaces in which both men and women were involved would help to determine just how the sexual division of labour was articulated and changed and to better understand the responses of male workers to women. Such studies will not necessarily help us to understand the work experience of most women, since the majority have worked and continue to work in what are largely female ghettos — separate from males, generally not unionized, and paid unequal wages. Interaction between male and female workers, even militant action and support, need not, however, be limited to those working together. Carole Turbin's study of Troy shows how in a city dominated by two major industries, one primarily female and the other male, mutual support could occur. She argues that when the male iron moulders went on strike, they could rely on the earnings of female collar laundresses and sewers, and vice versa.<sup>37</sup> In a different kind of town (Paris, Ontario, where women working in the hosiery and knitting mills could get steadier work than local men at roughly equal rates of pay), Joy Parr has shown how within real limits gender divisions were redrawn. Her future work should clarify how this unusual sexual division of labour at the community level influenced union strategies and struggles.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly it is very important to try and determine how the particular industrial structure of specific towns or cities could influence militancy, organization, and mutual support between male and female workers. This involves

<sup>34</sup> Graham Lowe, "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (1982), 11-37 at 37; Graham Lowe, "Mechanization, Feminization and Managerial Control in the Early Twentieth-Century Canadian Office," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Montreal 1986), 117-209.

<sup>35</sup> Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike," 126.

<sup>36</sup> Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Carole Turbin, "Reconceptualizing Family, Work and Labour Organizing: Working Women in Troy, 1860-1890," *Review of Radical Political Economists*, 16 (1984), 1-16 at 10.

<sup>38</sup> Joy Parr, " 'This was a Women's Town': Range and Limits in the Local Reconstruction of Gender," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, Montreal, 1985.

unravelling the family links between workers within plants, in different industries, and between paid and unpaid workers. In doing this, in integrating a consideration of the family, Turbin suggests, the family — "formerly thought of as especially suited to understanding women" — may also provide a key "for analyzing a subject thought to be the domain of men, labor activism."<sup>39</sup>

Yet the family itself and specific ideas about the ideal division of labour within the family was one of the major reasons why many working males at different points in our history either opposed the work of women in general or of married women in particular. Male opposition to female labour and to female unionization is one of the four major factors which historians have stressed in explaining the low rates of female unionization in the past. Structural reasons were important: women's geographical isolation in small workshops, other women's homes, and in sex-segregated workplaces constituted a structural impediment to organization.<sup>40</sup> Equally important was the strong resistance and active antagonism of employers, who quite rightly saw the potential dangers to their businesses that unionized women workers might present.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, most women, correctly or otherwise, only expected to spend a short period in the work force before marriage, and many had domestic responsibilities that conflicted with union meetings and action.<sup>42</sup>

When we turn to the attitudes and actions of male trade unionists we seem to approach an arena in which the guiding principles of labour history and women's history enter into direct conflict, in which skilled males appear quite simply as the bad guys. Not surprisingly, there has been no systematic study by labour or working-class historians of the changing attitudes of Canadian unions to the question of women's wage labour.<sup>43</sup> In general, the issue has either been ignored or downplayed. Abella, for instance, argues that "organized labour has, from the beginning, studiously ignored her problems."<sup>44</sup> Labour has done more than studiously ignore women, and its role has to be examined carefully. Feminist sociologists and political economists as well as some historians have made much of trade union opposition to female entry into their trades as a "reinforcement of a gender specific division of labour within the working class family."<sup>45</sup> Exclusionary policies and the promotion of a family wage have been identified as enforcing the dependency and oppression of women, subjecting "unsupported women, especially mothers to severe poverty — and dividing and

<sup>39</sup> Turbin, "Reconceptualizing Family, Work and Labour," 12.

<sup>40</sup> Paul and Erin Phillips, *Women and Work: Inequality in the Labour Market*, 134; Roberts, *Honest Womanhood*, 53; Sangster, "Canadian Working Women," 66.

