Labour/Le Travailleur

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Volume 39, 1997

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt39re01

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Wells, D. (1997). "From Fordist Worker Resistance to Post-Fordist Capitalist Hegemony?". *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *39*, 241–260.

REVIEW ESSAYS / NOTES CRITIQUES

"From Fordist Worker Resistance to Post-Fordist Capitalist Hegemony?"

Don Wells

Bryan Palmer, *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry: The Goodyear Invasion of Napanee* (Toronto: Between the Lines 1994).
David Sobel and Susan Meurer, *Working at Inglis: The Life and Death of a Canadian Factory* (Toronto: Lorimer 1994).

THE THIRD INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION is upon us. It is now increasingly clear that capitalist control of new information technologies is destroying the Fordist balance of power between corporations, states, and civil society that was created after World War II in most advanced market economies. At the heart of today's more profound subordination of politics and society to market forces lie new, technologically facilitated, "flexible" production concepts. Harbingers of the "end of work" for many, and of accelerating work intensification for most of the rest, the new cybernetics and its symbiotic partner, the "soft technology" of flexible work organization, are re-engineering a catastrophic collapse of worker power and solidarity. In this context, capitalism is becoming "disorganized."[1] Worker strug-

[1]Analysts such as Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Madison 1987) and Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics* (Cambridge 1985) argue that capitalism "organized" by state and corporate

Don Wells, "From Fordist Worker Resistance to Post-Fordist Capitalist Hegemony," *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), 241-60.

gles are becoming increasingly disaggregated and decentred. As a result, the workplace is now, much more than before, the critical site for mobilizing workers' "consent" to management control. A more decentralized politics of production is becoming the main arena in which emergent post-Fordist capitalism is reproducing itself. It is also clear that these post-Fordist production relations are being nurtured by a unitarist ideology of competitiveness. Allied to the "lean and mean" politics of debt and deficits, and neo-liberal "free" trade arrangements, this "we're-all-in-the-same-boat" ideology is being promulgated by an elite consensus.[2] For most workers this ideology has its strongest purchase in the concrete, day-to-day worlds of work itself. If a new post-Fordist hegemony is to be fashioned out of the restructuring of workers' understandings of their own identities, it will need to be anchored in production relations. For this reason, the Third Industrial Revolution is as much about the politics of workplace culture as it is about rapid technological change and the regionalization/globalization of capital.

A quarter of a century ago, British sociologist Michael Mann concluded that postwar Fordist hegemony was stabilized not so much because of workers' adherence to a dominant ideology but because workers had been subjected to a process of mass ideological confusion. Schools and the mass media do not change values, he argued, but rather tend to "perpetuate values that do not aid the working class to interpret the reality it actually experiences."[3] This ideological confusion and its corollaries, a lack of coherent politics and a weakening of working-class identities, are central to the formation of working-class "consent" outside the workplace, through schooling,[4] television,[5] and advertising,[6] and other arenas of socialization. By contrast, today's triumphalist, end-of-history, neo-liberalism is boldly explicit in redefining a "common sense" ideology that is aimed directly at workers in "their" workplace. Almost everywhere managers exhort workers to join the "team," become "partners" with management, and subordinate their personal and collective interests to their firm's "competitiveness" in a Hobbesian war of all (capitals) against all.

And yet, at the same time, employers and state elites, particularly in the Anglo-American regimes, have been carrying out a systematic attack on workers

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administrators is giving way to a spatial dispersion and functional fragmentation of capitalism that is "disorganized."

[2]For a critique of the applicability of zero-sum "competitiveness" concepts to international trade, see Paul Krugman, "Competitiveness: A Dangerous Obsession," *Foreign Affairs* (March-April 1994), 28-44.

[3]Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," *American Sociological Review*, 35 (1970), 437.

[4]Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Farnborough 1977).

[5]Gerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York 1978).

[6]Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York 1976).

and their institutions. In the face of today's massive employer and state offensive, including policies of high unemployment, reduced worker rights, and cuts in the social wage, how is working-class "consent" possible? How can we reconcile a putative decline in class politics in the midst of such class war? How can post-Fordist capitalism maintain *ideological* sway over workers under these conditions?

