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# Inside the Mobilities Regime of Newfoundland and Labrador's Construction Megaprojects

## Experiences of Rotational Work Close to Home

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## ARTICLE

# Inside the Mobilities Regime of Newfoundland and Labrador's Construction Megaprojects: Experiences of Rotational Work Close to Home

**Lachlan Barber**

THE COLLAPSE OF THE NORTHERN COD STOCKS, which culminated with the 1992 moratorium, coincided with the emergence of Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore oil industry. Although exploration had been initiated decades earlier, the pieces necessary for the initiation of development finally fell into place in the late 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Hibernia, a project that began construction in 1990 and entered production in 1997, Terra Nova, White Rose, and more recently Hebron – along with energy and mining developments – have employed thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in a variety of well-paying jobs.<sup>2</sup> These projects contributed to a remarkable shift in the fortunes of Newfoundland and Labrador, transitioning it from a “have not” to a “have” province, marked by the cessation of equalization payments from the federal government in 2008. Although the generation of value in royalties from the production and sale of oil and other commodities is the aim and purpose of such projects, construction activity that enables their development offers some of the most tangible benefits in terms of employment.

1. For an account of the labour negotiations that laid the groundwork for the construction of the Hibernia platform, see Gregory Kealy & Gene Long, *Labour and Hibernia: Conflict Resolution at Bull Arm, 1990–92* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1993).

2. The format and development details of these projects vary substantially, with the gravity-based structures (GBS) of Hebron and Hibernia being much larger and requiring more labour-intensive construction than the floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessels used at Terra Nova and White Rose.

It perhaps comes as no surprise that major construction projects are heralded not only for their economic impact, but also for demonstrating that Newfoundland and Labrador has a large skilled trades workforce and for employing many of its members.<sup>3</sup> The rise in household incomes in the province, significantly greater than the national average between 2000 and 2014, in part reflects the earnings of workers at these resource-extraction construction sites.<sup>4</sup> It also reflects a significant proportion of the population who lived in Newfoundland and commuted interprovincially to jobs in Alberta and elsewhere during this period. The challenges of long-distance commuting are well documented in the growing literature on fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) work in resource development.<sup>5</sup> Less often considered by researchers of work-related mobility is long-distance commuting of shorter distances, which has become the norm for the many construction-industry workers who live across the island of Newfoundland and commute by car to major projects on the isthmus of the Avalon Peninsula.

This article considers the experiences of construction-industry workers commuting to major projects sites with a view to broadening understandings of the meaning and impact of the development of extractive industries in Newfoundland and Labrador since the 1990s. To do this, the article employs the concept of “mobilities regimes.”<sup>6</sup> An emerging literature has productively theorized mobilities regimes as a heuristic through which to understand the regulation of movements, connections, and integration at a transnational and global scale.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the shifting contours of work-related mobilities at local and regional scales have not received detailed empirical attention. To address this

3. See, for example, Terry Roberts, “Hebron Success Proof That N.L. Workforce Is World Class, Says Union Boss,” *CBC.ca News*, 21 February 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/hebron-workforce-world-class-jim-myers-1.3992366>.

4. Between 2000 and 2014, the median employment income for families rose by approximately 44 per cent across Canada, but by 109 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador. Statistics Canada, “Family Characteristics,” table 111-0009, CANSIM (database), accessed 12 July 2017, <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=1110009>.

5. Keith Storey, “Fly-in/Fly-out and Fly-over: Mining and Regional Development in Western Australia,” *Australian Geographer* 32, 2 (2001): 133–148, doi:10.1080/00049180120066616; Fiona M. Haslam McKenzie & Aileen Hoath, “The Socio-Economic Impact of Mine Industry Commuting Labour Force on Source Communities,” *Resources Policy* 42 (December 2014): 45–52, doi:10.1016/j.resourpol.2014.09.002; Sara Dorow, “Gendering Energy Extraction in Fort McMurray,” in Meenal Shrivastava & Lorna Stefanick, eds., *Alberta Oil and the Decline of Democracy in Canada* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2015), 275–292.

6. Sven Kesselring, “Corporate Mobilities Regimes: Mobility, Power and the Socio-Geographical Structurations of Mobile Work,” *Mobilities* 10, 4 (2015): 571–591, doi:10.1080/17450101.2014.887249.

7. Ronen Shamir, “Without Borders? Notes on Globalization as a Mobility Regime,” *Sociological Theory* 23, 2 (2005): 197–217, doi:10.1111/j.0735-2751.2005.00250.x; Nina Glick Schiller & Noel B. Salazar, “Regimes of Mobility across the Globe,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, 2 (2013): 183–200, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2013.723253.

gap the article considers the mobilities regime associated with work in the construction industry in a single regional jurisdiction.

Construction work is project based, requiring workers to be itinerant. In Newfoundland and Labrador, skilled tradesworkers employed in the industrial construction sector on projects related to resource extraction may earn relatively high incomes, but the availability and location of work is variable. In light of the boom-and-bust cycles tied to commodity prices and broader economic indicators, the variability in the location of work has important implications for Newfoundland and Labrador workers who have found employment at projects in their home province.<sup>8</sup> Construction is also traditionally working class and male dominated. In order to account for the contingencies of work in different locations, the possibility that it may be of short duration, and the important but often neglected connections between work and home, the use of mobilities regimes here is inspired by work that applies a feminist political economy lens to the study of work-related mobility.<sup>9</sup> This approach is foregrounded by two propositions. First, owing to the diversity of engagements with and capacities for mobility, it should always be understood via the plural *mobilities*. Second, any understanding of work-related mobilities must connect formal paid employment in the realm of production to social reproduction and unwaged labour, and this is of particular importance in the construction industry, which remains a gendered and gender-imbalanced employment sector. The findings highlight the tension between the regime as a structure with defined “norms and rules” and the regime as a product of the participation and collaboration of different parties, perhaps with conflicting motivations, interests, and needs.

The article focuses on the mobilities regime of megaprojects that fall under the Special Project Order (SPO) legislation.<sup>10</sup> While SPO projects are

8. Employment in the construction sector grows more rapidly in periods of economic expansion and diminishes more rapidly in periods of economic contraction than overall employment. See Statistics Canada, *Canada Year Book 2011* (Ottawa 2011), 72.

9. Sharon R. Roseman, Pauline Gardiner Barber & Barbara Neis, “Towards a Feminist Political Economy Framework for Analyzing Employment-Related Geographical Mobility,” *Studies in Political Economy* 95, 1 (2015): 175–203.

10. For the purposes of this article, the analysis is limited to SPO projects on the island of Newfoundland. Although some of the interviewees have worked on projects in Labrador, those are not treated at length here. Labrador projects involve a distinct set of issues owing to their location on land that is the traditional territory of northern Indigenous groups. There, impact benefit agreements involve various actors, including Indigenous people, in the governance of mining and energy projects. See Suzanne Mills & Brendan Sweeney, “Employment Relations in the Neostaples Resource Economy: Impact Benefit Agreements and Aboriginal Governance in Canada’s Nickel Mining Industry,” *Studies in Political Economy* 91, 1 (2013): 7–34. Churchill Falls is discussed briefly because it was the first SPO project. It employed workers from different places but housed them in a company town, a work arrangement that has been replaced by long-distance commuting, which, various interpretations suggest, is appealing for workers as well as employers.

not dissimilar from other work sites in the province and nationally in terms of rotational work schedules designed to attract skilled workers from outside the immediate vicinity, they differ in two distinct ways. First, they have been discursively positioned as vital to the provincial economy, in terms of both revenues and the opportunities they offer in the form of “industrial benefits,” including employment for residents of the province.<sup>11</sup> Jobs at such projects have enabled transient workers to find employment close to home. Second, SPO projects also have a unique relationship with the provincial collective-bargaining framework. They are exceptional in that they have project-specific agreements that prevent strikes and lockouts, and they are granted this exception in accordance with their importance to the economy. These conditions, combined with the relatively long duration and large workforces of SPO projects, create a distinctive environment to think through a work-related mobilities regime and worker participation in it. The article argues that beneath the rhetoric of employment, economic development, and the long-term prospects of oil and mining development in Newfoundland and Labrador, the employment experiences at SPO projects are contradictory: they enable upward mobility but without the promise of long-term stability; they offer the opportunity to work close to home, but still require extensive mobility that reinforces the separation between home and work and the gendered dimensions of the construction workplace. These contradictions are brought into view through empirical findings on how workers and their families make decisions about where to live and work and how they negotiate long hours and long commutes.