<sup>41</sup> Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond*, 44; Sangster, "Canadian Working Women," 66.

<sup>42</sup> Sangster, "Canadian Working Women," 66; Jane Lewis, "The Debate on Sex and Class," *New Left Review*, 149 (1985), 111.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts, *Honest Womanhood*, constitutes an excellent starting point.

<sup>44</sup> Irving Abella, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, Canadian Historical Association, Historical Booklet No. 28, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis, "The Debate on Sex and Class," 109-11.

weakening the working class."<sup>46</sup> This topic seems easy to deal with within a feminist framework in which the primary concern is to identify the bases of women's oppression today. It is less straightforward if we want to understand historical reality and the past experience of the working class in all its complexity and ambiguity.<sup>47</sup>

It is certainly not difficult in Canada, as it is in other countries, to document the long series of ways in which many unions have failed to provide support to organizing women, have acted paternalistically, have consciously excluded women, and "ultimately maintaining the low-status, low-paid and poorly organized (i.e. sex-segregated) female labour force."<sup>48</sup> Whether Canadian workers, like those in Britain, played an active role in creating gender segregation as they attempted to preserve their own jobs in the face of transformations of the labour process which threatened them with redundancy requires studying.<sup>49</sup> Exclusionary policies do seem to have been dominant in the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress even after it eliminated its platform that had called for the "abolition of . . . female labour in all branches of industrial life" and replaced it in 1914 with a plank which called for equal pay for equal work.<sup>50</sup>

However, as Ruth Frager has pointed out, this was not a simple "battle between the sexes."<sup>51</sup> All men at all times did not oppose women's organization. The Knights of Labor were insistent on the need to organize women workers and argued that "women came into the order as the peers of men, equal and deserving of the same pay at the workplace."<sup>52</sup> In some periods, men

<sup>46</sup> Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The Family Wage. Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class*, 11 (1980), 51-72.

<sup>47</sup> Hence, in part, the major reaction to Jane Humphries' arguments about the importance of the working-class family to class persistence and survival. See the comments of Rose in "Gender at Work," 124-6; Jane Humphries, "Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1 (1977), 241-58; Jane Humphries, "The Working Class Family, Women's Liberation and the Class Struggle: The Case of Nineteenth Century British History," *The Review of Radical Political Economics*, 9 (1977), 25-41.

<sup>48</sup> Marie Campbell, "Sexism in British Columbia Trade Unions, 1900-1920," in Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., *In Her Own Right. Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia* (Victoria 1980), 167-86 at 183; on the United States, see Ruth Milkman, "Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor: Historical Perspectives on 'Women's Work' and the American Labor Movement," *Socialist Review*, 49 (1980), 95-150.

<sup>49</sup> Rose, "Gender at Work," 120; Jane Jenson's recent article on "Gender and Reproduction, or Babies and the State," in *Studies in Political Economy*, 12 (1986), 9-46, makes clear the importance of national and cultural traditions and differences in studying the reaction of male workers to the wage labour of women.

<sup>50</sup> Ruth Frager, "No Proper Deal. Women Workers and the Canadian Labour Movement, 1870-1940," in Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., *Union Sisters. Women in the Labour Movement* (Toronto 1983), 44-64 at 51.

<sup>51</sup> Frager, "No Proper Deal," 53.

<sup>52</sup> Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 104.

and women who worked side by side in textile factories at similar tasks as weavers struck together. On at least one occasion skilled weavers supported the demands of unskilled women who tended the bobbins, and Magog weavers denounced the fact that young workers and substitutes received lower rates of pay for equivalent work.<sup>33</sup> In 1937 the skilled male cutters of the ILGWU (a union which does not have a good history of support for its women workers) joined the dressmakers on strike in Montreal.<sup>34</sup> Such examples testify to moments of class solidarity which crossed the apparent boundaries created by gender. Men's responses were not automatically conditioned by the "weight of tradition" or by "sexist" ideas about women's place, or by the understandable desire to have someone at home who would have meals ready, her body available, and the house clean.<sup>35</sup> Rather, within the context of a strong gender ideology, policies of inclusion, exclusion, support, or indifference must have been worked out in each particular conflict and in each specific workplace in relation to the positions and strengths of male and female workers, of skilled to unskilled. Delineating just how divisions of labour were articulated, maintained, or transformed by working-class men and women in the context of specific industries, the family, and local economies must be continued if we are to unravel how gender definitions were made and remade within the working class.

