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Robert McIntosh

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Résumé de l'article

Pour une bonne part de ce siècle, le commerce du vêtement a été Ã un des plus grands employeurs de l'industrie manufacturière au Canada. Le déclin de la fabrication artisanale de vêtements du milieu du XIXe siècle a suscité une croissance marquée de l'absence de travail ainsi que la détérioration des normes de travail. Alors que l'exploitation se répandait dans le commerce du vêtement — un processus conditionné par la structuration des inégalités de classe et de sexe — ce domaine devenait une source importante de revenu d'emploi pour les femmes. Ce n'est qu'au cours de notre siècle que des mesures ont été prises pour limiter l'exploitation dans l'industrie du vêtement sans pour autant y mettre un terme. L'effet des lois protectrices a été minime; ce sont plutôt les luttes menées par les syndicats de l'industrie du vêtement qui ont eu les meilleurs résultats.

Sweated Labour: Female Needleworkers in Industrializing Canada

Robert McIntosh

There are "scores, hundreds, of women in this city whose only means of subsistence is by their needle. They are paid starvation wages, viz., 6 cents each for making shirts, 17 cents for making and pressing pants, 75 cents for coat and vest, etc. In the words of a skeleton living on Maitland St. with a sick girl: 'I have to work with my needle until midnight to earn the money to buy bread for tomorrow. And this is my hard experience every day of the week, and every week of the year.'"[1]

THE CLOTHING INDUSTRY emerged gradually in Canada during the 19th century, as the site of production shifted from the household (for use) to larger-scale manufacture for the market. By the end of century, the industry was one of the largest employers in manufacturing in industrial centres such as Montréal, Toronto, and Hamilton, and remained so until well into this century.[2] Unlike most contemporary manufacturing industries, the clothing trades were a major source of wage labour for women, who typically accounted for 70 to 80 per cent of all needleworkers.[3] While the clothing industry extended across the country, it was based in central Canada. By 1901 at least 7500 women in Ontario and nearly 9000 in Québec

[1]Halifax *Morning Herald*, 20 February 1889 as cited in Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, N.S. 1989), 159.

[2]Despite their prominence, *Labour/Le Travail*, the journal likeliest to address them, contains only two items on garment workers: Irving Abella, "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," 2 (1977), 185-213) and a research note by Jacques Rouillard, "Les travailleurs juifs de la confection à Montréal (1910-80)," 8/9 (Autumn 1981/Spring 1982, 253-9). Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto 1992), stands as a noteworthy recent exception to a general neglect of needleworkers in Canadian working-class history.

[3]Within the manufacturing sector, textile mills and shoe factories also made extensive use of women's labour. See *Census of Canada*, 1871-1881, Vol. III.

Robert McIntosh, "Sweated Labour: Female Needleworkers in Industrializing Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 105-38.

worked in their homes at garment manufacture. Many more, including more than 5500 in Ontario and nearly 1800 in Québec, worked in small contract shops.[4]

Rife with sweating by the close of the 19th century, the garment trades exhibited some of the most deplorable working conditions faced by any worker.[5] An analysis centred on the operation of the capitalist system helps to account for the grossly depressed labour standards, interminable hours of work, and wretched pay within the garment trades. It cannot explain why sweated needle workers were overwhelmingly female.

Jacques Ferland argued recently that "labour history has all too often neglected [the] wedding of capitalist oppression and patriarchal domination."[6] The terms and conditions of this wedding warrant close scrutiny. Capitalist society emerged within an existing patriarchal context, "a set of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women."[7] Capitalism and patriarchy, analytically distinct, interacted in complex, manifold, and frequently contradictory ways. Capitalist social relations adapted, used, and exploited — but never subsumed — patriarchal attitudes and practises.[8]

Historical narrative details this interaction. Women's subordinate role within the traditional household, whereby they assisted and supplemented the work of men, made them, in the context of industrial capitalist growth, of ready use to employers in search of cheaper, easily victimized, workers.[9] The initial disadvantage women faced was compounded by discrimination on the part of trade unions, which sought for decades to restrict or exclude women's wage labour as part of the struggle for the male breadwinner wage.[10]

[4]*Census of Canada*, 1901, Vol. III.

[5]As defined in 1898 by one of its first Canadian students, William Lyon Mackenzie King, 'sweating' described "a condition of labour in which a maximum amount of work in a given time is performed for a minimum wage, and in which the ordinary rules of health and comfort are disregarded. It is inseparably associated with contract work, and is intensified by sub-contracting in shops conducted in homes." See *The Daily Mail and Empire* [Toronto], 9 October 1897, 10.

[6]Jacques Ferland, "'In Search of Unbound Prometheia': A Comparative View of Women's Activism in Two Quebec Industries, 1869-1908," *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989), 12.

[7]Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford 1990), 20.

[8]Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, patriarchy and job segregation by sex," in Zillah Eisenstein, ed., *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York 1979), 206-47; Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: towards a more progressive union," in L. Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution* (Montréal 1981), 1-41.

[9]See Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-1850," in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth 1976), 77-83. On the preindustrial gender-based division of labour in Canada, see Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto 1988).

[10]When the organization of women did occur at the end of the century other discriminatory practises were employed: lower pay rates for women, job segregation and ghettoization were enshrined in union contracts.

If the interrelation between class and gender provided the context in which female sweated labour emerged, it also shaped responses to sweating. At one level, seamstresses who sweated at home were inoffensive to patriarchal norms. These women did not desert home duties and children by taking on wage labour outside the home, nor did they steal 'men's' jobs. They did not toil at "rough work in hot sweaty environments in close physical proximity to unrelated men."[11]

Eventually, however, the pervasiveness of sweating came to be unsettling to patriarchal standards. Female sweating jeopardized male incomes in the clothing trades, and for this reason drew the hostility of men as wage-earners. The profound degradation associated with sweated labour threatened women's ability to perform their designated duties as homemakers and mothers. Evidence linking sweating with the emergence of slums became clearer and stronger. Chronic occupational diseases undermined women's capacity to function as mothers. The sweated trades exploited the labour of many children. Extremely poor pay, in tandem with the demoralization and degradation associated with sweating, led to the seamstress' close ties with the prostitute.[12]

Patriarchal unease intersected with concerns to mute the most destructive aspects of the capitalist system. Sweating revealed starkly how terribly damaging unchecked market forces could be. On this question a coincidence of interests emerged toward the end of the 19th century. The liberal state, concerned to 'legitimize' the system, took steps to mute its most destructive aspects. On this point trade unions, on behalf of the interests of their working-class constituents, lent their support. Likewise, private and organized philanthropy, moved by humanitarian impulses, struggled to secure the legislation which some hoped would maintain what they viewed as the essential elements of their society.[13]

Consensus formed most readily concerning women. Patriarchal arguments regarding women's role and place resonated with capitalist concerns to perpetuate by timely reforms a class-based, market-driven society. If society was to be saved, reform had to begin with women.[14]

[11]See Wally Seccombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized: the construction of the male breadwinner wage norm in nineteenth-century Britain," *Social History*, II, No. 1 (January 1986), 53-76, esp. 66-7.

[12]On these points, see also Jenny Morris, *Women Workers and the Sweated Trades: The Origins of Minimum Wage Legislation* (Aldershot, Hants. 1986), 192-4.

[13]See Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980), especially Chapter 6. For a recent study of protective legislation for women, see Mary Lynn Stewart, *Women, Work, and the French State: Labour Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879-1919* (Kingston 1989). Stewart argues forcefully that protective legislation, passed in response to a patriarchal agenda, was inimical to women's interests, failed to improve their working conditions at home or on the job, and buttressed their secondary status in the labour market.

[14]A similar convergence of forces had led to the passage of the first Factory Acts in the United Kingdom. See Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, "The 'Family Wage': Some Problems for Socialists and Feminists," *Capital and Class*, No. 11 (1980), 53.

The Rise of Sweating

THE INTEGRITY OF THE TRADITIONAL CLOTHING TRADES had been maintained by means of formal apprenticeships. Apprentices, while subject particularly at the outset of their period of indenture to menial tasks, generally were initiated into all aspects of clothing manufacture, including the measuring and cutting of cloth, sewing, and the pressing of the completed garment.[15]

By the 1820s and 1830s, expanding markets owing to urban growth, immigration, and improved transportation (with the construction of canals, railways, and roads) brought traditional clothing manufacture under pressure.[16] Traditional garment manufacture had been largely custom-work. Clothing was made to measure, manufactured on the premises, under the supervision of the master tradesman and retailed directly to the public. Increasingly, particularly in men's clothing, there was a shift from custom to readymade production, where relatively large allotments of clothing were made in standardized sizes.[17]

During this time, certain merchant tailors and dressmakers accumulated more capital, secured access to credit, left manual labour and hired a foreman to oversee production. They began to reorganize production within their workplace. Conditions of labour deteriorated. The emergence of sweating was part and parcel of the destruction of the traditional clothing trades. Detailed research has been conducted on Montréal, the major centre for clothing manufacture in Canada throughout most of the 19th century. There, large master tailors sought to exploit expanding markets through the extension of the division of labour. As a first step, they began to take on many more than the customary one or two apprentices. Subsequently, the traditional, rounded apprenticeship was compromised as in the interest of increasing production, boys were instructed in simply one branch of clothing manufacture. The consequences of these new divisions of labour were evident even among journeymen. Because foremen took responsibility for the most demanding task of measuring and cutting cloth, journeymen tailors increasingly were called on simply to sew. The paternal aspects of the traditional craft also declined: by 1835 journeymen no longer were benefitting from the provision of room and board in the home of their masters. At the same time, employment conditions worsened: year-long contracts were giving way to shorter terms, even to payment by piece. This enabled master tailors to lay off journeymen during slack times. Finally, larger

[15]Jean-Pierre Hardy et David-Thiéry Ruddel, *Les apprentis artisans à Québec (Montréal, 1977)*, 119-20.

[16]On the development of Canadian markets see H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860* (Toronto 1981), Chapter V.