The remainder of the article will proceed as follows. The next section will introduce contextual issues of research specific to the construction industry and the methods used in this study. This will be followed with a discussion of the application of the concept of “mobilities regimes” to studies of work-related mobility and, more specifically, long-distance rotational commuting in the construction industry. The following section examines the mobilities regime that has developed at SPO projects in Newfoundland and Labrador with a historically situated review of government policy and a review of project-specific documents including benefits plans and collective agreements. The article then proceeds with an analysis of evidence from interviews with workers. The conclusion summarizes the empirical findings and reflects on their significance.

11. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, “Hebron Agreement Signals New Era in Province’s History,” news release, 20 August 2008, <http://www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2008/exec/0820n04.htm>.

## Researching Construction and Study Methods

THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY is relatively understudied in the social sciences given its scale, economic significance, and large labour force.<sup>12</sup> Much of the early, and some more recent, construction scholarship in anthropology and related disciplines was written by insiders – scholars who conducted participatory research while working on construction sites.<sup>13</sup> Such ethnographic accounts offer the advantage of a closeup view of the workplace and information shared as a result of intimate bonds of trust with fellow workers, but they say little about the relationship between home and work. The industry is most visible in cities and research has reflected this fact, with limited scholarship on construction work and projects outside of urban areas.<sup>14</sup> Daniel Sage's effort to develop an agenda for geographical research on the construction industries, for instance, draws substantially on research on buildings and architecture, neglecting industrial and infrastructure construction, which often takes place on the peripheries of cities or in remote locations.<sup>15</sup> One of the goals of this research is thus to make visible the various influences and impacts of SPO projects that take the form of a mobility regime in more remote locations in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Working away from home has long been common in the construction industry. However, important developments in the logistics of "working away" in the sector have occurred over the last two decades that are not well understood. The expansion of construction tied to the extractive industries, driven by high commodity prices, has resulted in the standardization of rotational schedules that often include employer-paid travel between home and work. It is in

12. In Canada, 1,371,200 people were employed in the construction industry in 2015. Statistics Canada, "Employment by Industry," table 282-0008, CANSIM (database), accessed 17 July 2017, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/econ40-eng.htm>.

13. Herbert A. Applebaum, *Royal Blue: The Culture of Construction Workers*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1981); Jeffrey W. Riemer, *Hard Hats: The Work World of Construction Workers* (Beverly Hills, California: SAGE, 1979); David Iacuone, "'Real Men Are Tough Guys': Hegemonic Masculinity and Safety in the Construction Industry," *Journal of Men's Studies* 13, 2 (2005): 247–266, doi:10.3149/jms.1302.247; Darren Thiel, "Ethnography and Flux: Identity and Epistemology in Construction Fieldwork," in Sarah Pink, Dylan Tutt & Andrew Dainty, eds., *Ethnographic Research in the Construction Industry* (London: Routledge, 2013).

14. See, for example, Michelle Buckley, "From Kerala to Dubai and Back Again: Construction Migrants and the Global Economic Crisis," in "Party Politics, the Poor and the City: Reflections from South Africa," special issue, *Geoforum* 43, 2 (2012): 250–59, doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.09.001; Ayona Datta, "Places of Everyday Cosmopolitanisms: East European Construction Workers in London," *Environment and Planning A* 41, 2 (2009): 353–370, doi:10.1068/a40211.

15. Daniel Sage, "'Danger Building Site—Keep Out': A Critical Agenda for Geographical Engagement with Contemporary Construction Industries," *Social & Cultural Geography* 14, 2 (2013): 168–191, doi:10.1080/14649365.2012.737009.

this context that SPO projects in Newfoundland and Labrador have offered the opportunity for many people to choose between living and working in another province, commuting interprovincially, and living and working in Newfoundland. Yet, the perspectives and experiences of workers employed close to home, but outside of comfortable driving distance, remains largely underexplored.

The construction industry is large and complex, encompassing different types of construction activities. Projects in the industry include residential, commercial, or industrial buildings, roads and bridges, and industrial infrastructure such as pipelines.<sup>16</sup> While there are clear divisions between construction subsectors (between residential and industrial, for instance), there is also considerable intersectoral interaction and movement of both employers and employees. Workers who begin in new-home construction with little training may upgrade and *move* to more lucrative work on larger commercial and industrial projects.<sup>17</sup> Upgrading is a formal process involving classroom education, apprenticeship work, and union membership. *Moving* is quite literal, as such a shift will likely entail work involving travel. Likewise, contractors that begin with small jobs may expand and bid on larger, geographically dispersed projects.

Geographical differences between construction in major urban centres and resource-related construction are important for labour markets. In most mid-to large-size Canadian cities, there is generally sufficient work for workers to move from project to project in the same city or metropolitan region. Urban construction labour markets also absorb interprovincial and international migrants.<sup>18</sup> Industrial construction tied to extraction and energy projects – oil and gas, mineral, hydro, etc. – relies much more extensively on a transient workforce. Much of the content of the work, however, is not particularly distinct from other forms of construction; ironworkers, plumbers, scaffolders, electricians, pipefitters, and other tradesworkers perform many of the same tasks. Hence, training may produce skills that are easily transferable. What is distinctive at major projects in remote locations is the labour relations environment and widespread use of rotational work involving long-distance commuting.

16. See Center for Construction Research and Training, *The Construction Chart Book: The U.S. Industry and Its Workers*, 5th ed. (Silver Spring, Maryland, 2013). Activity is often divided into three subsectors – residential, commercial/institutional, industrial/heavy civil – but such a division tends to oversimplification.

17. According to a construction industry informant, this is a common trajectory (interview by author, 6 February 2015).

18. Often they may be migrants themselves, elsewhere in Canada or farther afield. See Emily Reid-Musson, Michelle Buckley & Bridget Anderson, “Building Migrant Precarity: Employment, Citizenship & Skill in Toronto and London’s Construction Sectors,” working paper, April 2015, accessed 7 February 2018, <http://www.migrantworkersrights.net/en/resources/building-migrant-precarity-employment-citizenship-s>.



The empirical evidence reported in this article was conducted as part of the On the Move Partnership, a Canadian research initiative that examines employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) in an array of employment sectors across Canada.<sup>19</sup> E-RGM can be understood as a spectrum that ranges from daily commutes of one hour or more each way to extended absences from the home for the purpose of work, as well as mobility while at work.<sup>20</sup> It is becoming an increasingly ubiquitous and complex phenomenon, driven by evolving managerial practices, advances in transportation, and corporate imperatives. The article is based on research conducted in the St. John's area and the Burin peninsula from December 2014 to June 2016.<sup>21</sup>

## Approaching Mobilities Regimes

COMMUTING ARRANGEMENTS ASSOCIATED with the construction phases of megaprojects in Newfoundland and Labrador have evolved over time in relation to developments in other parts of the country and globally. Features such as company-paid transport, standard overtime hours, living-out allowances, camp accommodations (for some projects), and an emphasis on workplace safety and security have become common features of project agreements. These trends, which influence changes across the provincial construction industry, are the result of policy learning and innovation, influence, negotiation, and bargaining involving a number of actors, including the provincial government, labour unions, project owners, contractors, and other industry and labour organizations. A helpful way to understand the effects of the result of this assemblage of influences on the workers who experience the conditions prescribed in collective agreements is through the concept of mobilities regimes.