Behind men's desires to keep married women out of the workplace, behind the expressed opposition to "taking women from their homes to put them in the factory and the sweatshop," lies a multitude of ambiguities which we minimize if we talk simply of sexism. Frager carefully talks of the "fundamental ambivalence" of male workers;<sup>36</sup> this ambivalence has to be addressed. It is more complex than any simplistic formulation about the relative weight of class and gender in history might suggest. For men were not only workers, but also current or future husbands and fathers. Women were not simply a category of competitive unskilled labour, potential strikebreakers, or depressers of wages (although their visibility in these roles made them, like immigrants, easy targets). Women workers might also be wives, or potential wives, or daughters. Thus skilled workers' arguments for the exclusion of married women from the work force must be seen in part as an assertion that they could or wanted to maintain a wife at home, in other words, as an assertion that what we have come to call a "family wage" was desirable. Certainly, this implied acceptance of a patriarchal role. Certainly, the idea that most women workers were secondary workers served to keep female wage rates down and to subject "unsup-

<sup>33</sup> Ferland, "Le rôle des déterminismes," 119.

<sup>34</sup> Frager, "No Proper Deal," 39.

<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Smith, "Women, Class and Family," reprinted in Varda Burstyn and Dorothy E. Smith, eds., *Women, Class, Family and the State* (Toronto 1985), 1-44 at 33-4.

<sup>36</sup> Frager, "No Proper Deal," 51-5.

ported women, especially mothers to severe poverty."<sup>57</sup> Yet this should not blind us to the historical importance of this aspect of skilled male culture.

The pride of skilled male workers did not end when they left the workplace. For married men, the "manliness" so important to them as workers or strikers extended to their capacity to support a wife. Changes in the workplace which threatened a man's ability to provide threatened equally, Sonya Rose suggests, to "unravel the fabric of male personal identity intricately woven from pride in skill and family headship."<sup>58</sup> This pride seems clear in Knights of Labor editor W.H. Rowe's description of the "girl that young men are in quest of for a wife." She would be "rosy cheeked and bright eyed, who can darn a stocking and mend her own dress, who can command a regiment of pots and kettles and be a lady when required." To dismiss partially such a statement as "offensive" and as "crude moralizing," as Kealey and Palmer do,<sup>59</sup> seems to me both to deny the realities of the division of labour within the working-class family economy at that time, and to close off the possibility of examining this very important element of a skilled worker's pride. It also suggests that while some historians of the working class are becoming more comfortable when dealing with women in the workplace, they are less so when they find them at home. Yet in the home was where most married women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canada were to be found. That minority of working-class wives who did seek relatively steady wage work had husbands who were ill, who were unskilled workers, or who were workers whose trades were undergoing rapid deskilling.<sup>60</sup> To understand the work of married women involves examining their domestic labour and other survival strategies. While subsequent generations, through a neat and unnecessary association of wages with work, have not recognized this as work, it is clear, I think, that Rowe and working-class men and women of the time did. It seems to me that one could interpret Rowe's statement quoted above as showing that within the male working-class culture of the period, the importance of having not just any wife, but a healthy, hard-working wife was recognized. Furthermore, it seems to have been a class-based ideology, explicitly differentiating these working women from the weak and idle ladies of the "aristocracy of power and money."<sup>61</sup>

A Montreal workman of the same period was explicit: a "thrifty, economical and thorough good housekeeper who can lay out to advantage [a] fair day's wage, is just as essential to the wellbeing of the workingman as the fair day's wage itself." Kealey and Palmer quite rightly point out that this statement stopped short of a "critique of well entrenched notions of women's proper

<sup>57</sup> Barrett and McIntosh, "The Family Wage," 59.