[17]Some tailors had always kept on hand small stocks of readymade goods, generally for sale to labourers. This was a sideline, however, to their principal business of custom work. Readymade clothing was often, particularly in the early decades of its manufacture, associated with a very poor quality of workmanship and material.

capital requirements in clothing manufacture (tied up chiefly in cloth and ready-made goods) made the path to master increasingly difficult for journeymen.[18]

From in-house division of labour it was a small step to putting out parts of the work to homes (and later, to contract shops). Because most women had experience with the needle, they were brought into the clothing trades, in competition with male garment workers, by the master tailor or contractor. They were not in a position to command the pay or labour standards of journeymen: this of course encouraged their use.[19]

By the middle of the 19th century a second group had emerged as large manufacturers of readymade garments: clothing and drygoods importers, wholesalers and retailers. While they had no experience of artisanal production of clothing, they possessed the capital to profit by expanding markets for ready-made clothing.[20] Moss Brothers exemplifies this second group of clothing manufacturers. They first entered the garment business in 1836, as importers of clothing. By 1856, they employed 800 men and women in Montréal.[21] Many other merchants followed this path. In 1888, it was observed that virtually no drygoods merchant in Montréal was without a workshop attached to his business.[22]

During the last half of the 19th century, a wide range of garment businesses developed. Economies in garment production were not achieved through the consolidation of machinery and labour; indeed, they were achieved through their dispersal. The industry was characterized by an increasingly advanced subdivision of labour which was often associated with extensive subcontracting. This practice had clear benefits for employers. Contractors could be dropped or underemployed as convenient. Competition among contractors exerted downward pressure on the prices they charged. Subcontracting enabled wholesale manufacturers to avoid the expense of recruiting and supervising workers. Both wholesale manufacturers and

[18]For this paragraph I am indebted to Mary Anne Poutanen, *For the Benefit of the Master: The Montreal Needle Trades During the Transition, 1820-1842*, MA thesis, McGill University, 1985.

[19]It was division of labour, not machinery, which brought women into the clothing trades in competition with men. Morris, 37. In this sense, their experience is similar to shoemaking, where women first came to be employed — as outworkers — by new divisions of labour. See Joanne Burgess, "L'industrie de la chaussure à Montréal: 1840-1870 — Le Passage de l'artisanat à la fabrique," *La revue de l'histoire de l'amérique française*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (septembre 1977), 187-210.

[20]See Gregory L. Teal, *The Organization of Production and the Heterogeneity of the Working Class: Occupation, Gender and Ethnicity among Clothing Workers in Quebec*, PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1985, 167-9.

[21]Moss Brothers also anticipated the very large Jewish presence in clothing production which emerged at the turn of this century. See Gerald Tulchinsky, "'Said to be a very honest Jew': The R.G. Dun Credit Reports and Jewish Business Activity in Mid-19th Century Montreal," *Urban History Review*, XVIII, No. 3 (February 1990), 206.

[22]Royal Commission on the Relations Between Labour and Capital [hereafter Labour Commission], *Quebec Evidence*, Part I (Ottawa 1889), 15.

contractors were able to pass on to homeworkers many costs of production, including workspace, light, fuel, sewing machines, needles and thread. Homework also permitted the circumvention of rudimentary state regulation of industrial standards.[23] Large manufacturers like Hollis Shorey claimed ignorance of the working conditions of these outworkers, even of the numbers employed.[24]

A handful of large wholesalers and manufacturers struggled successfully to control large portions of the market. In the middle, a variety of contract shops emerged. Some contractors were relatively large, employed one or two dozen people, and specialized in certain kinds of work; they were often intermediaries between wholesalers and homeworkers. Other contractors were themselves poverty-stricken, worked out of their homes, and employed in addition to family members one or two girls from the neighbourhood. At the other extreme were women who laboured individually, perhaps occasionally hiring a neighbourhood girl to assist her as she struggled to meet deadlines on small consignments of clothing.

By 1900, the largest clothing manufacturers employed well over one thousand workers. Of those, only a small portion were on the manufacturer's payroll. 'Inside' workers, as they were called, were employed in two (often conjoint) places: in showrooms where a small number of highly skilled tailors designed clothing and cut cloth to pattern; and in warehouses, where foremen gave out cloth to outworkers, where they inspected the completed sewing, where 'trimmers' finished certain lines of goods (by hemming, for instance, by correcting mistakes, or sometimes simply by cutting off loose threads), and where pressers ironed the completed garment. In these warehouses, too, large quantities of garments were stored before shipment out. Outside workers were largely on the payroll of a subcontractor (a term used interchangeably with contractor) or working on their own account.[25]

[23]In Québec, it also permitted avoidance of a business tax. See *Globe*, 19 November 1898, 1.

[24]Canada, House of Commons, *Journals*, 1874, Vol. VIII, Appendix No. 3, "Report of the Select Committee on the Manufacturing Interests of the Dominion" [hereafter Select Committee *Report*], 23.

[25]Hollis Shorey dominated the Canadian garment industry in the late 19th century. The son of a shoemaker, Shorey was apprenticed in 1839 to a tailor in Hatley. He subsequently established his own tailoring shop in Barnston, also in the Eastern Townships of Québec. In 1861 he left for Montréal, where he was employed for a number of years as a travelling salesman. At the end of 1866 he began to manufacture on his own account. By 1870 Shorey employed 305 workers, of whom 280 were women. By 1874, Shorey's business had expanded to employ from 700 to 1000 outside workers and perhaps one-tenth that number inside. In 1888 he employed 103 inside and 1450 outside. When he died in 1893 Shorey was the largest clothing manufacturer in Canada, employing 125 workers inside and 1500 outside. (Select Committee *Report*, 22-4; Labour Commission, *Quebec Evidence*, 285; Gerald Tulchinsky, "Hollis Shorey," in Frances G. Halpenny, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. XII (1891-1900), (Toronto 1990), 968-9).

The Sweating System

THE TERM 'SWEATING' was introduced in Britain in the 1840s to describe the deteriorating working conditions skilled tailors had faced since the 1830s. It originally referred to the taking home of work by skilled tailors seeking to cope with falling prices, but it soon came to encompass a range of abuses including poor working conditions, irregular work and seasonal layoffs. The expression was subsequently popularized by concerned publications like the *Morning Chronicle* and *Punch*.[26]

Sweating was soon introduced to British North America where, we have seen, the labour standards of the artisanal workshop in Montréal were already under pressure. By 1852 Hamilton tailors too were cursing "the ill omened practise of sweating," which they defined as efforts by master tailors to "procure the utmost of labour from journeymen tailors for the smallest possible remuneration."[27] The growth of outwork and subcontracting in the late 1800s produced two new categories of sweated workers: those in small contractors' shops and those who laboured at home. In practice, there was little to choose between the two: the distinction between a shop and a home often was slight. These new categories of sweated workers, unlike the tailors who first faced the problem, consisted largely of women and girls.[28]

The sweating system, acknowledged the tailor and trade unionist Louis Gurofsky at the end of the 19th century, "work[ed] like machinery."[29] Clothing manufacturers decided to produce a line of clothing on their own account or obtained contracts from wholesalers, retailers, or the government. The cloth was bought wholesale. Designs were produced in the manufacturer's shop. Sub-contracts were let. Often, responsibility for garment design and the letting of contracts was combined in the person of the shop foreman. The cutting of the cloth, button-sewing and buttonhole-making, the finishing of the garment (including pressing) might be let or done in-house, depending on the capacities of the manufacturer. Most sewing was done as outwork. It was let either to contractors or directly to women in their homes.[30]

[26]James A. Schmiechen, *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labor: The London Clothing Trades, 1860-1914* (Urbana 1984), 2. Similar trends were evident in contemporary Paris. See Christopher H. Johnson, "Economic Change and Artisan Discontent: The Tailors' History, 1800-1848," in Roger Price, ed., *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic* (London 1975), 87-114.

[27]Hamilton *Gazette*, 28 June 1852, cited in Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict* (Montréal 1979), 11-2. Such abuses persisted, even in custom tailoring. See the *Labour Gazette*, February 1901, 270, on Toronto tailors and 'back shops.'

[28]Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1896, Vol. XXIX, No. 11 (61, 61A), *Report Upon the Sweating System in Canada* [hereafter Wright Commission], 12.

[29]Wright Commission, 25.

[30]*The Daily Mail and Empire*, 9 October 1897, 10; *The Globe*, 19 November 1898, 1.

Mackenzie King described in 1898 how some of the largest garment contracts of his day, government orders for military and Post Office uniforms, were filled. These garments were never manufactured "entirely upon the premises of the firms which were awarded the work." While all such firms cut the cloth, made buttonholes, and (often) put on buttons (the latter two jobs were done at trifling cost by machines tended by boys), most work was done off the premises by resort to one of three kinds of subcontract.[31]

The cut cloth might be sent to a contractor's shop, to a contractor's residence where workers were employed, or directly to an individual who laboured at home with the assistance of family members only (and sometimes one or two girls or young women from the neighbourhood). A hierarchy of skills was recognized. Needle work considered less skilled (where a minimum of fit was required) — trousers, vests, greatcoats — was consigned to homeworkers. Work which was deemed to call for greater skill — superior tunics, riding breeches — was sent to contractors' shops.[32]

Contractors proliferated. The barriers to entry were very low: the contractor simply needed access to clothing contracts on the one hand and to a pool of needleworkers on the other. One Ontario factory inspector wrote in 1897:

> The greatest tendency in the clothing trade appears to be against the establishment of large, sanitary workshops. The employers who own the present ones complain of their hands leaving them and taking rooms as workshops, and taking clothing to make at a lower price. The facilities offered for the hire of sewing machines and other necessary tools are so easy that a workman starting without any capital becomes an employer in the space of a week or two.[33]

Interaction between the custom and readymade sectors was not unknown: seasonal lulls in the custom trade often led custom shops to contract for readymade work.[34] Journeymen tailors, ordinarily employed in custom shops, did not scruple during the slack season to work for ready-made manufacturers on their own account. Many skilled tailors displaced from custom work permanently joined the ranks of contractors.[35]

Immigrants were often found among clothing contractors. By the end of the 19th century they were often Jews, with some experience of the garment trades in

[31]William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Report to the Honourable the Postmaster General of the Methods Adopted in Canada in the Carrying Out of Government Clothing Contracts* (Ottawa 1900) [hereafter King Commission], 6-9, 18. This report was first published in 1898, and reprinted (with minor changes in pagination) in 1899 and 1900.
[32]King Commission, 6-10.
[33]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1897, 19.
[34]Michelle Payette-Daoust, *The Montreal Garment Industry, 1871-1901*, MA thesis, McGill University, 1986, 58.
[35]Select Committee *Report*, 23.

the Old World.[36] The ranks of contractors included women, who might rise from individual homework to employ a number of other needleworkers.