Mobilities regimes draw attention to institutionalization and regulation of mobility associated with work and other facets of social life. An emerging literature engages some of the themes developed in earlier areas of enquiry,

19. The On the Move Partnership is based at Memorial University. Information about the project can be found at <http://www.onthemovepartnership.com/>.

20. Julia Temple Newhook, Barbara Neis, Lois Jackson, Sharon R. Roseman, Paula Romanow & Chrissy Vincent, "Employment-Related Mobility and the Health of Workers, Families, and Communities: The Canadian Context," *Labour/Le Travail* 67, 1 (2011): 121–156.

21. This research was reviewed by Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and judged to be ethically sound. The analysis relies upon a mixture of textual sources from the government, industry, and media, site observations, and 60 semistructured interviews with industry stakeholders and workers. The empirical sections of this article rely mainly on data from interviews with 20 workers (including 4 women) who are residents of the province and represent different trades and levels of experience. All of the interviewees were working at SPO projects in the Avalon Isthmus area at the time of the interview.



including theories of governmental regimes developed by international relations (IR) scholars, such as Stephen Krasner, for whom regimes are “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area.”<sup>22</sup> A tentative definition of mobilities regimes presented by Kesselring and Vogl clearly references the IR literature: they “represent specific sets of principles, norms, and rules that regulate, in a fundamental way, the movement of individuals, artifacts, capital, data, etc. in a given context of action.” They also discipline and channel movements, to ensure that “the paths and potentials for mobility are defined and regulated.”<sup>23</sup>

It makes sense to think of a multiplicity of regimes just as it makes sense to think of mobilities rather than mobility.<sup>24</sup> Different regimes exist for different types of work. For example, the corporate realm is quite different from that of workers who perform home care.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as the preceding definition makes clear, it is not only the world of work that is subject to mobilities regimes, but also the realms of transportation, of communication, and other networks through which the things, bodies, ideas, and more move. Shamir, however, writes of just one global mobility regime reflecting the contradictory nature of globalization, in which increasing mobility is subject to containment based upon a “paradigm of suspicion” that seeks to manage risks posed by unequal subjects – racialized, poor, from the wrong place, or otherwise marked by difference.<sup>26</sup> These same unequal subjects may also be observed within a mobilities regime at a smaller scale. This is the case in the mobilities regime in the Newfoundland and Labrador construction industry, in which access to employment is circumscribed not only by training and experience, but also by gender, social capital, and household composition – all factors that impinge upon the possibility of working in construction and engaging in the mobility that the work requires. The association of mobility with the global scale and the unifying perspective of Shamir allows little space for regional or local specificity. Newfoundland’s particular social and historical context inscribes a mobilities regime – one that may be similar to those in other provinces or other countries – with place-based distinctiveness. Thus, while rotational work on major construction projects occurs in many places, experiences and the meanings ascribed to such work are contextually specific.

22. Stephen D. Krasner, *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

23. Sven Kesselring and Gerlinde Vogl, “The New Mobilities Regimes,” in Susanne Witzgall, Gerlinde Vogl & Sven Kesselring, eds., *New Mobilities Regimes in Art and Social Sciences* (Routledge, 2016).

24. Tim Cresswell, “Mobilities I: Catching Up,” *Progress in Human Geography* 35, 4 (2011): 550–558, doi:10.1177/0309132510383348.

25. Kesselring, “Corporate Mobilities Regimes.”

26. Shamir, “Without Borders?”

E-RGM is intimately bound up with the spheres of both paid employment and social reproduction. As Roseman, Barber, and Neis discuss, connecting social reproduction to wage labour using a feminist political economy approach is important because formal employment that involves mobility often relies heavily on unwaged labour in the home. They assert that

by adopting a feminist lens that focuses on the inextricable links between the social reproduction of the labour force and paid employment, researchers can analyze how employment-related geographical mobility might exacerbate or modulate potential conflicts between social reproduction and employment, and how household members might reorganize social reproduction responsibilities as a result of stretching their relationships across geographical space.<sup>27</sup>

Given the gendering of construction-industry employment, in which the nature of the work and the work environment have been constructed and reproduced as masculine or, more exclusively, male, this is an important dimension of construction-industry mobilities regimes. Here, mobility and immobility become gendered capacities, both reflecting contradictions and compromises. The care and maintenance work that home and family depend upon is overshadowed and undervalued in the mobilities regime. This contributes to the perpetuation of the gendered division of labour, with few women entering construction work involving long-distance commuting – and with those who do experiencing different challenges than most men.

Mobilities regimes involve a number of different actors, including states, firms, and labour organizations. Various conditions and processes undergird the relationships between these actors. For example, increases in the scope and extent of mobility at work and between home and work have been driven, in part, by shifting political-economic landscapes. As Newhook et al. suggest, “The current context of neo-liberal economic restructuring, associated policy changes, and industry rationalization means that for more and more Canadian workers and employers, employment-related mobility is an inherent part of working life.”<sup>28</sup> Drawing on Ritzer,<sup>29</sup> Kesselring and Vogl have challenged the tendency to celebrate mobility as liberatory, pointing out that increases in mobility are often accompanied by an intensification of control that restricts and channels movements.<sup>30</sup> In the context of unionized work environments, concessions granted by employers over years of collective bargaining may give the appearance that mobility is a form of freedom, but its effects are nonetheless shaped by distance, schedules, means of transport, family and relationship commitments, and the limits of the body's capacity for

27. Roseman, Barber & Neis, “Feminist Political Economy Framework.”

28. Newhook et al., “Employment-Related Mobility,” 122.

29. George Ritzer & Zeynep Atalay, *Readings in Globalization: Key Concepts and Major Debates* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

30. Kesselring and Vogl, “The New Mobilities Regimes.”

work and long-distance travel. Glick Schiller and Salazar's conceptualization of mobility regimes draws attention to the ways that privileged movements are dependent upon and interconnected with the mobilities and immobilities of those who are powerless, underpaid, and exploited.<sup>31</sup> The social construction of construction work as working class problematizes the possibility of labelling the movements it entails as "privileged," especially when compared with the "business travel" of the corporate world. However, new meanings have emerged alongside this work, the wages it offers, and the lifestyle it makes possible. Many construction-industry workers who commute to major projects do so in expensive pickup trucks. The truck has an important symbolism in the construction industry, connected as it is to work and masculinity, particularly in rural settings.<sup>32</sup> But in Newfoundland, trucks are also favoured for safety reasons because they are perceived to act as a buffer against hazards, from poor road conditions to moose.<sup>33</sup> The relative privilege of being able to afford a large vehicle that provides a feeling of increased safety is not unconnected from the fact of the distance it is driven, the fatigue experienced behind the wheel, and the absence of the driver from the home. This scenario should be understood in relation to the actors and structures that enable it.