<sup>58</sup> Rose, "Gender at Work," 125.

<sup>59</sup> Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 318.

<sup>60</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "The Working Class Family Economy, Montreal, 1861-1881," (PhD thesis, Concordia University, 1984), 315-36.

<sup>61</sup> Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 318.

sphere."<sup>62</sup> Yet this is probably not the most important point to be made here. These men appear to have recognized the centrality of wage management and of domestic labour within the family economy and to have acknowledged it as work. The link between wage labour and domestic labour was quite clear to them. Skilled workers believed married women should work at home as home-makers, not simply in order to dominate them, which they could, but also because within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century capitalism, such work was required to transform wages into sustenance and shelter. In those families able to survive on the head's wages or in which children earned wages, it was the shopping, baking, mending, and darning of wives and mothers that kept daily life running smoothly. "Personally," wrote one woman to the editor of the *B.C. Labour News* in 1922, "I find that the proper care of my house and two children require an average of fourteen hours each day."<sup>63</sup>

This sexual division of labour within the family provided the basis for the material reproduction of the working class. It had to be adjusted and re-adjusted in the context of the family life-cycle, illness and health in the family, local employment conditions, and changes in the economic conjuncture. It worked out differently for the skilled and the unskilled.<sup>64</sup> It offered both benefits and costs, and women bore most of the costs both in the short and the long run. For male workers' pride and paternalism seem inextricably combined and tied up with the perpetuation of this division of labour. "My wife had always been cared for by me and had never had to work for others," recalled a French Canadian immigrant to Lowell, Massachusetts, who, when his wife took in laundry, told her "I have not reached a level here which requires you to work. I think we can get along without that."<sup>65</sup>

The luxury of a wife at home or fear of depressed wages were not the only reasons to keep women out of the workplace. A wife who was not financially dependent just might decide not to do any domestic labour, or worse, to leave. A daughter might decide that in the absence of economic need marriage offered little attraction. Few male workers had to face this problem; few women could consider these options. Low wages and job segregation continued to maintain the material basis of marriage. The feminist critique that the idea of the family wage has been basic to the perpetuation of gender divisions thus seems justified.

Yet to blame the family wage for women's continued economic subordina-

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-20.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Dorothy Kidd, "Women's Organization: Learning from Yesterday," in Janice Acton, *et al.*, *Women at Work*, 331-61 at 337.

<sup>64</sup> Bradbury, "The Working Class Family Economy;" see also John Holley, "The Two Family Economies of Industrialism: Factory Workers in Victorian Scotland," *Journal of Family History*, 6 (1981), 57-69.

<sup>65</sup> Francie H. Early, "The French-Canadian Family Economy and Standard of Living in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1870," *Journal of Family History*, 7 (1982), 180-99, at 183.

tion implies that had skilled workers sought equal pay for equal work, had they embraced the employment of women, the material basis for women's relegation to the home would have been eliminated. The historical evidence for this is less than clear. Equal pay could and did lead employers to "employ men, because they remain longer in the business."<sup>66</sup> All power was not in the hands of men's unions; the role of capital must equally be examined. Furthermore, had men been able to insist on equal pay for women, even equal jobs, the question of who took responsibility for reproduction would have had to be addressed. It seldom was.