Intense competition among contractors pushed prices down. "One contractor makes war upon the others, and the demand for cheapness is not satisfied," explained Ontario factory inspector Margaret Carlyle in 1897. "It has been told me by a contractor that they are compelled to accept the prices offered by the wholesalers; if they do not take it someone else would."[37] Contracting was both volatile and precarious: shops moved constantly, as the business changed owners or as contractors simply sought "to install themselves as cheaply as possible."[38] The ease of entry into subcontracting encouraged fly-by-night contractors and a range of associated abuses.[39] In many instances, Mackenzie King pointed out, contractors were nearly as miserable as those they employed.[40]

Lower prices, given the labour-intensiveness of clothing manufacture, necessarily meant downward pressure on wages and working conditions. "The contractor's principal concern is the cost of his labour, since he neither buys materials nor sells completed garments," explained F.R. Scott and H.M. Cassidy in 1935. "Consequently competition between contractors becomes almost entirely a question of competition in forcing down labour standards."[41]

The downward pressure on wages as a consequence of subcontracting was inexorable. Contractor underbid contractor, and, as Toronto's Mayor W.H. Howland explained to the Labour Commission in 1888, homeworker undercut homeworker.

> A sewing woman is taking shirts to make, for example, and getting so much for them. She goes in the establishment and says, "I want you to give me some work." She is told that they have plenty of workers and that they must keep their own people going; however after some conversation she asks what price they will give and they arrange to send her a lot at such a price a lower price than they have been paying. It is human nature and business nature for that to be done and it is undoubtedly done and the result is that when the regular worker comes in she has to take that price or she will not get the work.[42]

[36]On the attraction of immigrant Jews to garment-making, see Frager, *op. cit.* See also Robert Babcock, ed., "A Jewish Immigrant in the Maritimes: The Memoirs of Max Vanger," *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (Autumn, 1986), 136-48 and David Rome, *On Our Forefathers At Work*, New Series, No. 9 (Montréal 1978), 39-40.

[37]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1897, 23-4.

[38]*Ibid.*, 1899, 23; 1913, 49.

[39]Wright Commission, 21. On such swindles, see also Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1894, 14.

[40]*Daily Mail and Empire*, 9 October 1897, 10.

[41]F.R. Scott and H.M. Cassidy, *Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry* (Toronto 1935), 24.

[42]Labour Commission, *Ontario Evidence*, 167.

Falling wages, and persistently increasing working hours, produced a relentless probing of the limits of subsistence. "The political economists who base their calculations upon the living wage, that is to say, the smallest sum upon which human life can be sustained," wrote a late Victorian journalist, "would be surprised to find how small that sum may be."[43]

Accompanying the growth of the readymade clothing industry were increasing divisions of labour. These were of two kinds. The first respected traditional divisions of labour within the clothing trades, of which the most significant was the distinction between men's and women's wear. These divisions could be broken down further: customary subdivisions within the former included pantmaking, shirtmaking, collarmaking and coatmaking. Within women's wear, these included dressmaking and coatmaking. These traditional subdivisions were respected by contractors who, as A.W. Wright reported in 1896, usually "confine[d] themselves as far as practicable to the making of some particular kind of garment, coats, trousers, vests, mantles or overcoats for example."[44] Contractors might further specialize in a particular *quality* of clothing.

The extension of readymade production led to new divisions of labour, based on stages in the manufacture of a given article. These came to include the preliminary work of patternmaking, sample-making and cutting (often the prerogative of foremen and skilled men). The next stage, sewing (mostly done by female outworkers) could be highly specialized: individuals simply might sew sleeves, collars, or pockets, for instance. The sewing on of buttons and the making of buttonholes often were done by specialized workers.[45] Finishing or 'trimming' was often in-house. It involved tasks such as hemming, repair work, and the trimming of loose threads. Garments would then be pressed. The final stage was the inspection of the completed goods by an official.

Divisions of labour undermined clothing workers' traditional skills, as garment manufacture was broken into various easily-mastered components. Garments were made in assortments, cut by machinery "and then each part of the work of making up and finishing [was] done by men, women and children skilled in doing that particular part."[46] Mackenzie King described in 1897 the extensive divisions of labour within larger contractors' shops.

[43]"Knight of Labour," "Where Labor is Not Prayer," *Walsh's Magazine* (Toronto 1895-6), 111-6, cited in Michael S. Cross, *The Workingman in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto 1974), 153.

[44]Wright Commission, 13. Montréal contractor Israel Solomon, for instance, made overcoats, employing his father and two girls. He knew nothing of the prices paid for pants or vests. Labour Commission, *Quebec Evidence*, 560.

[45]This was the work undertaken by Montréal contractor Jacob Julius Rosen, who had the necessary machinery. Labour Commission, *Quebec Evidence*, 558-9.

[46]Wright Commission, 13.

In a large shop there may be engaged in the manufacture of a single coat no less than 16 different individuals, each of whom works at a special line, and, after completing one stage in the process of manufacture, passes the garment on to the next, who is skilled in his line, and so on, till the article is completed.[47]

As the readymade clothing industry grew and made increasing calls for labour, the labour it demanded was ever less skilled and ever cheaper. As a consequence, more and more women and children entered the garment trades. The division of labour in the readymade sector, A.W. Wright remarked in 1896, had "practically done away with the necessity of employing completely skilled tradesmen."[48] These basic tasks could soon be well within the competence of even young and inexperienced workers.

The Technology of Garment Manufacture

NUMEROUS KEY MECHANICAL DEVICES were introduced into the garment trades between 1850 and 1900. Significantly, however, these devices did not upset the prevailing division of labour in the clothing trades which allowed for outwork.[49]

Two aspects of garment manufacture remained in-house even with the emergence of extensive outwork in the 19th century. Cutting was the most highly skilled aspect of garment manufacture. The material had to be laid out on the cutting table with great care: an incorrect 'stretch' would spoil the fit.[50] The introduction of expensive mechanical cutters encouraged the retention of cutting in-house. The 'band knife' was introduced in the 1850s, making possible the cutting out of more than one garment at a time. During the 1870s 'long knives', capable of cutting up to 18 thicknesses of cloth, were introduced, followed a decade later by steam-powered band knives, which cut up to 24 thicknesses of cloth.[51] As well, the introduction of steam presses to replace hand irons confirmed pressing as inside work.[52]

[47]*Daily Mail and Empire*, 10 October 1897, 10.
[48]Wright Commission, 11-3.
[49]Even after the turn of this century, when garments for men and (a decade or two later) women became standardized, there remained a basic technical impediment to automation. Because they are made of *soft* material, garments can not be mechanically fed into a machine: human hands are needed to hold and guide the material. See Roger D. Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York's Garment Trades* (New York 1986), 54-5.
[50]Mercedes Steedman, "Skill and Gender in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston and Montréal 1986), 158.
[51]Gerald Tulchinsky, "Hidden Among the Smokestacks: Toronto's Clothing Industry, 1871-1901," in David Keane and Colin Read, eds., *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless* (Toronto 1990), 272.
[52]*Ibid.*, 274.

The central innovation in the garment trades was certainly the sewing machine, whose use spread rapidly from the 1850s. It revolutionized the speed at which clothing could be manufactured. By one estimate, it took 16 hours and 35 minutes to sew a frock coat by hand. The same coat took 2 hours and 38 minutes by machine.[53] The sewing machine greatly reduced the cost of producing clothing while, in the opinion of some manufacturers, improving its quality.[54] At the same time, it was *cheap* enough for the small contract workshop or home. Various other, specialized machines were invented (such as those for pocket-stitching, making buttonholes and sewing on buttons), but a contractor could purchase one and do this work exclusively.[55]

The technical base of the industry not only allowed for extensive outwork, it encouraged it. By 1900, consequently, garment production differed from most manufacturing industries in that it was *not* becoming centralized in factories.[56] Mackenzie King estimated in 1898 that 5 per cent of men's wear [and certainly a much lower proportion of women's wear] was factory-produced.[57] Even large manufacturers like Shorey or Sanford contracted out to workers in homes or small contractors' shops, who competed fiercely among themselves for the available work. While a number of mechanical innovations had been introduced in clothing manufacture after 1850, they changed neither the industry's heavy demand for labour nor its geographical diffuseness. Into this century, Schmiechen has argued, "there was probably no industry as untouched by factory production or in which the methods of production had been standardized so little as the manufacture of clothing."[58] The industry continued to rest, as Mercedes Steedman observes, on the "systematic exploitation of a seemingly endless pool of cheap, female labour."[59]

Working Conditions of Sweated Needleworkers

ONTARIO FACTORY INSPECTOR Margaret Carlyle remarked in 1899 that "most ... garment workers in the struggle for subsistence feel obliged to accept wages that are little above subsistence."[60] In fact, wages for female needleworkers were almost uniformly below subsistence levels. One manufacturer acknowledged in 1874 that women "work very cheap."[61] For a woman without dependents, Ontario's Bureau

[53]Martha Eckmann Brant, "A Stitch in Time: The Sewing Machine Industry of Ontario, 1860-1897," *Material History Bulletin*, Vol. 10 (Spring 1980), 3.
[54]See the remarks of Hollis Shorey and William Muir in the Select Committee *Report*, 24, 39.
[55]Tulchinsky, "Hidden," 274.
[56]*Ibid.*, 271.
[57]*Globe*, 19 November 1898.
[58]Schmiechen, 26.
[59]Steedman, 155-6.
[60]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1899, 26.
[61]Select Committee *Report*, 36.

of Industry estimated in 1889, the cost of living in Toronto was approximately $4.00 weekly.[62] Homeworkers earned nowhere near that amount. Women working in contract shops also routinely fell short of a living wage.[63]

The earliest comprehensive information on wages dates from the 1890s, when factory inspectors regularly were reporting on conditions in the needle trades, and when two federal commissions of inquiry examined sweating. Ontario factory inspector James R. Brown visited one contractor's shop which employed seven women and girls in Toronto in 1894. Some earned $1.50 weekly, some $2.00 and one, the finisher, was paid $3.00 weekly. The shop owner claimed, perhaps legitimately, that "he could not afford to pay more."[64] Louis Gurofsky testified to the Royal Commission on Sweating in 1896 that women's wages in Toronto contract shops were as low as 75 cents weekly, although $3.00 was considered a 'fair' wage. The average wage failed to reach $4.00 weekly.[65] In contractors' shops in Montréal, Mackenzie King concluded in 1898, women earned between $2 and $5.30 weekly, although $3.00 was considered a good wage. Women employed in the contractor's residence earned from $1.25 to $3 weekly. As homeworkers, women could expect to earn between $1 and $2 weekly.[66]

The sweating system allowed, even encouraged, workers to exploit coworkers. Mackenzie King noted in 1898 that "[i]t was pretty generally conceded that, except by thus working overtime, or by the profits made by the aid of hired help, there was very little to be earned by a week's work."[67] He offered the examples of one woman who hired four girls to assist her at the rate of 25 cents daily (2.5 cents hourly) and another who hired five girls, some paid $2 weekly and others $1 weekly (less than 2 cents hourly).[68]

Clothing manufacturers in Montréal soon discovered that the price of subsistence was even less in outlying villages than it was in the metropolis. Québec factory inspector Joseph Lessard noted in 1897 the extension of the subcontracting network to rural areas.[69] Even Ontario contractors are reported at the turn of this century to have sent clothing to be made up in rural Québec.[70] Scott and Cassidy

[62]Ontario *Sessional Papers*, Vol. XXII, Part 7, 1890, *Annual Report of the Bureau of Industry*, 1889, Part IV, "Wages and Cost of Living," 90. The estimate given was $214.28 annually. By only making provision for board, lodging and clothing, it identified the level of bare subsistence.