SPO projects are shaped by policies intended to develop natural-resource industries as a way to create a modern prosperous economy and society in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is not purely an operation of state power, however, because the policy framework and development efforts may be influenced by the private capital of transnational firms and efforts by governments to attract it. Further, as will be discussed below, organized labour also plays an important role, agreeing to terms and conditions in exchange for desirable wages and benefits for member workers. To this list of agents must be added workers themselves who choose to participate in the labour force and how they do so – decisions that may be shaped by age, gender, union membership, personality, and a multitude of other factors. And oftentimes, the decisions are not made alone, as workers and their families must negotiate the relationship between the exigencies of care work and household maintenance with those of paid employment. But, the discussion will reveal, it is through workers that the interdependence of the neoliberal logics of time, productivity, consumerism, and mobilities is established and reproduced. Here, the operation of a mobilities regime that reflects of unevenness of capitalist development implicates the lived experiences of workers.

31. Glick Schiller & Salazar, "Regimes of Mobility."

32. Berit Brandth & Marit S. Haugen, "Doing Rural Masculinity – From Logging to Outfield Tourism," *Journal of Gender Studies* 14, 1 (2005): 13–22, doi:10.1080/0958923042000331452.

33. This is part of a broader North American trend in which larger vehicles are increasingly favoured by consumers for safety reasons. See Michelle J. White, "The 'Arms Race' on American Roads: The Effect of Sport Utility Vehicles and Pickup Trucks on Traffic Safety," *Journal of Law & Economics* 47, 2 (2004): 333–355, doi:10.1086/422979.

## The Special Project Order Legislation

A CENTRAL FEATURE OF THE MOBILITIES regime of Newfoundland and Labrador's construction industry is the provincial Special Project Order legislation in the Labour Relations Act, which allows the province to suspend collective-bargaining rules for megaprojects that develop a natural resource and that are important for the provincial economy. Similar legislation exists in New Brunswick and Alberta, but not in other provinces. Why did Newfoundland and Labrador develop this tool and how does E-RGM figure in it?

Collective bargaining in the construction industry is distinct from that in other sectors due to the project-based nature of the work, a strong tradition of trade unionism, and a lack of conventional forms of seniority.<sup>34</sup> The labour relations framework features collective agreements for each trade that cover all union work in the province. These agreements are negotiated between the Building and Construction Trade Council (BCTC), representing the sixteen building trades in the province, and the Construction Labour Relations Association (CLRA), which acts as the certified bargaining agent for all employers that use union labour.<sup>35</sup> They span five years and include incremental wage and benefits increases. In contrast, the declaration of an SPO allows a project to be exempt from the terms of these provincial labour agreements. In these cases, project-wide agreements are struck by a council of employers and the Resource Development Trade Council (RDTTC), the umbrella organization representing the same sixteen building trades at SPO sites. Superficially, the differences between provincial agreements and project agreements appear to be minimal. Wages and benefits may be slightly higher at special projects, but this could be explained by the fact that they are removed from the cycle of negotiation of the provincial agreements. This fact is not uncontroversial; construction employers feel that the SPO framework favours labour and drives up wages.<sup>36</sup> An important difference lies in clauses that forbid strikes and lock-outs at SPO projects. Labour accepts these constraints as a trade-off for the security of extensive work and high wages. However, Cadigan makes the compelling suggestion that an underlying motivation for suspending the rules of collective bargaining is to attract more capital investment.<sup>37</sup> A brief review of the historical context in which the policy was introduced reaffirms this view.

34. Eric Tucker & Brendan Jowett, "Employment-Related Geographic Mobility and Collective Bargaining in Canada," unpublished report, On the Move Partnership Working Documents, 2014.

35. This arrangement, developed in the 1970s, is intended to provide a balance of power and prevent unions from targeting individual employers for concessions.

36. Construction industry association representative, interview by author, 26 January 2015.

37. Sean Thomas Cadigan, "Organizing Offshore: Labour Relations, Industrial Pluralism, and Order in the Newfoundland and Labrador Oil Industry, 1997–2006," in Judy Fudge & Eric Tucker, eds., *Work on Trial: Canadian Labour Law Struggles* (Toronto: Irwin Law, 2010), 143–171. This study concerns the extension of the Hibernia SPO to cover offshore workers in

The SPO legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador was introduced in 1968 with the specific objective of addressing labour relations at the Churchill River hydroelectric project. Churchill Falls was, of course, an important political project that Liberal Premier Joey Smallwood envisaged as a vehicle of modernization for the province.<sup>38</sup> A collective agreement had been signed the year prior and a legislative change was needed in order for it to be accepted as a legal document. A project-specific agreement with clear guidelines with respect to wage increases and a rule forbidding strikes and lockouts would help attract investors to buy bonds to finance the project.<sup>39</sup> Smallwood explicitly expressed this point in Legislative Assembly debate in 1968:

There are so many competing opportunities for the money lender to put his money in, that he is not going to take risks that he does not have to take. If he thinks he is taking a big risk to lend money to a project, where there will be labour troubles, lock-outs, strikes, stoppages, for one reason or another, so as to destroy the economic viability, the financial viability of that project, then that project is not going to be able to sell its bonds.<sup>40</sup>

In the absence of a project-specific agreement, some interpretations have suggested that workers with a history in fishing and informal work who were unfamiliar with industrial settings were more prone to strike action.<sup>41</sup> There was also a fear that in the absence of representation from island unions, located mainly in St. John's and Corner Brook, workers in the remote Labrador location would be approached by unions from Québec.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the Labour Relations Act was amended with the introduction of provisions for project agreements, which included defining "special projects" and unions therein. Quite clearly, defining terms of employment that would satisfy both labour and capital was central to this project, but within the framework of a government led by a premier who was hostile to labour and much more interested in courting investors than fostering labour rights. Initially, the SPO legislation was intended to apply only to the Churchill Falls project, such that this site was included in the official definition.

The SPO legislation was not used again until the Hibernia project in the 1990s. The intervening years were some of the most tumultuous in the

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the production phase of the Hibernia project.

38. Joseph Smallwood, *I Chose Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973).

39. James C. Oakley, "Review of Special Project Order Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador," prepared for the Labour Relations Agency, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (St. John's 2012), 15.

40. Newfoundland and Labrador, Legislative Assembly, *Hansard* (28 May 1968), 2974, House of Assembly Legislative Library.

41. Michelle McBride, "Bunkhouses, Black Flies, and Seasonal Unemployment: The Industrial Construction Industry in Newfoundland, 1960s–1990s," PhD thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2003, 150. <http://research.library.mun.ca/11001/>.

42. Oakley, "Review of Special Project Order Legislation," 16.

history of labour relations in the construction industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, echoing similar challenges nationally.<sup>43</sup> The construction of the Come By Chance refinery on the east coast of Newfoundland from 1971 to 1973 saw numerous disputes, including a series of wildcat strikes.<sup>44</sup> Multiple factors contributed to labour instability on this site, including the fact that trade unions were working under different collective agreements. The province later brought in outside experts to study labour relations in the construction industry. The 1986 report of the Construction Industry Advisory Committee, chaired by Gordon Easton, highlighted challenges specific to the industry and encouraged the government to modify and improve existing legislation rather than develop new policy. Easton advocated the use of the SPO legislation for major projects including Hibernia, the commencement of which was imminent.<sup>45</sup> This would also ensure the province's attractiveness to outside capital, which remained a central focus of the government.<sup>46</sup>

As Newfoundland and Labrador's first offshore oil project, Hibernia marked a new direction in the province's economic development. It had been a long time coming. The field had been discovered in 1979 but a dispute with the federal government had delayed its development. The Atlantic Accord of 1985 established a royalty-sharing agreement under the terms of which oil development would proceed.<sup>47</sup> A key feature of the accord was the requirement that the construction phases of oil projects provide jobs for residents of the province as an industrial benefit. It was opportune timing. With the introduction of the cod fishing moratorium in 1992, Hibernia offered the promise of new jobs, with an emphasis on providing qualified residents of the province priority in hiring. Premier Brian Peckford hailed it as a major turning point in the history of the province: "The next generation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will be free once and for all; free from that agonizing choice to stay in poverty or to leave for prosperity; free from having to leave home, leave family and go off to live in another part of this world to earn a living."<sup>48</sup>

43. David Wolfe, "The State and Economic Policy in Canada, 1968–75," in Leo Panitch, ed., *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 251–288.