Even on the left, as recent articles by Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster show, this division of labour between men and women was taken for granted. Both authors see the ideal of the family wage as structuring the left's response to the "woman question." In her study of the socialist movement between 1900 and 1914, Linda Kealey argues that "this ideology helped to perpetuate attitudes and policies on the 'woman question' which limited the appeal of these organizations to women. It also defined the contributions women could make to the socialist movement."<sup>67</sup> In the Communist Party, Joan Sangster suggests, ready acceptance of the ideal of a family wage meant that "women's consciousness and her political activities were interpreted in the context of her domestic role." The CPC was much more explicit apparently than any other left or labour group about the need to draw "working-class wives into support groups to develop their revolutionary consciousness and act as auxiliary forces to men's struggles." As a result they did address and recognize many of the problems of working-class housewives, including birth control, their role as "managers of the family budget," and as tension managers. Behind these attempts lay a fear of women's potential conservatism and the recognition that women's attitudes and actions could "determine the fate of a strike, make or mar men's morale."<sup>68</sup>

Further study of the arguments of the left and labour for a family wage are essential to both working-class men and women's history in Canada. Why was such an ideology apparently so widespread when all the evidence we have about wages and costs of living suggests that only a limited number of

<sup>66</sup> Jean Scott Thomas, "The Condition of Female Labour in Ontario," *University of Toronto Studies in Political Science*, 3 (1889), 18-25, cited in Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto 1976), 173-82 at 178.

<sup>67</sup> Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 77-100 at 83.

<sup>68</sup> Joan Sangster, "The Communist Party and the Woman Question, 1922-1939," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (1985), 25-56 at 37, 55. Other studies of women on the left include John Manley, "Women and the Left in the 1930's, the Case of the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee," *Atlantis*, 5 (1980), 100-9 and Deen Bechy, "Women in the Ontario CCF, 1940-1950," *Ontario History*, 74 (1982), 258-83.



working-class families could survive adequately with only one wage earner?<sup>69</sup> Behind the male rhetoric about the need to support their families must have often existed the uneasy realization that few men could always support a wife and family at home on their wages alone. For real families, unlike the budgets bureaucrats outlined for "typical" families of five, increased in size, and more children required more food, clothing, medical supplies, and larger dwellings. At most periods in Canadian history, working-class families have, at some point in their life-cycle, relied on more than one worker. Children's earnings were fundamental to the family economy of all but the most skilled workers in late nineteenth-century Canadian cities.<sup>70</sup> Rebecca Coulter has made clear the continued contribution of children's wages to family incomes in Edmonton in 1921 and 1931. There, in 1931, they contributed 17 per cent of total reported earnings in labourers' families compared to 10 per cent for construction workers.<sup>71</sup> The majority of workers' families survived in part because, up until the 1930s at least, the wages of co-resident children filled some of the gaps between earnings and expenses.

While the fact of the male wage-earner/family head has remained relatively constant, it is in the area of supplementary earners and alternate strategies that most changes have probably occurred. Studies done in Quebec at the end of the 1950s, for example, suggest that the most usual second earner was, in fact the husband, who took on a second job. However, "pensions" paid by children or other relatives living in the household constituted a greater proportion of the average family revenue and existed in a greater number of families than either a wage-earning wife or a man with two jobs.<sup>72</sup>

A myriad of diverse and changing strategies have been used by working-class families to raise additional cash or to save money. The informal economy, so recently discovered by economists and sociologists, was part of the lived past of the working class. And much of the responsibility for this kind of work fell to the women, whose time was less structured and whose need for ready cash was more pressing. Examination of this crucial aspect of working-class

<sup>69</sup> Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto 1974), 30-42; Michael Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* (Ottawa 1979), 27-60; Bradbury, "The Working Class Family Economy," 84-161; John Bullen, "Hidden Workers: Child Labour in the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth-Century Urban Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (1986), 163-87.

<sup>70</sup> Bradbury, "The Working Class Family Economy."

<sup>71</sup> Coulter, "The Working Young of Edmonton," 156; Jane Syngé, "The Transition from School to Work: Growing Up Working Class in early Twentieth Century Hamilton, Ontario," in K. Ishwaren, *Childhood and Adolescence in Canada* (Toronto 1979), 249-69.