[63]As a matter of course women were paid much less than men. "I don't treat the men bad," explained one Toronto clothing manufacturer, "but I even up by taking advantage of the women." *The Daily Mail and Empire*, 9 October 1897, 10.

[64]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1894, 14.

[65]Wright Commission, 26.

[66]King Commission, 12-4.

[67]*Ibid.*, 19.

[68]*Ibid.*, 15.

[69]Quebec Factory Inspectors' *Report*, 1897, 39.

[70]Ernest J. Chambers, ed., *The Book of Montreal: A Souvenir of Canada's Commercial Metropolis* (Montréal 1903), 171.

observed in 1935 that "a shift from town to country is a comparatively simple matter for the contractor. Cheap labour is the magnet that attracts him."[71]

Fining, the bane of homeworkers, was a further means to depress wages. A.W. Wright reported in 1896:

> When an employee in a factory or contractor's shop does imperfect work, necessitating an alteration, only the time required to make the alteration is lost. On the other hand, a person working at home must carry the goods back again, frequently losing half a day because of having to make an alteration which in actual work only requires a few minutes of time. To avoid this they are often willing to submit to a fine or reduction of wages far in excess of what the making of the alteration would be worth to them.[72]

Some warehouses made a practice of fining to reduce their wage bill. Some foremen did likewise to fatten their wallets. In either case protests from homeworkers produced a common response: "There is no more work for you."[73]

Employers' wage bills were also lowered by means of truck. Certain stores only gave women work who purchased a sewing machine from them and accepted payment in 'bons' redeemable only at the stores for which the clothing was made. In Hull, for instance, about 150 or 175 seamstresses were using sewing machines in 1901 for which they had been charged $55, payable at $2.00 monthly, or in 'bons' at a rate of $2.50.[74]

The hours of labour in the needle trades were irregular. Many of these trades were highly seasonal: weeks of intense labour could be followed by weeks of idleness. Seasonality was very pronounced in custom work: in millinery, perhaps the branch where it was most evident, there might be only six months' work annually.[75] The most regular employment was found in the larger workshops and factories, where the ten-hour day and sixty-hour week were standard in Toronto and Montréal in the 1890s.[76] In some cases the working days were extended during the week to allow for a half-day holiday on Saturdays.[77]

Both the larger establishments and the smaller dressmakers', milliners' and tailors' shops were subject, however, to frequent overtime in the busy season, for which there was seldom extra payment. In the custom dress shops, this pressure arose in part from customers eager to have their new garments. For "the gratification of some few hundred of inconsiderate people" complained one factory inspec-

[71]Scott and Cassidy, 24.
[72]Wright Commission, 11.
[73]Wright Commission, 26. On foremen demanding bribes, see Mackenzie King's article in *The Daily Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 9 October 1897, 10.
[74]*Labour Gazette*, August 1901, 98; May 1901, 466.
[75]Labour Commission, *Ontario Evidence*, 348, 358.
[76]Wright Commission, 11; King Commission, 13.
[77]Wright Commission, 24.

tor, "the health of several thousand of women and girls" was jeopardized.[78] In the larger garment establishments, legal restrictions on hours of labour were circumvented by sending workers home with garments to make up.[79] Alternatively, in contract shops, "[t]he employees eat their dinner in five minutes, and put the rest of the meal hour in at work."[80]

Homeworkers, as a matter of course, were even more victimized. Mackenzie King noted that "in private houses the time is irregular and the number of hours of work usually more." He offered the example of a woman and son sewing army greatcoats at home who grossed $4 weekly on the strength of 90 hours of work *apiece*.[81] Writing in the *Globe* a few months later, King observed that 15 or 16 hour days (at as low as $3 per week) were common for home needleworkers when employed. In practice, the working day was restricted by "no limit save that of physical endurance."[82]

To the hours of sewing by the homeworker were added the hours of waiting for work. Although work was only intermittently available, homeworkers might nonetheless be required to ask at the warehouse once or twice daily, as a condition of future work.[83] One contractor (contractors were always willing to decry the iniquities of other contractors) spoke in 1896 of one shop where he had seen women kept "waiting two hours to get half a dozen pairs [of pants]."[84] Home needleworkers' time was cheap.

However poor was the pay or however long were the hours these producers worked, factory inspectors complained most persistently about needleworkers' wretched working conditions. Workshops were overcrowded; the environment was unsanitary; the air was foul. "These [small contractors'] workshops," it was reported in 1901, "are among the worst kept. Located as best they could be in old buildings or private houses, and sometimes in basements, they lack equally in light, air and cleanliness."[85] Similar accounts continued to be heard a decade later. "One feature of industrial life that is creeping into the city," wrote another factory inspector in 1911, "is underground workshops. It is almost impossible for them to be healthy. Quite a number of these places are used as tailor shops."[86] Demands by factory inspectors that contractors improve sanitary conditions often led to the abandonment of a workshop, and a clandestine move to another.[87]

[78]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1899, 28.
[79]*Ibid.*
[80]Wright Commission, 24.
[81]King Commission, 14-5.
[82]*Globe*, 19 November 1898, 1.
[83]Schmiechen, 56.
[84]Wright Commission, 38.
[85]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1901, 12.
[86]*Ibid.*, 1911, 19.
[87]Wright Commission, 31.

Further Consequences of Sweating

THE VERY POOR CONDITIONS OF LABOUR, wretched pay, and interminable hours had further consequences for the women subject to them. They demoralized workers. They led to early exploitation of children's labour. They broke women's health. They drove some women to prostitute themselves in order to survive.

Prolonged labour under grossly depressed conditions made workers timid and fearful. A.W. Wright was told in 1896 in the course of his Royal Commission that "[i]t would be as much as any man's job was worth to be found giving information."[88] Mackenzie King was struck by the fear of dismissal of the garment workers he interviewed. "The dread of their employers, entertained by men and women alike, was in many instances distressing." King did not disclose publicly the names of his informants.[89]

The sweated clothing trades were marked not simply by the exploitation of adult labour, but also by widespread use of child labour. There was strong pressure to enlist the help of children. They spared adults work in an occupation where, literally, time was money. Even five year-old children were capable of pulling out basting; by age ten they could perform simple sewing, such as attaching buttons. Children also were employed commonly to deliver clothing bundles.[90]

Generally, children laboured within the household. A Toronto journalist recounted in 1868 that:

> frequently the industrious efforts of a whole family are employed to fill the orders of the employers. Often, in such instances, the child of eight or nine summers is made a source of material help in the construction of the coarser descriptions of men's garments that are now prepared for the ready-made clothing market. In the same way the female head of the house, a group of daughters, and perhaps the male members of the family, if no better occupation is available, turn in to assist the father in adding to their means of support.[91]

Into this century children were commonly employed within the family to assist in garment manufacture. "In poor neighborhoods," the Ontario Committee on Child Labour reported in 1907, "piece work under sweat shop conditions in a room of a dwelling house ... is very common."[92]

More viciously, children were also subject to harsh exploitation by contractors outside the family context. By the late 1800s, traditional apprenticeships had long

[88]Wright Commission, 30.
[89]King Commission, 7-8.
[90]Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana 1987), 117.
[91]Toronto *Globe*, 28 October 1868.
[92]Ontario, *Report of the Committee on Child Labour*, 1907, 5. See also Dr. Augusta Stowe Gullen, "Child Labour," in National Council of Women of Canada, *Report of the Fourteenth Annual Meeting* (Ottawa 1907), 105.

since fallen into disuse. Children were used simply as a cheap and docile source of labour. A.W. Wright reported in 1896:

> 'Learners' are employed usually young girls and boys but the employer is under no obligation to teach them a trade or any part of one. Evidently such a system is capable of gross abuse and there are not wanting instances of such abuse by unscrupulous employers. I learned of one contractor, engaged in making pants and vests, who makes a practise of employing 'learners' who engage to work for him without wages while they are learning the trade. These learners, usually girls, are kept at some trivial and easily mastered work, such as pulling out basting threads, sewing on buttons, or running up seams on a sewing machine, and then, when the term, for which they agreed to work without wages expires, they are discharged, without having had an opportunity to learn any trade by which they can earn a livelihood, their places being filled by other 'learners' who are in turn defrauded out of several months of work and time.[93]

Contractors readily acknowledged that even in the best of circumstances, young girls were hired simply because of the low wages they commanded. As a rule, they were not trained in any more than one branch of clothing manufacture. "I have twenty or twenty-five girls working for me," claimed one contractor in 1896, "and not one of them could make a coat right through."[94] That year some Toronto contractors still recalled a system of indenture, whereby girls would be apprenticed to the trade for four years, but it was no longer practiced.[95]

Needleworkers were further afflicted with a distinctive set of health problems. Eye strain produced headaches, giddiness, fainting, hysteria, and occasionally even total blindness. The bent posture in which they laboured, and their lack of exercise, often led to chronic indigestion, ulcers, dysmenorrhoea, and distortion of the spine. The foul, dusty, and fluff-filled atmosphere of the workroom was linked with a variety of lung complaints, including tuberculosis.[96] Sewing machines produced a further set of problems: physical exhaustion, back and shoulder pains, pain in the legs from use of the treadle, deteriorating vision, and 'the tremble', caused by the vibration of the machine.[97]

The seasonality of poverty has been extremely well described by Judith Fingard.[98] Winter posed particular hardships for clothing workers.