44. McBride, "Bunkhouses," 147–154.

45. Newfoundland, *Report of the Construction Industry Advisory Committee*, chaired by Gordon Easton (St. John's 1986).

46. Doug House, *The Challenge of Oil: Newfoundland's Quest for Controlled Development* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1985).

47. The Accord became law in 1985 but the mechanism for its implementation was introduced two years later. Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, SC 1987, c 3, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-7.5/>.

48. Brian Peckford, "The Hibernia Agreement," St. John's, 18 July 1988, quoted in McBride, "Bunkhouses," 94.

In retrospect, evidence has emerged that the economic benefits of oil development at Hibernia and subsequent projects were neither sustainable nor equitably distributed among urban and rural areas of the province, or between men and women.<sup>49</sup> The “bluster” was convincing, however, and jobs at Bull Arm and other sites provided tangible evidence to back up proclamations that the province was undergoing a sea change.

In order for the SPO legislation to be useful beyond the Churchill Falls project for which it was created, it would need to be modified. This work began shortly after its introduction and continues still today, with the most recent changes resulting from a review conducted in 2012.<sup>50</sup> Amendments have focused upon broadening the applicability of the legislation beyond the limited context permitted by its original wording.<sup>51</sup> The legislation appears to have received an inordinate amount of attention given the small number of times it has been used, but its purpose in relation to projects that have been integral to the employment of thousands of people explains this. The next section will explain some of the key features of collective agreements required at SPO projects and benefits plans required in oil and gas developments, with an emphasis on how both of these texts figure in the mobilities regime.

## Industrial Benefits and Collective Agreements at SPO Projects

INDUSTRIAL BENEFITS ARE opportunities for employment, training, research and development, and procurement for Newfoundland and Labrador people and businesses resulting from resource development activities. In this context, the language of industrial benefits refers specifically to the offshore oil and gas industry.<sup>52</sup> The Atlantic Accord specifies that “individuals resident in the Province shall be given first consideration for training and employment in

49. Sean Thomas Cadigan, “Boom, Bust and Bluster: Newfoundland and Labrador’s ‘Oil Boom’ and Its Impacts on Labour,” in John Peters, ed., *Boom, Bust and Crisis: Labour, Corporate Power and Politics in Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2012), 68–83.

50. Oakley, “Review of Special Project Order Legislation.”

51. A detailed lineage of these modifications may be traced through a reading of government-commissioned studies on labour relations in the province, including Newfoundland, *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour Legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador*, chaired by Maxwell Cohen (St. John’s 1972); Newfoundland, “Report of the Construction Industry Advisory Committee”; Oakley, “Review of Special Project Order Legislation.”

52. See “About Industrial Benefits,” *Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board*, accessed 10 July 2017, <http://www.cnlopb.ca/benefits/>. A slightly different format, impact benefits agreements, are often used in land-based (as opposed to offshore) resource development activities and have been studied in relation to present and historical dispossession of Indigenous peoples and others. See Guillaume Peterson St-Laurent & Philippe Le Billon, “Staking Claims and Shaking Hands: Impact and Benefit Agreements as a Technology of Government in the Mining Sector,” *Extractive Industries and Society* 2, 3 (2015): 590–602, doi:10.1016/j.exis.2015.06.001.



the work program for which the plan was submitted and any collective agreement entered into by the corporation or other body submitting the plan.”<sup>53</sup> The reason for this condition is quite simple: in the context of high unemployment, thousands of jobs in the construction phases of projects, though temporary, would be extremely beneficial for families and communities and also expedient for the provincial government. However, by specifying only “individuals resident in the province,” the accord inadvertently favours a specific group of workers: able-bodied, adult white men who were already working in the industry or conditioned to enter trades and related fields of work through their upbringing.<sup>54</sup> Construction, not only in Newfoundland but in most parts of the world, has been shaped over a long history as a hegemonic masculine space where certain exclusionary or threatening behaviours and attitudes toward women are tolerated or normalized.<sup>55</sup>

Efforts to rectify the structural exclusion of women and other groups historically disadvantaged in construction employment, including Aboriginal people, predate Hibernia. One of the recommendations of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women in 1986 was to introduce affirmative-action hiring practices at the outset of the project, but this was not done. Instead, women, led by the group Women in Trades and Technology (WITT), lobbied for training and employment opportunities when it became clear that qualified women were not being hired. Initiatives were introduced to provide training opportunities and while many women completed training programs, a much smaller number were hired; those who were hired worked in an environment in which sexism was rampant.<sup>56</sup> The situation has improved, with projects such as Hebron and Long Harbour actively recruiting women in order to meet diversity targets. As one informant suggested, however, “diversity” at Newfoundland projects refers mainly to the presence of women on-site. On the one hand, this trend is a result of the efforts of organizations, and some corners of government and industry, working to diminish or remove barriers to careers that may be interesting and lucrative to anyone, regardless of sex or gender. On the other, the incorporation of women into the workforce may address potential or actual labour shortages, whether or not the work environment is supportive of their inclusion.

Alongside benefits and diversity plans that favour the employment of residents of the province, collective agreements at SPO project sites include a number of articles related to schedules, wages, and commuting that can be interpreted as central to the mobilities regime. They reflect the ways that

53. Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act, SC 1987, c 3, s 45, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-7.5/page-7.html#h-17>.

54. McBride, “Bunkhouses,” Chap. 8.

55. Iacuone, “Real Men.”

56. Industry expert, interview by author, 30 January 2015.

time, above and beyond working hours, and distance are together rendered as calculable for the purposes of managing the workforce. The following discussion includes examples from the Hebron project, which consists of building a Gravity-Based Structure for offshore oil extraction at Bull Arm, the same site where the Hibernia platform was built in the 1990s.

As in the Alberta tar sands and elsewhere where large numbers of people are employed in construction in remote locations, work schedules at SPO sites are rotational. Rather than a five-day workweek, which is still used in much of the commercial and residential construction sectors, SPO projects often feature a schedule of ten days or more of work followed by multiple days off. Work shifts may be day or night, at some sites alternating after each rest rotation. Such schedules are designed to allow workers to travel home during their days off. A ten-hour work shift is common, with extra time for lunch. There are multiple reasons for using this type of schedule. The first relates to production; it allows the project to proceed continuously, thereby increasing efficiency and ensuring the timely completion of deliverables. The second reflects ideas about capitalist productivity; while working, often at quite a distance from home, employees have little time to do anything else and minimal distractions. Such schedules were already in place at Churchill Falls, where, suggests Michelle McBride, longer shifts allowed management better control over their workers: "Workers who worked ten-hour days ... were often too tired to do much other but sleep. Being tired also made workers less of a discipline problem in the camp."<sup>57</sup>

The Hebron collective agreement explicitly establishes a connection between the design of work schedules and the employment of workers who live beyond daily commuting distance. Article 21 reads, "The ASSOCIATION has established WORK SCHEDULES that are different from the regular workweek, to accommodate workers from distant locations in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, workers from other Canadian Provinces, or workers from outside of Canada. These WORK SCHEDULES ... will consist of scheduled days of work followed by scheduled days of rest."<sup>58</sup> Such rotational work schedules enhance the attraction of Hebron jobs for residents of the province who live outside of daily commuting distance. The use of rotational schedules also affects wages, with significant overtime hours paid at time-and-a-half or double time accumulated during the course of a rotation. The most common schedule at SPO projects is fourteen days on followed by seven days off.<sup>59</sup> The overtime pay creates an incentive to endure long work hours away from home.