<sup>72</sup> M.A. Tremblay and G  rald Fortin, *Les Comportements   conomiques de la famille salari  e du Qu  bec* (Qu  bec 1964), 70-1.

survival and of the economy at large requires further study if we are to understand fully the survival and reproduction of the working class as a whole.<sup>73</sup>

### III

#### Gender, the Family, and Working-Class History

WHETHER WE EXAMINE aspects of women's involvement in wage labour, in the labour movement, or in left ideology in Canada, it is the differences between male and female work experience rather than the similarities that stand out. Women's history and working-class history seem almost drawn by the logic of different paths in opposite directions — one to issues surrounding the workplace, the other to everything from wage labour to the kitchen sink. To write the history of the entire working class, to include consideration of the work and role of women and children, thus means confronting the realities of these past gender prescriptions and of the male actions that have usually limited women's opportunities more than they have men's.

Great strides forward have clearly occurred, and *Labour/Le Travail* has been important in publishing much of the work that links together working-class and women's history. The spring issue in 1985, for instance, not only included two articles on aspects of the history of working-class women, but also articles by Joy Parr and Allan Greer which demonstrate effectively how integrating consideration of the family into the way we write history can change and improve it.<sup>74</sup> Increasingly working-class historians are including some consideration of women in their studies. Others acknowledge the need to consider or at least refer in passing, to the importance of family and kin. Yet much working-class history continues to fall into the category of "sexless class." The working class still seems to be largely conceptualized as comprising only paid workers, who act only in relation to specific workplace needs, and seldom, if ever, with the support or even the opposition of wives, mothers, or children.

Sometimes it seems perfectly justifiable to ignore women and children or the role of the family. In the mining, lumber, and other resource towns, for instance, which have been so important in the staples sectors of Canada's economy, virtually no wage labour existed for women. Why then consider them? Because it is relevant and important to consider whether the workers in such towns were single males, perhaps living in company-run bunkhouses, or married men with families in the town. Strategies of resistance and struggle,

<sup>73</sup> Bettina Bradbury, "Pigs, Cows, and Boarders: Non-Wage Forms of Survival among Montreal Families, 1861-91," *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (1984), 9-46 and John Benson, "Working-Class Penny Capitalism in Great Britain and Canada, 1867-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (1983), 145-54, cover some aspects of the informal economy.

<sup>74</sup> Allan Greer, "Wage Labour and the Transition to Capitalism: A Critique of Pentland," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (1985), 7-22; Joy Parr, "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective," in *ibid.*, 91-103.

and the ability to withstand long strikes, would be different in each case. The support of women and children for industrial action — whether they turned out for parades and rallies, ran active auxiliaries, staffed picket lines, or stretched strike pay could be crucial — as could their lack of support. Ruth Frager, for instance, cites the example of Alberta women, whose husbands were members of the United Mine Workers, attacking scabs with sticks.<sup>75</sup> Yet the reader of the most recent *Labour/Le Travail* issue on Alberta would have to be forgiven for believing that, with the exception of a few working-class women involved with the Social Credit Party, this province remained a frontier community made up predominantly of men. In Allen Seager's article on western Canadian coal miners, for instance, there are two photographs which testify to the presence of women and children at victory marches and solidarity meetings. Yet apart from a brief acknowledgement of the importance of "family and kin" there is virtually no mention in the article of the role of the family or women.<sup>76</sup>

I don't want to suggest that everybody has to do women's history or add token comments about women's role. I do want to suggest that if labour and working-class historians try to think through the implications of the sexual division of labour and the role of the family for men's actions they may write a somewhat different history and one that has greater potential to include the totality of the working class. Elizabeth Jamieson's study of the mining town of Cripple Creek, Colorado offers an example of how women's presence in such towns could be important for working class action. She was able to show that women's auxiliaries played a crucial role in raising money during strikes and that women shared the class concepts and the social support of the labour community. In that town, labour's failure to integrate conceptions of both sex and class roles, however, both weakened class action within the town and left women "subordinate, isolated and often alienated."<sup>77</sup>

If we want to move towards a more total consideration of the working class, I would suggest that the links between wage workers and domestic workers, between men and women, have to be highlighted in at least four ways. First, and most obviously, we have to reconceptualize the working class to include not only those who sell their labour power, but also those who reproduce it, ideologically and materially, and those who are largely dependent on the wages of others. This does not simply mean adding women as a variable, it means thinking about how the relationship between wage workers, non-wage work-

<sup>75</sup> Frager, "No Proper Deal."