[93]Wright Commission, 10. Mackenzie King noted too the practise of discharging girls after their period of apprenticeship at little or no pay. King Commission, 10.

[94]Wright Commission, 46.

[95]*Ibid.*, 46.

[96]Christina Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (London 1981), 31-2.

[97]Schmiechen, 50-1. Garment manufacture is still characterized by a distinctive set of health problems. See Susan Wortman, "The Unhealthy Business of Making Clothes," *Healthsharing*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (November 1979), 12-4.

[98]Judith Fingard, "The Winter's Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-Industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815-1860," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (1974), 65-94.

[I]n the dead of winter, when the trade in the retail houses is slack, and the wholesale houses keep none but their best hands on, the prospect for those who are left suddenly to their own resources is, for the time, miserable indeed. Then, the petty savings from the busy season are anxiously hoarded, and, by dint of great effort are made to last till March or April, when warmer weather, by cheapening fuel, does not so hastily deplete their scanty store, while, at the same time, the increase of work adds to the value of their labour.[99]

The seasonal patterns evident in the use of charitable agencies and public refuges almost certainly extended to prostitution.[100]

Links between needlework and prostitution were frequently drawn by contemporaries. Henry Mayhew estimated that between one-quarter and one-half of all women in ready-made clothing work in London in the 1850s were forced to supplement their earnings by prostitution. In some quarters, seamstress' almost became a euphemism for prostitute.[101]

Far too rarely was the role played by the extremely low wages women received for needle work examined. A 'full-time' prostitute offered her opinion on her 'seamstress sisters' in a letter to *The Times* [of London].

It is a cruel calumny to call them in mass prostitutes; and as for their virtue, they lose it as one loses his watch by a highway thief. Their virtue is the watch, and society is the thief.[102]

Canadians sensitive to needleworkers' plight made similar arguments. The *Labour Reformer* wrote in 1886:

In Toronto and other Canadian cities there are many girls employed from ... $2 per week and up ... Does any man suppose that girls can live respectably upon such wages? Those living with their parents may do so, but it is a lamentable fact that many of these, and more who board, increase their income in ways far from honorable, and in a manner which can only result in degrading our own and future generations.[103]

[99]*Globe*, 28 October 1868.

[100]See Ian Davey, "The Rhythm of Work and the Rhythm of School," in Neil McDonald and Alf Chaiton, eds., *Egerton Ryerson and His Times* (Toronto 1978), 221-53.

[101]Cited in Schmiechen, 61. Seamstresses turned to part-time prostitution in contemporary Paris also, when their wages were inadequate. See Joan Wallach Scott, "Men and Women in the Parisian garment trades: discussions of family and work in the 1830s and 1840s," in Pat Thane *et al.*, eds., *The Power of the Past: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (Cambridge 1984), 83-4. The 'fallen' woman depicted in a series of sketches of the underside of municipal life had been a home needleworker. See *Toronto by Gaslight: The Night Hawks of a Great City* (Toronto 1884), 61.

[102]24 February 1858, cited in Walkley, 82.

[103]*Labour Reformer*, 1 December 1886, cited in Lori Rotenberg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitutes at the Turn of the Century," in Janice Acton *et al.*, eds., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto 1974), 47.

During a strike against Toronto clothing contractors in 1896, one trade unionist laid out clearly what he felt to be the crux of the issue: "These men would not care if the women prostituted their bodies at night to make a living wage."[104] Mackenzie King recorded in his diary for September 18, 1897 a visit to a needlewoman earning $1.25 weekly and "supporting herself, found she was doing so by prostitution. What a story of Hell. My mind all ablaze."[105] King subsequently hinted at more direct sexual exploitation of female needleworkers: "foremen and contractors had taken a more terrible advantage of those anxious to secure work for a living ... too terrible to admit of publication."[106]

Who Was Sweated?

TWO GROUPS OF WOMEN were described by contemporaries as doing home needlework, where sweating was most evident. One group, almost certainly a minority, consisted of homeworkers whose subsistence did not depend on needlework. A Toronto journalist wrote in 1868 of women taking in sewing, "interspersing the household duties with a run at the sewing machine ... its products ... adding to the comforts and luxuries of their homes."[107] William Muir, a clothing contractor, echoed this view in 1874, claiming that women took in sewing "to buy finery." He continued: "These women sit down when their breakfast, dinner and supper is over, and make a garment, but are not exclusively employed at this work all day."[108] "[W]omen whose husbands are making good wages" take homework, one Toronto contractor remarked in 1896. "They want a little more money for dress and finery and compete against girls who are working for a living."[109] Home needleworkers were described in 1903 as "thrifty housewives and their just as thrifty daughters," who kept shop sewing on hand "to occupy their time in the intervals of domestic and farm work."[110]

In fact, the 'typical' houseworker relied on her earnings to feed herself and her family.[111] Research focusing on the major urban centres of Montréal and Toronto has emphasized that for all but a narrow and privileged segment of the working class, the adult male's wages were inadequate to support a family — at least not until well into this century. The working class family needed more than one

[104]Wright Commission, 42-3.
[105]National Archives of Canada (NAC), W.L. Mackenzie King Diaries, MG 26, J 13, 18 September 1897.
[106]*The Daily Mail and Empire*, 9 October 1897. On this subject, see also Frager, 126-7.
[107]Toronto *Globe*, 28 October 1868.
[108]Select Committee *Report*, 36.
[109]Wright Commission, 51.
[110]Chambers, 171.
[111]On this point, see also Schmiechen, 67-111; Morris, 50-79; and Lorraine Coons, *Women Home Workers in the Parisian Garment Industry, 1860-1915* (New York 1987), esp. 1-2.

breadwinner.[112] The "wives and daughters of mechanics" who are reported to have been engaged in homework in Montréal in 1874; or the "wives of labourers or mill hands" in Hull doing shop sewing in 1901, were almost certainly working to supplement a meagre family income.[113] Homework was one of the few means of earning an income available to women with children. Bettina Bradbury discovered that among the home needleworkers in St. Jacques Ward in Montréal, 20 per cent had children under two; 45 per cent had children under five.[114] Families with older children would rely on them as secondary wage earners; until that point in the family life-cycle, women were necessarily employed to supplement inadequate male incomes.[115] Widows, particularly those with children, were among those most dependent on home needlework. Bettina Bradbury has calculated that 40 per cent of the widows in St.-Jacques Ward and 20 per cent of those in Ste.-Anne Ward [both in Montréal] did home sewing.[116] James Munro, Sanford's foreman, acknowledged in 1888 that among Sanford's homeworkers: "There are a great many widows and a great many who might as well be widows, as they provide for the whole house."[117]

The lack of alternative sources of income — coupled with pressing need — forced women into homework. No sooner had one contractor, William Muir, linked homework with pin-money, then he reported incongruously: "it makes my heart ache to have the women come crying for work."[118] In 1896, at a time of relentless price reductions in Toronto, one employer described women as "running —

[112]Bettina Bradbury, "The Working-Class Family Economy, Montreal, 1861-1881," PhD dissertation, Concordia University, 1984, 84-161; Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto 1974), 30-42; Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto — 1900-1921* (Ottawa 1979), 27-60. By 1928, one historian has argued, "it was possible, for the first time, for the average male manufacturing worker to raise a family on his wages alone." Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 192.

[113]Select Committee *Report*, 36; *Labour Gazette*, August 1901, 98.

[114]Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," Canadian Historical Association *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* (Saskatoon 1979), 87.

[115]On this point, see Bettina Bradbury, "Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market and Girls' Contributions to the Family Economy," in Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore, eds., *Canadian and Australian Labour History* (St. John's 1990), 119-40.

[116]Bettina Bradbury, "Surviving as a Widow in 19th-Century Montreal," *Urban History Review*, XVII, No. 3 (February 1989), 151. On widows and sewing, see also Lorna R. McLean, "Single Again: Widow's Work in the Urban Family Economy, Ottawa, 1871," *Ontario History*, LXXXIII, No. 2 (June 1991), 132.

[117]Labour Commission, *Ontario Evidence*, 831-2.

[118]Select Committee *Report*, 39.

breaking their necks you might say — to get the work."[119] It is unlikely that these women were 'breaking their necks' for pin-money.

Responses to Sweating

HOWEVER MUCH SWEATING was associated with ill-lit rooms, with needleworkers huddled together out of sight in garrets and basements, its existence was evident to anyone who cared to look. Hungry-looking people, struggling under heavy loads, were commonplace in urban centres. "Every one has seen," reported one journalist in 1895, "the large numbers of women and children winding their way up or down Bay street, carrying bundles in their arms or on perambulators."[120] Trade unionist Alfred Jury lamented in 1896 "the great number of women staggering up and down with great bundles of clothing; some of the poor creatures hardly able to walk."[121] Even without their telltale bundles, needleworkers, who spent so much of their day bent over their work, often could be identified by their stooped carriage.[122]

The first to respond to sweating were its first victims, tailors. In England, London tailors found conditions in their trade deteriorated rapidly in the wake of an unsuccessful strike against outwork in 1834. By that time, as E.P. Thompson has pointed out, they no longer enjoyed the traditional protection of the Elizabethan apprenticeship statutes, repealed in 1814. The rapid growth of the 'dishonourable trades' followed: wages and working conditions in the needle trades were steadily undermined by subcontracting and outwork.[123]

In British North America, as noted above, deteriorating working conditions, including outwork, were in evidence before 1850 in Montréal. In response, tailors began to form some of the earliest unions in British North America. Locals were organized in Montréal (in 1823), Toronto (1845), and Hamilton (1854) as journeymen tailors sought to maintain working standards.[124] Conflict soon followed, generally over the allied issues of pay and contracting out.[125]

The process of contracting-out continued into this century, as the custom sector was eroded by relatively cheap readymade production.[126] Inside needleworkers

[119]Wright Commission, 37.

[120]"Knight of Labour," Where Labor is Not Prayer," *Walsh's Magazine* (Toronto 1895-6), 111-6, cited in Cross, 157.

[121]Wright Commission, 23.

[122]Stansell, 113-4.

[123]On the decline of the British needle trades, see Schmiechen, Chapter One; E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth 1968), 257.

[124]Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme québecois: Des origines à nos jours* (Montréal 1989), 17; Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982), 28, 17.

[125]Paul Craven, "Workers' Conspiracies in Toronto, 1854-72," *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (Fall 1984), 54; Forsey, 28.