57. McBride, "Bunkhouses," 121.

58. Hebron Project, "Project Agreement between Hebron Project Employers' Association Inc. and Resource Development Trades Council of Newfoundland and Labrador for The Hebron Project," 2011, accessed 8 February 2018, <http://www.nlbtc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/HEBRON-and-RDTC-Project-Agreement-October-20121.pdf>.

59. Although schedules vary, even at the same work site, a range of interviewees – including

Another feature of SPO collective agreements is compensation associated with travel to and from work. It is common to offer either monetary compensation or camp accommodations to workers who live a certain distance from the project site. Article 27 of the Hebron agreement explains this benefit in relation to "Travel Zones" demarcated on a map.<sup>60</sup> The zones correspond to driving distances from Bull Arm. Those who live within 50 kilometres of the site, in Zone 1 (Free Zone), travel to and from work daily at their own expense. In Zone 2, workers may take a bus, if demand warrants offering one, or they may claim a travel allowance based upon distance travelled. It is expected that workers in Zone 2, who live between 50 and 100 kilometres from Bull Arm, also commute daily. Workers whose principle residence is greater than 100 kilometres from the site – that is, workers who live in Zone 3 and beyond – are eligible for a Living Out Allowance (LOA) or camp accommodation, if it is offered. Those who opt to live in the camp are provided a travel allowance to cover the expense of returning home after every rotation. For those not living in camp, the LOA was \$120 per day at the beginning of the project in 2012, with the provision for a raise of \$4 per day each year. The LOA, which is not subject to income tax, is intended to allow workers the option to rent accommodations near the work site during their work schedule. However, it is provided with no conditions and workers who receive it may choose whether or not to spend it on a secondary accommodation.

Many other items are covered in the collective agreements, but the articles related to schedules, wages, and commuting are central to understanding the mobilities regime. While the conditions they create are by no means unique to the Hebron project, or even to projects in Newfoundland and Labrador, the characteristics of the mobilities regime are the result of the travel and sharing of knowledge among company representatives and business managers of unions. They reflect the expectations of workers, many of whom have worked elsewhere under similar terms. When the Hebron project was in the planning stages, concern was expressed by different actors that the required complement of skilled workers might not be available because they were working elsewhere and because a large number of workers were already employed at the project at Long Harbour nearby, a project that had its own challenges finding workers.<sup>61</sup> These concerns were unfounded. Hebron, like other SPO projects, drew Newfoundlanders and Labradorians back to their home province to work on these large industrial projects.

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workers, HR personnel, and union representatives – confirmed that fourteen and seven is currently the most common.

60. Hebron Project, "Project Agreement," 58.

61. Shawn McCarthy, "Labour Shortage Looms in Newfoundland and Labrador," *Globe and Mail*, 17 December 2011.

## Construction Industry Worker Experiences of the Mobilities Regime

MANY INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS grew up with fathers who worked away in construction or at sea. Forestry, fishing, and even mining involved time away from home. In the 1970s and 1980s, after the completion of the Come By Chance refinery, it was not unusual for men to drive across the country stopping at union locals to inquire about the possibility of work. Reports of these journeys suggest that these movements were initiated out of necessity. If work was scarce, “back 30 years ago, it was nothing to put five guys in a car and drive to Edmonton. ... First stop was Ontario.”<sup>62</sup> Alberta’s booming economy in the 1980s, and flourishing urban construction in various cities, provided opportunities for itinerant Newfoundlanders, and some chose to relocate. At some point, however, the meaning of “working away” changed. In the early 2000s, Alberta’s oil sands development began paying for transportation home, enabling interprovincial rotational commuting. Apart from a short-lived global financial crisis in 2008, the steady rise of the price of Brent crude and other commodities translated into widespread employment opportunities, both in other provinces and in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is in this context that the mobilities regime at SPO projects took shape.

### From Local to Mobile Work

THE ROTATIONAL WORK SCHEDULES that emerged in the early 2000s have shifted the meaning of working away and have normalized rotational schedules that engender a further distancing of home and work. The experience of Gary, an experienced scaffolder in his early 50s, illustrates this. Gary did not begin his working life in construction. He left school in grade nine, as did many people of his generation, and began work in a nearby fish plant. He worked there for almost ten years before he was laid off and forced to look for alternatives. Training in carpentry and scaffolding led to work in different locations in the province, including jobs in his community and at maintenance shutdowns for industrial projects, like the Come By Chance refinery, that were close to home. He has fond memories of that period: “They were enjoyable days. They were fun days. You got up and you looked forward to going to work. You were having fun working, with the people.” But, he added, “them days are not there anymore.” He had been working on the Sea Rose project and when that was finished he had to consider going away. “And then once that was it ... she just went downhill right there.”<sup>63</sup>

Gary began working in Alberta through a transfer with the contracting company he was working for. His first job in Alberta, in 2003, was very challenging. He said to his wife, “I don’t know where I’m going. I don’t know how

62. Mike, union representative, interview by author, 9 February 2015.

63. Gary, scaffolder, interview by author, 29 July 2015.

long I'll be out there.' Because when you go away and you get there, and you get in this rut, this panic mode, you want to go back home, you're going home. ... It's a sickness that can come over ya." He went on to say that this first stretch of work away was the hardest. "Being away from your family is tough, really tough. My daughter was only nine years old or something when I left. She was into everything ... figure skating, gymnastics, music." But things improved: "I survived the first six weeks and then after we left they said we were going on two and one, so I said I'll go back and try it again." He ended up working in Alberta for nine years and only stopped when his wife had an accident and they decided he should find work in the province. The decision to find work nearer to home coincided with an opportunity at an SPO project a two-hour drive from his house. In spite of this shift, he has a nostalgic view of working in his community when he began his career. The "days of fun" were replaced by work that he feels more ambivalent about. "I find now it's tougher. ... People are tougher. Different attitudes in the field. It's tough, I'm telling you." The challenges, however, are manageable for the material returns: "I must say, life is good, but you've got to be working." Gary's transition from work in Alberta to work in his home province was relatively smooth – an experience not shared by everyone seeking to make such a move.

### **Entering the Mobilities Regime at SPO projects**

THE RDTC WORKS WITH OTHER BODIES such as Newfoundland and Labrador Advanced Education and Skills to try to ensure that a sufficient number of skilled workers like Gary are available for major projects. A number of factors are at play, including interprovincial and intraprovincial competition and the timing of projects. Since there have been gaps between major projects, many workers have chosen to work elsewhere rather than face the alternatives at home – either a job with lower pay or government assistance. Although trade unions often hire workers from affiliated locals in the event of a shortage of resident workers, many Newfoundlanders who travelled to Alberta for work did so at sites represented by the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), a union that is distanced from the Canadian labour movement.<sup>64</sup> If they continued to pay dues at their home union in Newfoundland, they could be called to work if their name rose to the top of the hiring list. However, hiring is often done directly by contractors rather than through the union. Collective agreements contain provisions for both "name hires" by contractors and union hiring lists. This rule, combined with a specified journeyman–apprentice ratio, means that experienced workers with extensive personal networks often have a range of options, including working in Newfoundland

64. Steven Tufts and Mark P. Thomas, "Populist Unionism Confronts Austerity in Canada," *Labor Studies Journal* 39, 1 (2014): 60–82, doi:10.1177/0160449X14530705.

when work is available, while apprentices may be forced to work away. Several examples from the interviews illustrate these dynamics.