<sup>76</sup> Allen Seager, "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-1921," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 23-59 at 53.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Jamieson, "Imperfect Unions: Class and Gender in Cripple Creek, 1894-1904," in Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, eds., *Class, Sex and the Woman Worker* (Greenwood CT 1977). On the role of women's auxiliaries, see Sara Diamond, "A Union Man's Wife: The Ladies' Auxiliary Movement in the IWA, the Lake Cowichan Experience," in Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money* (Victoria 1984), 287-96.

ers, and their dependants influence work-based struggle and strategies and vice versa as well as unravelling differences within the working class and over time.<sup>78</sup>

Operationally, this means that the question of workers' status in the family and household would be taken as seriously for men as it has been for women. The other side of the damage that the idea of the family wage has done to generations of women is the incredible burden of responsibility placed on generations of working-class males, few of whom were able to attain such a wage. Men's family responsibilities must have influenced their organization and struggles, and the direction of that influence need not always have been the same. Even posing such an issue raises problems in terms of sources. While statistics generators have recorded working women's marital status at various points in time this was seldom done for men. Combinations of sources, recreation, or reconstitution of the family situations of both men and women involved in specific struggles could open up new areas of interpretation and suggest ways in which the family can constitute a force either for or against militancy.<sup>79</sup>

Second, to understand how the working class survived and reproduced itself, all kinds of work must be considered, not simply wage labour, but non-wage labour, self-employment, home production and domestic labour, involvement in informal as well as formal economies. This means examining the family economy, determining which family members did what kind of work and how divisions of labour within the family were perpetuated or changed in specific periods, places, struggles, or among different fractions of the working class.<sup>80</sup> The redefinition of what constitutes work has been begun by women's historians, who have turned to an investigation of that kind of work in which most women were involved: domestic labour.<sup>81</sup> Yet as this becomes accepted

<sup>78</sup> Clearly this is not simple. Lowe discusses some of the problems surrounding how to define women's class position in "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (1982), 91-113 at 37. John Bodnar's work illustrates one way in which this approach might change our interpretation of labour history. In early twentieth-century America, he concludes that, among the workers whom he interviewed, "labour issues were essentially family issues." John Bodnar, *Workers' World: Kinship, Community and Protest in an Industrial Society* (Baltimore 1982), 178.

<sup>79</sup> Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time. The Relationship Between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge 1982) could have done this. However in her analysis she kept the detailed work histories separate from the analysis of households.

<sup>80</sup> Holley, "The Two Family Economies," 66-7.

<sup>81</sup> Susan Strasser, *Never Done. A History of American Housework* (New York 1982); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York 1983); Christine Delphy, "Travail ménager ou travail domestique" in Andrée Michel, ed., *Les Femmes dans la société marchande* (Paris 1978). For a useful review of some of these works see Deborah Gorham, "Three Books on the History of Housework: A Review Article," *Atlantis*, 10

as a serious topic worthy of academic study, women's history and working-class, workplace history seem again to diverge in opposite directions, the one towards the home, the other recreating work and culture outside the home.