[126]Examples of the continual growth of putting-out, and efforts by inside garment workers to prevent it, include an 1896 strike against 19 custom tailor shops in Toronto when they

tried, generally unsuccessfully, to prevent ever more categories of clothing from being put out.[127] In the struggle against readymade interlopers, especially in tailoring, labour standards in the custom sector were constantly eroded. The suppression of outwork remained (and remain) a principal concern of garment unions.[128] Because women commonly did outwork, they were defined from an early day as undesirable and threatening by journeymen tailors.

By the end of the 19th century the Journeymen Tailors' Union (JTU) and the United Garment Workers (UGW) were the principal unions of clothing workers in North America. They had a precarious foothold in the custom sector, and among skilled workers in readymade manufacture.[129] Their commitment to organizing women was uncertain; their interest in — or even knowledge of — the sweated trades was questionable. Bernard Rose, head of the Montréal Journeyman Tailors, testified to the ignorance or indifference of the skilled custom tailors when, in 1901, he "emphatically assert[ed] that there exist[ed] no form of sweating, at least in the clothing industry of Montréal, at the present time."[130] A cutters' local of the UGW supported Montréal clothing manufacturer Mark Workman when an outcry arose in 1899 over his contravention of anti-sweating clauses in army uniform contracts.[131]

Early efforts to organize female needleworkers, such as those made in Toronto in 1889 (by the Knights of Labor) and in 1897, 1899 and 1900 (by the Journeymen Tailors), proved abortive.[132] It was not until the great industrial unions in ladies' wear, the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, and in men's wear, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, embarked on vigorous organizational efforts after the turn of this century that garment unions enjoyed some success in (re)establishing industrial standards.[133]

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began to put out pants (Wright Commission, 42-3); a strike in 1912 against Toronto cloakmakers (*Labour Gazette*, February 1912, 784); and another Toronto strike against subcontracting in 1914 (*Labour Gazette*, June 1914, 1462).

[127]Steedman, 165.

[128]See, for instance, Rouillard, 256; Piva, 18; John Hample, "Workplace Conflict in Winnipeg's Custom Tailoring Trade, c.1887-1921," *Manitoba History*, No. 22 (Autumn 1991), esp. 6.

[129]The Journeymen Tailors' Union of America, based in custom tailoring, arrived in Canada in 1889. It numbered only 300 in 1898. The United Garment Workers of America arrived in 1894 and focused its organizational efforts among cutters and trimmers. It peaked in strength between 1912 and 1915, when 3000 workers were organized in 24 locals. Forsey, 261, 266; Harold Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948), 208.

[130]*Canadian Journal of Fabrics*, XVIII, No. 4 (April 1901), 120.

[131]*Montreal Herald*, 3 August 1899, 1.

[132]See Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 183; Wayne Roberts, *Honest Womanhood: Feminism, Femininity and Class Consciousness Among Toronto Working Women 1893 to 1914* (Toronto 1976), 38. The JTU had organized at least some women in Winnipeg as early as 1892. See Hample, 5, 13.

[133]Logan, 210-4.

Frustrations encountered by male trade unionists in organizing women made state intervention more attractive.[134] The Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) expressed its concern respecting sweatshops from its founding conference in 1883.[135] Between 1887 and 1895 a resolution in favour of the prevailing (later union) wage on all public contracts was passed annually. In 1893, a resolution calling for the abolition of the sweating system was passed. In 1895 came a successful request for a royal commission to enquire into sweating.[136]

Certainly, collective organization on the part of sweated workers was difficult. Physically isolated, homeworkers were not necessarily acquainted with each other, even those working for the same employer. Homework pit worker against worker, as they bid against each other for work. The sweating system also held out the lure of status as an employer, which discouraged the growth of a collective sense of grievance. In contract shops, ethnic differences divided needleworkers, particularly after the turn of this century when the Jewish presence in the needle trades increased rapidly in Toronto and Montréal. The regular seasonal downturns in the clothing trades also hampered organization. Often, needleworkers were so destitute that a strike immediately meant hunger. Their low level of skill (or rather, their possession of commonly-held skills) meant that any strike would be followed by an invasion of replacements. Women faced special challenges in juggling union activity with domestic responsibilities.[137]

Although sweated workers were unlikely to end sweating unassisted, individual acts of resistance occurred. Phillips Thompson offered one example in 1900:

> a poor woman took [legal] action against her employer for her wages. She was promised twenty-five cents per dozen for making boys' pants and the money was withheld on the ground that the work was not well done.[138]

There almost were certainly others, although rare and poorly documented. The sweated seamstress, while not entirely incapable of acting to limit the extent of her exploitation, was ultimately largely dependent on the actions of others.[139]

[134]This was also the experience of the 'new unionists' in Great Britain, who had approached the organization of women workers with enthusiasm. Their inability to organize women led them to support the push for protective legislation. Morris, 123.

[135]Labour Canada Library, Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Annual Proceedings*, 1883, 22.

[136]Forsey, 456.

[137]Many of these points are made by Arthur St. Pierre, "Sweating System et Salaire minimum," in his *Le Problème social: Quelques Éléments de Solution* (Montréal 1925), 38. See also Morris, Chapter IV; Frager, 98-107.

[138]Cited in Piva, 96.

[139]On the question of agency, see R.B. Goheen, "Peasant Politics? Village Community and the Crown in Fifteenth-Century England," *American Historical Review*, 96 (February 1991), 42-62, esp. 60-2.

The Middle Class and Sweating

MIDDLE-CLASS efforts to address the problem of sweating were often spearheaded by women's organizations. In facing the problem, Canadian women had a number of American and English models. Three general ways of dealing with sweating were advocated: the organization of sweated outworkers, agitation for protective legislation, and consumer pressure (discriminatory purchasing).[140] These suggestions were not exclusive to the middle class — trade unions at various times advocated similar tactics. Underlying most calls for reform were two convictions: first, that the worker — despite the logic of the capitalist wage market — was entitled to live by his or her work. The second reflected patriarchal unease about women, particularly those with young children, who worked for wages.[141]

Canadian middle-class concern failed to produce organizations comparable to the Women's Trade Union Leagues in the United States and the United Kingdom.[142] The National Council of Women of Canada, which dedicated itself to the advancement of Canadian women (and which, nationally and locally, often demonstrated concern for working women) said of sweating in 1901: "Canada has little or no trouble with this irregular system of manufacture."[143] Ruth Frager has remarked on the gap between early 20th-century Canadian women reformers and the concerns of working-class women, "especially where ethnic differences reinforced class differences."[144] Any local antisweating organizations formed rested heavily on the efforts of a handful of individuals and tended to be short-lived.[145] Only with the rise of the Social Gospel movement after 1900 did the Canadian middle class develop organizations committed to a comprehensive range of social reforms.[146]

[140]"[M]ore effectual than law," said Mackenzie King of discriminatory purchasing and the union label in 1897. He later changed his mind. *Daily Mail and Empire*, 10 October 1897, 10.

[141]On these points, see Morris, Chap. v, and Eileen Boris, "Regulating Industrial Homework: The Triumph of 'Sacred Motherhood'," *The Journal of American History*, 71 (March 1985), 745-63.

[142]On abortive efforts to form a Canadian WTUL in 1917-18, see Frager, 140-1.

[143]National Council of Women of Canada, *Women of Canada* (Montréal 1901), 105.

[144]Frager, 148. On the other hand, Nellie McClung claimed to have taken Premier Rodmond Roblin through the sweatshops of Winnipeg in 1913 as part of her campaign for the appointment of a female factory inspector in Manitoba. See Nellie L. McClung, *The Stream Runs Fast: My Own Story* (Toronto 1965), 101-6.

[145]In Toronto, the Working Women's Protective Association was organized in 1893 under the dynamic leadership of Marie Joussaye. During its brief lifetime it pushed for better conditions for female workers; Roberts, 42-3. Helena Rose Gutteridge was active in Vancouver after 1911 in organizing working women and lobbying for protective legislation. Alison Prentice *et al.*, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto 1988), 200-1.

[146]Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto 1973).

Until that time, middle-class response to sweating in Canada remained individual and episodic rather than organized and sustained. Concern was often expressed in the popular press. A Toronto journalist, for instance, wrote in 1869 of a widow

> supported by her daughter, who provides food for both, by making pants at 15 cents a pair. Let the young gentlemen who adorn King street of an afternoon, and the old gentlemen who rattle their silver in their pockets, seriously reflect on that fact.[147]

By the 1890s sweating was clearly on journalists' agenda. The Montréal *Herald* was among those newspapers which followed the sweating 'question' closely. It exposed in 1897 the 75- to 80-hour work weeks in "old dark tenements" needleworkers faced.

> Occupied as they are from early morning until night, they have little time, even if they had the inclination, to give a thought to the sanitary condition of their surroundings, which are often simply vile. The combination living-room and workshop offers one of the saddest spectacles which can be sought by any humanly disposed person, who seeks light on the subject of human misery.[148]

The *Herald* endorsed in 1899 a fair wage resolution by the federal government, hoping that this measure would close the opportunities offered to "unscrupulous contractors of making large profits whilst paying starvation wages" and describing the consequences of sweating as "impaired health and a permanently broken system."[149] The *Herald* also reported the Montréal Federated Trades Council's call for the abolition of sweating, deploring that "little children of our city, who should be attending school, were being destroyed in the sweat shops."[150]

Fears about public (middle-class) health helped provoke wider concern about the sweated needle trades. Infected clothing was known to spread contagious disease, including scarlatina, diphtheria, and most ominously, smallpox. During the 1885 smallpox epidemic, for instance, many retailers boycotted goods produced in Montréal; Ontario provincial authorities insisted on inspecting and certifying readymade clothing from Montréal.[151] Individuals appalled by the plight of needle workers saw this fear as a means to mobilize action against the practice of sweated clothing production. James Mitchell raised this worry in the first mention of sweating by a Québec factory inspector, in 1893.[152]

[147] *Globe*, 26 January 1869, cited in Cross, 194.
[148] *Montreal Herald*, 3 February 1897, cited in Rome, 39-40.
[149] *Montreal Herald*, 2 August 1899, 2, 4.
[150] *Montreal Herald*, 4 August 1899, 8.
[151] Michael Bliss, *Plague: A Story of Smallpox in Montreal* (Toronto 1991), 119, 142.
[152] Quebec Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1893, 111; see also 1901, 166. Such concerns are echoed by A.W. Wright and Mackenzie King. See Wright Commission, 12; King Commission, 28-9; *Globe*, 19 November 1890.