When Eric finished his training he became a member of the ironworkers union. At the time there were jobs in the province but he was at the bottom of the hiring list. Rather than wait for a call, he decided to pursue work in Alberta. He managed to return home after a referral from a relative. For Eric, like many others, working out west was just a stopgap until he could work closer to home: “The whole time I was out there I was waiting, trying to get back here.”<sup>65</sup> Another newly journeyed tradesperson, Peter, encountered difficulties finding work when he relocated to Newfoundland, his home province, after living for several years in another province.<sup>66</sup> He had experience in the Vancouver area and at major projects in Alberta, but when he joined a Newfoundland local, he became bewildered at the hiring practices, which he found to lack transparency. He was hired eventually, like many others, when one of the SPO projects had what many call a “big hire.” In this case, so many people were hired at one time that the hiring list was exhausted and people like Peter – near the bottom of the list, still an apprentice at this point, and lacking the connections to be “name hired” – received a call. The requirement to hire residents of the province at SPO projects is significant here. The situation may be different for women. Jen is an apprentice at her trade<sup>67</sup> and believes she was offered work at an SPO project in large part because of equity hiring practices. She pointed out that the number of women on her site was substantial and attributed this to efforts on the part of the project owners to create a diverse workforce. At the time we spoke, she expected to be employed for a longer duration than many men for this reason.<sup>68</sup>

## From Home to Work and Back Again

INTERVIEWEES, BOTH WORKERS and others, had a lot to say about the commute to work – about its routinization, the risks it carries, strategies for making it work, and its connection with the challenges of long hours. Although a bus has been offered at some sites, such as Hebron, it is not an option that is attractive to most workers, who are more likely to drive their own vehicles or carpool. A bus, driven on someone else’s schedule, following a prescribed route, is not as appealing as being in the personal space of one’s own vehicle or with friends with the freedom to make stops and go at one’s own pace. Carpooling is popular for several reasons. Sharing driving duties

65. Eric, ironworker, interview by author, 21 May 2015.

66. Peter, electrician, interview by author, 30 July 2015.

67. In addition to identifying female construction workers with a pseudonym, their trades will not be identified. It is due to the small number of women tradespeople relative to men that this is necessary to ensure confidentiality.

68. Jen, tradesperson, interview by author, 24 June 2016.

allows members of a carpool to take turns driving and rest when others are on duty. Driving one's car or truck less reduces mileage, potentially prolonging the warranty. Carpooling also creates a sense of camaraderie by providing a space and time to debrief the day's interactions and challenges. Saving money on fuel is also a significant factor in the decision to carpool. This sentiment does not affect the popularity of fuel-intensive trucks among construction workers or the likelihood that they will be driven to work, whether alone or in a carpool. The ways that commuting workers operate their vehicles may also be influenced by long working hours. A law enforcement official indicated that speeding is common on the Trans-Canada Highway, particularly around project sites, and that the most effective way to address this problem is to drive the speed limit in a law enforcement vehicle, thereby influencing drivers to slow down.<sup>69</sup> This is necessary because speeding is not the exception but the norm, and individual infractions are difficult to identify. When an effort is made to ticket speeders, many are caught.<sup>70</sup> While most are merely trying to get home, some are heading to social and recreational activities after work. One interviewee plays recreational hockey weekly, extending his bedtime to almost midnight before his 4:15 a.m. alarm.<sup>71</sup>

Many people who work at SPO projects forego long drives in favour of camp accommodations, if offered, or other options near work. Gary rents an apartment near his work site and stays there during his shift, sometimes accompanied by his wife. Jen, who lives on the Burin peninsula, chooses to rent a flat in a house owned by a relative near her job site.<sup>72</sup> Her boyfriend works at the same location so they travel together, leaving home the evening before a shift starts and driving home after work on the final day of a fourteen-day rotation. Jen's home is outside of comfortable daily commuting distance, which is the case for many who live in small communities and work at SPO projects in the Avalon isthmus area. The experiences of workers who rent accommodations near the work site, such as Gary and Jen, lie in contrast to those of the many workers who commute daily to SPO sites, sometimes more than one hour in each direction. Peter, an electrician who had recently relocated to the St. John's area from another province, was commuting daily to a night shift at an SPO project. He and his partner, Deirdre, struggled to adjust to his schedule, which allowed them approximately one hour a day at home together, "and that hour being busy – washing dishes, getting lunch packed up. ... It's not sustainable at all." Peter had previously commuted to a work site in Labrador and before that to Alberta. Although living in a camp and being

69. Law enforcement official, interview by author, 27 February 2015.

70. "RCMP 'Could Not Keep Up' with Traffic Violations Tuesday," *Telegram* (St. John's), 21 February 2017, <http://www.thetelegram.com/news/local/2017/2/21/tch-motorist-clocks-155.html>.

71. Carl, electrician, interview by author, 21 May 2015.

72. Jen, interview.



away for extended stretches of time presented different challenges, it was the daily commute he found less manageable.

For those employed at SPO projects who commute daily and those who stay near the site, managing the time before and after work becomes an important way of being an effective worker. Many choose to arrive at work in advance of the start of their shift. Eric described a daily routine in which he arrives on-site up to half an hour before he is required to start work, at 6:15 a.m., for his job as an electrical foreman.<sup>73</sup> When asked for his thoughts on this kind of schedule, he laughed and said, "It's just work." Leaving the site, he said, it sometimes takes an hour to reach the highway. Although his workday is from 6:15 a.m. to 5 p.m., he is physically at or near work from 5:45 a.m. to nearly 6 p.m. most days. Gary, also a senior worker, begins his morning with a cup of tea and slice of toast when he arrives on-site. Both of these men rent accommodations near their work site. This, Gary said, means that that he is well rested and able to perform better at work. While this type of strategy mitigates stress and fatigue, it may have less benign effects at home for those experiencing the absence of a household member.

## **Family and Reproductive Labour**

WHEN A HOUSEHOLD MEMBER is away for half the time, domestic work and care work are impacted. Various strategies are pursued in order to manage this challenge. One of the more common in families with young children is for one parent to stay home. This was the case for Eric's wife: "She's a stay-at-home mom now. She was managing a store and stuff like that but when I'm working away it's just too hard to have two people working." He chooses not to commute daily, instead paying for room and board. Interestingly, some of the reproductive labour that he and his wife might share while he is at home is done by someone else when he rents a room: "They cook for you and stuff, pack a lunch." When he arrives home after his rotation, he points out, "I've got a fine list of stuff I've got to do. It's ... well, it's all right." He clarified that these are tasks to be done around the house: "It's hard to squeeze it all in. ... My wife, she definitely needs a break when I go home, after ten days with a toddler." On his first day home he tries to finish the work his wife needs help with before taking time to play with his daughter and relax with family. Other interviewees also talked about trying to spend as much time with their children as possible when home, while also resting to deal with a buildup of fatigue.