To bring them together involves considering how the working class is reproduced. Historians of working-class culture have started to make clear the importance of union halls, baseball fields, pubs, and a variety of other male-dominated and male-oriented institutions and practices to the forging of a specific working-class culture.<sup>82</sup> How women and children were incorporated into this culture is less clear. Festivals, dinners, outings, and picnics must have served not simply to "bring together the men in a craft," but also to draw in wives and children, to convince them of their membership in the working class. Clearly women's auxiliaries were important, both in involving women and in confirming their exclusion from the real union. This subordinate position was made quite clear when in 1924 the Toronto Women's Labour League was denied formal affiliation to the TLC because its members, as housewives, were not producers.<sup>83</sup>

Some working-class women clearly did recognize their importance as bearers and socializers of future workers. "Is it not from our children that the ranks of labour are recruited," asked one woman in 1920, cited by Angus McLaren.<sup>84</sup> A third step towards bringing together working-class and women's history would involve examining the processes of class reproduction in the broadest sense: including an examination of marriage, childbearing, childrearing, and socialization. In the late nineteenth-century Montreal families which I studied, marriage patterns clearly varied between workers and non-workers, and also between fractions of the working class.<sup>85</sup> Lucia Ferretti has shown how in one working-class parish, in early twentieth-century Montreal, marriage served to reproduce existing class divisions.<sup>86</sup> Regarding the socialization of working-class youth, we need to know more about women's reactions to the advice of

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(1985), 138-45. For Canadian studies, see: Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Toronto 1980) and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Keeping House in God's Country: Canadian Women at Work in the Home" in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Montreal 1986), and Diane Belisle and Yolande Pinard, "Un peu d'histoire" in Louise Vandeland, ed., *Du travail et de l'amour, les dessous de la production domestique* (Montreal 1985), 69-133.

<sup>82</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979), especially chap. 2; Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 290.

<sup>83</sup> Sangster, "The Communist Party," 301.

<sup>84</sup> Angus McLaren, "What Has This to Do with Working Class Women? Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 14 (1981), 435-54 at 44.

<sup>85</sup> Bradbury, "The Working Class Family Economy."

<sup>86</sup> Lucia Ferretti, "Mariage et cadre de vie familiale dans une paroisse ouvrière Montréalaise: Sainte-Brigide, 1900-1914," *RHAF*, 39 (1985), 233-51.

nineteenth-century reformers and twentieth-century social workers and bureaucrats. McLaren makes quite clear the antagonism of male workers to outsiders *meddling in their family life, either by promoting the idea of birth control or by denying them access to necessary knowledge.*<sup>87</sup>

While some attention has been paid to the role of schools in perpetuating existing class and gender divisions in society,<sup>88</sup> less attention has been paid to less formalized socialization and education of the young. How, for instance, were decisions made within working-class families about which children should work, which should remain at school, which help at home, and how did these choices serve to perpetuate or change divisions based on sex? We have to broaden our way of looking at culture and its transmission to include more than just work-related or -derived culture if we truly want to understand how the working class and the role of men and women within it were reproduced.

Integrating this kind of analysis of how gender definitions within the working class were transmitted, reshaped, or altered offers a fourth way of moving towards a history of the whole working class. A decision to keep a daughter at home to help with housework and care for younger children while an elder brother sought wage labour served to reproduce existing role definitions and to apprentice each child for their respective roles in life. Broad, society-wide definitions of people's proper spheres interacted with the reality of differential wage rates and with received ethnic and working-class traditions to act as a powerful impediment to change. In the particular strategies they devised, in their responses to the economic situations in which they found themselves, individual decisions within the working class perpetuated or changed such definitions.

Developments within working-class history and the writing of the history of women have produced areas of convergence and areas where interpretations derived from a class analysis and those derived from a feminist analysis invariably clash. To date, historians of women and historians of the working class have paid much more attention to women's work and involvement in the most public and most male aspects of work, labour and the left. As feminist historians, in particular, begin to unravel more about the history of the home, motherhood, and domestic labour, the possibility of writing a history that includes the whole working class increases, but so does the evidence of how very different the male and female pasts have been.

<sup>87</sup> McLaren, "What Has This to Do with Working Class Women?"

<sup>88</sup> Danylewycz, "Sexes et Classes;" Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters. Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto 1977).

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