Governments and Sweating

THE FEDERAL ROYAL COMMISSION ON SWEATING was appointed in autumn 1895, largely at the prodding of the Trades and Labour Congress. It was chaired by A.W. Wright, a man of broad loyalties. An erstwhile Knights of Labor stalwart, Wright had recently edited the Canadian Manufacturers' Association's *Industrial Canada*. The Canadian decision to appoint a royal commission followed major public inquiries into sweating in the United Kingdom and in the United States during the previous decade.[153]

Wright made a number of recommendations, but the federal government failed to act on any of them. An impending election may have distracted its attention. Charles Tupper pleaded "the pressure of other business."[154] In any case, clear jurisdictional problems (most of Wright's recommendations were clearly within the purview of the provinces) invariably would have produced delays.[155]

The catalyst for federal action was William Lyon Mackenzie King. He had spent winter 1896-97 doing graduate work at the University of Chicago and living at Hull House, one of North America's earliest settlement houses. There, King was first impressed by the extent of the sweated trades. Returning to Toronto the following summer, King found work as a journalist for the *Mail and Empire*, and canvassed Toronto in search of sweated workers.[156]

King soon found them, including "a poor old crippled woman who sewed night and day."[157] He discovered that many of the homeworkers with whom he was brought into contact were making letter carriers' uniforms. Years later, he described his response:

[153]In the United Kingdom, John Burnett conducted a major investigation into sweating in London's East End for the Board of Trade in 1887. This was followed by the striking of the 'Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Sweating System,' which issued five lengthy reports between 1888 and 1890. In the United States, the House of Representatives' Committee on Manufactures published its *Report on the Sweating System* in 1893.

[154]House of Commons, *Debates*, 1 April 1896, 5052.

[155]Most radically, Wright called for the extension of the factory acts to households "in which more than the husband and wife are employed and in which articles of any kind intended for sale are being manufactured." He further called for national standards of factory legislation. Wright also recommended that manufacturers be obliged to give factory inspectors the names and addresses of all individuals to whom work was subcontracted. Further recommendations called for protection at law for (the often unpaid) 'learners,' wholesalers' responsibility for the wages of (sub)contractors' employees, the labeling of 'home-produced' goods (to invite consumers to pass judgement), and the licensing of dwellings (licenses were only to be granted if dwellings met certain standards of hygiene). The latter two recommendations were already law in certain American states. (Wright Commission, 17-9)

[156]William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Industry and Humanity: A Study in the Principles Underlying Industrial Reconstruction* (Toronto 1973 [1918]), 54-5.

[157]NAC, King Diaries, MG 26, J 13, 18 September 1897.

> On questioning one of the workers as to the remuneration she was receiving for sewing machine and hand work, I found that it came to a very few cents an hour. I shall never forget the feeling of pained surprise and indignation I experienced as I learned of the extent of that woman's toil from early morning till late at night, and figured out the pittance she received.

King was further astounded to discover that this homeworker was employed by no fly-by-night subcontractor: "the contracting firm was one of high repute in the city." "As I visited other homes and shops," King continued, "I found the condition of this woman's employment to be in no sense isolated, but all too common."[158] King published his discoveries in a series of newspaper articles.[159]

Mackenzie King proceeded to parlay his family's acquaintance with Postmaster General William Mulock into an appointment as a one-man commission to enquire into the conditions under which government clothing contracts were filled.[160] In his report, first published in 1898, King argued that prices were "quite disproportionate to the amount of work done" and "insufficient to constitute a living wage" for both homeworkers and needleworkers employed in the subcontractor's residence. This intensified pressure to increase the length of the working day, which might extend to 15 hours or more. Sanitary conditions were "frequently foul and noisome."[161] In short, King was able to confirm that "the 'sweating system', with other objectionable conditions, has accompanied for many years the manufacture of uniforms [for the post office, the militia, and the Mounted Police]."[162]

King closed the report with a warning: that sweating led women to neglect their children and "the duties of the home." He emphasized "[t]he home is still the nursery of the nation."[163] Threats to the home, it was King's conviction, constituted threats to the nation.

Even before the publication of King's report Mulock had acted. He appears to have been genuinely outraged by King's disclosures to him. "Work performed at less than living prices is almost certain to be done under conditions unfavorable to good morals, health or comfort." He required that when the Post Office let contracts, a number of conditions were to be imposed.[164] Subsequently, in March 1900, Mulock introduced 'The Fair Wages Resolution' in the House of Commons. This was designed to secure to workers on government contract work a level of

[158]King, *Industry and Humanity*, 55-6.

[159]The first of these was "Toronto and the Sweating System," published in the *Mail and Empire* on 9 October 1897.

[160]King, *Industry and Humanity*, 56.

[161]King Commission, 21-6.

[162]*Ibid.*, 5.

[163]*Ibid.*, 28.

[164]Most importantly, subcontracting was banned (unless special permission was granted by the government, work was to be carried out on the contractor's own premises) and current wages were to be paid. If these conditions were not observed, contracts might be cancelled and/or the contractor fined. *Globe*, 30 September 1897.

wage generally accepted as current in the locality where the work was carried out.[165] Daniel J. O'Donoghue capped his career as a printer, workingman's advocate, and friend to the Liberal party when he was appointed the Dominion's first Fair Wages Officer in March 1900, charged with the preparation and enforcement of fair wage schedules. In the battle against sweated labour, the federal government would act as a model employer.[166]

Both Wright and King had recognized the limits to the federal government's power of action. Wright was explicit about jurisdictional problems; King was unable to offer specific recommendations to the federal government, limiting himself instead to the claim that there existed "sufficient grounds for government interference in order that future contracts may be performed in a manner free from all such objectionable features."[167] These federal commissions made clear that in future, the key legislative action against sweating was to be taken by the provinces.

Ontario and Québec, the major sites of sweating, both had passed Factory Acts during the 1880s. Factory inspectors found the needle trades particularly vexing, The conditions they encountered were deplorable and inspectors realized that the prevalence of outwork meant that there was much they failed to see. Moreover, the factory acts did not apply to many of the contexts of sweated labour, something subcontractors were well aware of. Louisa King recounted her frustrations in Québec in 1898 when she requested subcontractors to provide her with the addresses of homeworkers: "ils m'ont presque toujours répondu que leur ouvrage était fait dans les ateliers de famille sur lesquels l'inspecteur n'a point de contrôle."[168]

[165]House of Commons, *Debates*, 22 March 1900, 2466. Two and one-half years' delay indicates Mulock likely had difficulty convincing his cabinet colleagues of such a resolution. One member of the opposition declared that the resolution was simply a sop to the TLC by a government embarrassed by non-enforcement of the Alien Labour Act (2490-1). The Fair Wages Resolution formally passed on 17 July 1900 (10495-10502). The resolution did not have legal force until 1930, when the Fair Wages and Eight-Hour Day Act was passed. (21-22 Geo. V, Chap. 20, *Statutes of Canada*, 1930.)

[166]Doris French, *Faith, Sweat, and Politics: The Early Trade Union Years in Canada* (Toronto 1962), 132. These schedules, most commonly pertaining to public works such as wharves and post offices, regular appear in the pages of the *Labour Gazette*. See, for instance, the issue for September 1900, 15-27. For clothing contracts, see *Labour Gazette*, October 1904, 505.

[167]King Commission, 31.

[168]Quebec Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1898, 80. When first passed, the factory acts of Québec and Ontario only applied to establishments employing more than twenty workers. Although Québec dropped this clause in 1888, it continued to exempt homework. In Ontario, although amendments in 1889 brought all establishments with at least five workers under the purview of the factory act, many contractors' shops escaped regulation because of their modest size. (See *Statutes of Quebec*, 1885, Chap. 32, "An Act to Protect the Life and Health of Persons Employed In Factories"; the Act was amended in 1888 (Chap. 49). *Statutes of*

Factory inspectors were well aware of the inadequacies of the legislation they were charged to enforce.

> While factory legislation tends to purify and improve the factories, it does so at an increased expenditure to the factory owners, while these other places [i.e. smaller shops and homes, outside the purview of the Factory Acts] are not subject to any such expense."[169]

Factory Acts, by stipulating basic labour standards, could only encourage manufacturers in their use of the small contract shops and homework which exhibited the most oppressive working conditions. Joseph Lessard told the Montréal *Herald* in 1897 that taxation and sanitary regulations were necessary "to force the workers out of tenements and into shop buildings, where they would be subject to the control and protection of Provincial legislation."[170] Margaret Carlyle echoed his proposal that same year, urging legislators to "drive [needleworkers] from the wretched places in which they now labor into well regulated factories and workshops."[171]

Following repeated requests by its factory inspectors, Ontario took a step towards tightening restrictions on sweating by amending its Shops Regulation Act in 1900. In future, every individual contracting out clothing was to keep a register of the names and addresses of individuals given work. Each article of clothing was to be labelled with the name of the individual who made it.[172] This legislation helped factory inspectors to locate homeworkers (and workers employed in small contractors' shops). It was, though, no solution to sweating. A legislative means to end sweating had to address the question of wages.

The first step in this direction took the form of resolutions on government purchasing policy. The federal government, as we have seen, was including fair wage clauses in some of its contracts from 1897 and passed its Fair Wage Resolution in 1900. Other governments followed. Ontario passed its Fair Wage Resolution in 1900 also.[173] In the United Kingdom, many municipal councils began

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Ontario, 1884, Chap. 39, "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories"; 1889, Chap. 43, "An Act to Amend the Ontario Factories Act.")

[169]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1899, 26-7.

[170]*Montreal Herald*, 3 February 1897. British Fabians had long advocated the development of "large and healthy factories." See, for instance, Beatrice Potter, *How Best to do away with the Sweating System* (Manchester 1892), 12.

[171]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1897, 24.

[172]*Statutes of Ontario*, 1900, Chap. 43, "An Act to amend The Ontario Shops Regulation Act." The Act also stipulated that all dwellings where clothing was manufactured were to be certified by a health inspector, who was to set limits on the number of people to be employed on the premises. This certification was revocable at any time in the event that sanitary standards were not maintained.

[173]*Labour Gazette*, September 1900, 25-26. The western provinces did not pass similar resolutions until World War One. See Bob Russell, "A Fair or Minimum Wage? Women Workers, the State, and the Origins of Wage Regulation in Western Canada," *Labour/Le*

to add fair wage clauses to their contracts in the 1890s.[174] In 1901, the Ottawa city council agreed to the request of its Allied Trades and Labour Association that it insist on the union label where possible in its purchases.[175] Workers soon discovered however that these resolutions, if inconvenient, were easily overlooked by both governments and contractors.[176]

The End Of Sweating?