The tradeswomen interviewed as part of this study had different experiences. Jen has two children from a previous marriage and made the decision to find a live-in caregiver when she entered her trade and began commuting to Alberta with her boyfriend. Her younger child initially found her absences very challenging. One of the methods they developed to help him cope was to

73. Eric, interview.

use a calendar where he could cross off the days of her rotation, so he could see when she would return. The fact that she is within driving distance at her present job, rather than across the country, has made her situation more manageable. Nevertheless, Jen explained that she has taken time off between most jobs, especially during the winter, to spend time with her children.<sup>74</sup> Julie had a slightly different experience. When she finished her training, there was no work available. Rather than go to Alberta like Jen, she decided to work at a car dealership near her home. "I couldn't leave to go to Alberta or anywhere because I was a single parent and I had a baby."<sup>75</sup> She managed to find work at an SPO project when there was a "big hire." Her home is just under an hour's drive away and she travels daily to and from work, while her mother looks after her daughter. This arrangement, though challenging, works, but Julie is resigned to the need to work farther afield when she is laid off because her daughter is older now. Although these women are managing to pursue work in this traditionally male-dominated profession, they are still among a minority. According to a representative of a women's organization, there are high levels of attrition among women who enter the trades, especially among those who reach the age at which they may wish to start a family.<sup>76</sup>

### **Got to Keep Working, Wherever the Work Is ... except St. John's**

A REPRESENTATIVE OF A LABOUR organization spoke about how workers negotiate the need to be mobile in the construction industry:

We have a lot of people who actually either transfer in or transfer out to different local unions depending upon where the work source is, so there's a lot of workers who are constantly en route, travelling to different projects. And, of course, they're always seeking the ones that are longer in duration. ... However, because of the nature of construction, that's not always something that can be known up front.<sup>77</sup>

She went on to point out that for the projects in Newfoundland and Labrador, "sometimes, depending on which crew you get on, the nature of your work may last longer, or sometimes it may be shorter." This uncertainty has become an accepted fact in the industry. A group interview with three journeyed tradesworkers currently working at an SPO project revealed how some workers approach this uncertainty.<sup>78</sup> Carl, an electrician, said, "That job I took ... I was told it was six weeks long. I left a job to take that job. I ended up being two years. ... But the initial call was only for six weeks. Everybody says six weeks but it ends up being two years, three years. ... Sometimes it is only six weeks."

74. Jen, interview.

75. Julie, tradesperson, interview by author, 21 May 2015.

76. Women's organization representative, interview by author, 15 January 2015.

77. Labour organization representative, interview by author, 2 February 2015.

78. Alex, Carl, and Randy, tradespeople, group interview by author, 21 May 2015.

Randy added, "It's the nature of the beast. If you want to get into the trades, you've got to accept it. ... If you want to be in the trades you just have to accept having to travel." Most of the older workers interviewed had not only worked, but also lived in many different places. The emergence of company-paid travel in the early 2000s had allowed them to live at home, in Newfoundland, while commuting to Alberta, and the SPO jobs had further generated the possibility of working close to home, for a while at least. This is attractive for many. For Alex, "We work at home when there's work. When that dries up we just move around again." They noted that they had taken a pay cut to work in Newfoundland, relative to what they earned in Alberta, but that the wage gap was closing.

When the conversation turned to the possibility of working locally at a permanent maintenance job or for a contractor, the importance of certain aspects of the rotational work schedule became evident, notably the additional pay during overtime hours. A sense of disdain was expressed toward jobs that involve a 40-hour workweek. Alex, who lives near St. John's, said that he "would work in St. John's. If there was nothing else *in the world* to do" [emphasis added]. It is difficult to separate this sentiment from discussions about income. These men and other interviewees talked extensively about the economic returns they receive for the work they perform and the mobility that work entails. Such stories were most stark when contrasted with the lower wages, unstable hours, or seasonality of fish processing or other jobs performed locally in rural Newfoundland by some interviewees before they entered construction. Some, like Eric, will leave the lucrative mobile work: "Me, it's ten years. That's what I'm looking for. Ten years on the construction. I have five years now. Another five years. There are shops back home that I can go work for but obviously this is just to get us on our feet, get a retirement there for us, because there's no money back home, but there's enough money to work and live day to day, but not for planning ahead and retirement, kid's education and all that."<sup>79</sup> Things do not always work out according to plan, however. When asked if he intends to retire at 65, Gary, who is in his early 50s, said, "I should be able to – I got to be able to. ... But when I see guys ... that's almost 70 years old right now, and still working ... I say, b'y, God Almighty! Do you need to be at it?"<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

THE FOREGOING DISCUSSIONS have shown that work outside of the province was pursued by some because union jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador appeared inaccessible, even with training and a union membership. All of the workers interviewed chose to work close to home at an SPO project when the

79. Eric, interview.

80. Gary, interview.

opportunity arose. Many would prefer to work even closer to home, in their own communities or in St. John's, but do not see this as a possibility due to a lack of suitable options and substantial reductions in compensation. Jobs in local communities are also perceived to have lower status. Although working in the province puts them within a few hours of home, the commute is still difficult, involving long drives, often in the dark, often in poor weather. The challenges of the long drive are mitigated with time and planning, the sharing of driving duties, and companionship. Renting a secondary residence close to the work site is a common strategy that allows more independence than a camp setting and minimizes driving time. Enabling the mobility of the commuting worker is often a spouse or other household members who contribute extra physical and emotional labour in the reproductive sphere of the home. Although more and more women are entering the trades, and SPO projects provide opportunities for career development, it remains a male-dominated, masculine space from which reproductive labour and home life are distanced.

The mobilities regime is a developing conceptual apparatus that directs analytical focus to the ways actually existing mobilities are circumscribed and regulated by political, economic, and corporate structures and thereby disciplined and normalized. Existing research has applied this lens to border crossings, the large-scale movements of migrants and refugees, and the corporate world of "hyper-mobile" elites. This article has shifted the view from global and transnational mobilities regimes to the local and regional movements between home and work of construction-industry workers employed at sites that, by their very definition, have a special status in the provincial economy. The regulatory content of the regime, legible in policies and collective agreements, is not unlike that of extractive-industries construction projects elsewhere in Canada and in the Global North. What is distinctive is the way SPO projects have been positioned as enabling Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who moved away, or who commute out of province, to come home. Indeed, they have done so. By examining the experiences of these workers – their negotiation of commuting, as well how mobility figures in career decisions and aspirations and in the organization of home life – the article has revealed the different ways Newfoundlanders and Labradorians participate in the regime and the contradictory effects of these engagements. These mobilities are distinct from the histories of itinerancy in the industry because they have unfolded during a period of prosperity and increasing efforts to diversify workforces and remove the barriers that prevent women, Indigenous people, and racialized minorities from entering construction work. Nevertheless, the research shows that the regime is gendered, and while the composition of workplaces may be changing, the rules that structure time and connections between home and work perpetuate construction as masculine space. It also shows that roots that may have developed will again be unsettled as projects wrap up and thousands of workers are forced to face the need to

look outside the province for work in a labour market much less buoyant than in the recent past.

In late 2014 the price of Brent crude began a precipitous drop. The effects were not immediately felt on the Burin peninsula, known as a hub for mobile skilled tradespeople working in the oil and gas industry. In the summer of 2015, the topsides of the Hebron project were under construction at the Cow Head fabrication facility and Marystown was abuzz with workers, including a substantial number brought in from out of province.<sup>81</sup> A year later the tone had grown subdued. Cow Head was all but abandoned and, while many were still working at Hebron, there was growing uncertainty of what would come next. This question became more urgent as time wore on, with journalist Terry Roberts remarking in February 2017 that the imminent completion of Hebron “means the end of an employment bonanza for the construction industry.”<sup>82</sup> The same article provided a platform for Jim Myers, the business manager of the plumbers, pipefitters, and welders union, to trumpet the province’s “world-class” workforce and look forward to the possibility that a future project, the West White Rose extension, would pursue the more labour-intensive of two development options. The eventuality of this and future projects relies on negotiations by the province and project owners and on the ability of labour to carve out a space for the participation of union members. As the recent history of SPO projects indicates, this is quite probable. What it will mean for workers, with intervening time and new routes forged by the necessity of earning a living in this industry in a volatile economy, is less certain.

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81. This portion of the Hebron project was not under the SPO agreement and labour was supplied by Unifor, the shipyard union, not the provincial building trades.

82. Roberts, “Hebron Success.”