RECENT ACCOUNTS of garment workers in the United Kingdom have highlighted Parliament as the principal agent in ending sweated labour. Jenny Morris focused her study on the genesis of the Trades Boards Act of 1909.[177] James Schmiechen also closed his account of sweated labour with a discussion of this legislation, noting that in the years immediately subsequent to this act wages in the garment trades increased considerably.[178] Trades Boards, Schmiechen argued, led to "the elimination of sweated homework."[179]

Between 1917 and 1925, most Canadian provinces passed female minimum wage legislation and established minimum wage boards. Ostensibly, this action represented a key advance over the Trades Boards established in the United Kingdom, insofar as the cost of living of a single woman was to determine the minimum wage. In the United Kingdom, in contrast, the minimum wage was set on the basis of the industry's ability to pay.[180]

Travail, 28 (Fall 1991), 72. It was only in 1936 that Ontario gave its Fair Wage Resolution teeth by requiring by law minimum labour standards on its contracts. See *Statutes of Ontario*, 1936, Chap. 26, "The Government Contracts Hours and Wages Act, 1936."

[174]Morris, 130.

[175]It is unclear whether the Ottawa council had the courage of its convictions. On the first contract to be tendered after the adoption of this policy, for firemen's clothing, the sole bidder offered uniforms at $21-22 with the label, and at $16.95 without. See the *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 May 1901, 2.

[176]The federal government was less than diligent in enforcing the antisweating clauses in its contracts. In the affair of the large clothing contract awarded Montréal manufacturer Mark Workman in 1898-99, Laurier's government winked at Workman's failure to observe antisweating clauses. See the House of Commons *Debates* for 1 August 1899. It was to have been applied to railway contracts. (*Debates*, 22 March 1900, 2471). Railway navvies would have been surprised to have been informed of this.

[177]Morris credits progressive employers like the Cadburys for the passage of key antisweating legislation in England. The Trade Boards Act, she argues, reflected "the concern of one section of the ruling class with the maintenance of the existing social order and their recognition of the harmful effect of sweated labour on social stability." Morris, 225.

[178]Schmiechen, 174-9.

[179]*Ibid.*, 179.

[180]Margaret E. McCallum, "Keeping Women in Their Place: The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910-25," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 29-56.

Yet the Canadian minimum wage acts, on account of three major limitations, were inadequate means to end sweating. First, when initially passed, they did not apply to homeworkers.[181] Second, the legislation was filled with loopholes, exempting numerous categories of female workers from its provisions.[182] Third, the onus was placed on workers to lodge complaints against employers, an action hardly likely in light of the opportunities employers had for retribution. Consequently, minimum wage legislation was both limited in scope and difficult to enforce. The Royal Commission on Price Spreads reported in 1935 that minimum wage acts were "quite inadequate" and that violations were "frequent and continuous."[183] No account of the decline of sweating in Canada, however brief, can rest very heavily on minimum wage legislation.[184]

To account for sweating's decline, a variety of causes must be identified. It is useful in facing this question to distinguish between circumstances in Ontario and in Québec, or, more specifically, between the dominant centres of clothing production, Toronto and Montréal.

In Toronto, sweating's decline after the turn of this century was closely linked with a movement on the part of clothing manufacturers toward the use of the factory for clothing production. Factories allowed for quicker production time and better coordination of the various stages of manufacture. They were also considered to produce a better quality of garment.[185]

As early as 1904, Margaret Carlyle noted "a tendency [in Toronto] to move out of the tenement houses into factories."[186] Between 1901 and 1921, the Toronto garment trades came to be dominated by a few large firms (Eaton's predominant among them), manufacturing in factories, and accounting for over two-thirds of the total value of clothing produced in the city.[187] Michael Piva has identified the 1910s

[181]Only in 1940 did amendments to the Quebec Minimum Wage Act extend its provisions to homeworkers. *Statutes of Quebec*, 1940, Chap. 39. And only in 1968 did Ontario bring homeworkers under the purview of its minimum wage legislation in "The Employment Standards Act, 1968," *Statutes of Ontario*, 1968, Chap. 35.

[182]In Ontario, for instance, a certain proportion of workers in a given establishment were exempted as inexperienced and a certain proportion if under eighteen years of age. Only 80 per cent of pieceworkers in a shop or factory had to be paid the legal minimum wage. Special permits for exemptions were given in the case of elderly or handicapped workers. McCallum, 46.

[183]Royal Commission on Price Spreads, *Report* (Ottawa 1935), 129, 111.

[184]This conclusion is in line with recent interpretations of minimum wage legislation in France, which was applied specifically to homeworkers in 1915. It had little impact. See Coons, 305.

[185]See Teal, 205-7.

[186]Ontario Factory Inspector's *Report*, 1904, 33.

[187]Daniel Joseph Hiebert, *The Geography of Jewish Immigrants and the Garment Industry in Toronto, 1901-1931: A Study of Ethnic and Class Relations*, PhD, University of Toronto, 1987), 203. On Toronto factories and inside work, see Scott and Cassidy, 11-2.

as the pivotal decade. During these ten years the ratio of needleworkers employed in homes or small shops (i.e. dressmakers, tailors) to those employed in factories (as operatives) plummeted from 3.58 to 1 in 1911 to .53 to 1 in 1921. These figures reflect, Piva argued, "the rapid advance of the factory system and the decline of subcontracting."[188] Home work consequently diminished, although it never died out entirely.[189]

The extremely low pay, long hours, and poor working conditions associated with sweated labour were not as evident in the factory as they were in the home or small contractor's shop. A.W. Wright reported that the factory was the favoured workplace among female garment workers.[190] Work was more regular; pay was higher. On the whole, conditions of work were superior, in part because workers in factories benefitted from the minimum protection offered by the Factory Acts. In addition, factory workers were more easily organized, although employers resisted collective bargaining fiercely.[191]

In Montréal, in contrast, the factory (and inside manufacture) failed to emerge at the turn of the century. Presumably its relative cost advantages were not as clear: wages in the Québec garment trades were traditionally lower than in Ontario.[192] Into the 1930s subcontracting, the contract shop and homework remained prominent features of the Montréal garment trades.[193] The Royal Commission on Price Spreads observed in 1935 that in certain sectors of the Québec clothing industry, conditions were "altogether deplorable."[194]

The onus in Québec was consequently placed far more on trade unions to bring work inside. In this task large industrial unions such as the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America met with some success. By the end of the 1930s, Mercedes Steedman has argued, these unions "had managed to limit the use of contractors and homeworkers."[195] Union activity contributed greatly to the development of industrial standards in both Ontario and Québec. Unions were aided in this task by legislation passed by both Ontario and Québec in the course of the decade. Industrial standards acts allowed

[188]Piva, 18-20.

[189]On the persistence of homework, see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Working Women in the 1920s," *Labour/Le Travailleur* (1979), 131-64.

[190]Wright Commission, 8.

[191]See Ruth Frager, "Sewing Solidarity: The Eaton's Strike of 1912," *Canadian Women's Studies/Les cahiers de la femme*, 7 (Fall 1986), 96-8.

[192]Mackenzie King pointed this out in 1898. (King Commission, 20.) In June 1909, the Jewish *Eagle* estimated that garment workers in Toronto earned $15-16 for a 49 hour week. In Montréal, workers laboured 55-60 hours for $11. (Cited in David Rome, ed., *On Our Forerunners — At Work. Epilogue. Notes on the Twentieth Century*, New Series, No. 10 (Montréal 1978), 130.) See also Royal Commission on Price Spreads, 367, Table 33.

[193]Scott and Cassidy, 30.

[194]Royal Commission on Price Spreads, 112.

[195]Steedman, 168. See also Logan, Chapter IX; and Frager, *passim*.

workers and employers representing "a preponderant group in each industry" to negotiate minimum standards of wages and hours of labour. The provincial government was empowered to impose these standards on the industry as a whole. Given the weaknesses of minimum wage legislation, Harold Logan noted, these acts were "of considerable importance."[196]

The rise of sweating, it has been argued here, was conditioned by the structured inequalities of class and gender. Sweating emerged with the growth of the readymade clothing industry over the 19th century. The capitalist imperative to reduce production costs in the context of a highly-competitive clothing market, in tandem with the patriarchal marginalization of women's productive labour, produced the ruthless exploitation of countless thousands of working women described here.

Class and gender also shaped responses to sweating. The Social welfare programs initiated on women's behalf — and largely without their participation — were inconsequential. The impact of protective legislation such as Factory Acts, Minimum Wage Acts and Fair Wage Acts, was slight. Only with Industrial Standards Acts did legislation begin to acquire some teeth. Sweating's decline is primarily due to factors apart from state intervention. In Ontario, capitalist calculation of profit led to the movement of the workplace from the homes and very small shops where sweating thrived to larger workplaces, including the factory, where trade unions were to enjoy some success in enforcing minimum standards of employment. In Québec, where the movement to factory production was less pronounced, the onus to fight sweating fell more heavily on unions. In both provinces trade unions enjoyed some success between the wars in eliminating the most egregious aspects of sweating.[197]

Epilogue

THESE CURBS AGAINST SWEATING were only provisional. Today, the legal, regulatory and administrative regime continues to tolerate sweated homework while unions in the garment trades have weakened in their ability to enforce industrial standards. Homework has rapidly re-emerged over the last two decades, especially in Québec.[198]

[196]Logan, 220-1. See *Statutes of Quebec*, 1934, Chap. 56, "Collective Agreements Extension Act" and *Statutes of Ontario*, 1935, Chap. 28 "Industrial Standards Act." In Ontario, this legislation required homeworkers and their employers to obtain permits for their labour.

[197]At the same time, it must be stressed, unions often enshrined in contract discriminatory practises with respect to women. See Steedman, 167; Frager, 125-6.

[198]Michel Grant et Ruth Rose, "L'encadrement du travail à domicile dans l'industrie du vêtement au Québec," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 40 (1985), 473-92; Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women in the Clothing Trades: Homework and the 1983 Garment Strike in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy*, 22 (Spring, 1987), 41-71. See also Johnson, *op. cit.* The *Globe and Mail* (2 October 1992, 1, 8) carried a report very recently

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of sweating's persistence, which estimated that there are now 4000 home garment workers in Ontario alone. "What's an Alfred Sung jacket that sells for $375 worth to the person who actually stitched it together? [The *Globe and Mail* informs us:] A grand total of $4."