The two books under review provide uncannily complementary perspectives on the nature of worker resistance under Fordism and emerging post-Fordism. Both focus primarily on the most consequential and complex arenas of class conflict and accommodation: the workplace and its neighbourhood. Between them, they provide an understanding of how the interplay of worker resistance and management control helped to shape Fordist stability. More than this, they provide insights, some of them powerful and original, into how such relations are being transformed under the Third Industrial Revolution.

Working at Inglis, by labour historian David Sobel and workplace health and safety expert and playwright, Susan Meurer, is a hundred year history of the creation and destruction of a worker "culture of defiance" at an engineering and white goods plant and its surrounding neighbourhood in Toronto. The second book, *Capitalism Comes to the Back Country*, by labour historian Bryan Palmer, is about a large multinational tire corporation's ongoing attempt to bolster control of its production process by creating a mythology of benevolent, quasi-feudal reciprocity in Napanee, a "backcountry" town in eastern Ontario. By analyzing the changing balance of class forces in the workplace and the community, these books pose a most significant question: what do the decline of Fordism and the rise of "disorganized" forms of capitalism mean for the future of class politics?

Sobel and Meurer's *Working at Inglis* concerns the history of one plant, from its inception in 1881 as a craft-based manufacturing concern, through its rise as a unionized producer of consumer durables, to its demise in 1989. More orthodox labour histories tend to be written from a bird's-eye perspective that privileges union elites and the historiographic sources that speak for them: formal union policies, labour laws, collective agreements, media reports, minutes of meetings, correspondence, biographies, and other written sources. Too often the result is labour history that marginalizes workers. Rank-and-file struggles at the point of production are neglected in favour of major strikes and contract bargaining dominated by union leaders outside the workplace. Sobel and Meurer avoid such elitist labour history. They achieve a much deeper understanding of working-class politics by not only focusing on one plant, one union local, and one neighbourhood, but also by keeping workers themselves, and the day-to-day politics of production and neighbourhood, at the heart of their analysis. They have given us a social history of labour that reflects "that invisible contribution to the collective biography usually reserved for kings, millionaires and generals." Sobel and Meurer have also written a participatory collective biography. Thanks to reliance on oral history and on the ample use of photographs, cartoons, notices, letters, and other documents

that the Inglis workers themselves created, these workers' own views and experiences are much in evidence. Sobel and Meurer have listened to many Inglis workers and written about what they heard, making it possible for the Inglis workers to contribute to the writing of their own history.

The main theme of *Working at Inglis* is the making and unmaking of a class culture centred on work and neighbourhood. Much of that culture was shaped by struggles over the control of production. As the authors show in some detail, these were contests not only between labour and capital, but also among managerial factions and among worker factions. The first phase of these struggles at the point of production developed under the auspices of Macdonald's National Policy, as skilled craft workers made capital goods for Canada's growing, tariff-nurtured manufacturing sector in the late 19th century. According to the authors, unionized craft workers maintained solid control over the labour process at Inglis until the turn of the century. In the firm's development from personal to managerial capitalism, Inglis came to see craft power as the main impediment to management control. As organizational hierarchies grew more complex and labour relations became more impersonal, management control changed from an almost exclusive reliance on hands-on supervision to a more distanced, rationalized, bureaucratic system. The antagonism between management and producers was increasingly manifested in a dynamic workers' "culture of defiance" focused on wage and effort bargains, seniority rights, the length of the working day, and union security. Spurred on by military production demands and technological innovations during World War I, Inglis managers began to employ large numbers of less skilled, lower-waged, non-union workers. Resistance to these changes, by craft workers and their unions, culminated in a failed Toronto-wide strike of metal trades workers in 1919. Sobel and Meurer write that worker militancy did not became insurgent again at Inglis until the 1930s and 1940s.

During World War II, the workforce at Inglis expanded rapidly to meet the accelerating demand for munitions. In the face of formidable employer and state opposition, the craft-oriented International Association of Machinists (IAM) and the CIO's Steelworkers competed to organize the workers. Bent on maintaining union-free industrial relations, Inglis went to great pains to screen new hires for union sympathies, and also employed a network of intelligence agents in the plant. At a time when state elites considered industrial unions to be a threat to national security, both the Mounties and the local police wrote reports for Inglis on union activity.

Sobel and Meurer emphasize employers' use of cultural weapons to undermine worker solidarity. Prominent among these was the Masonic Lodge, a powerful, clandestine men's service organization whose significance for class politics has long been underestimated. Sanctioned by Masonic rites, managers and workers became "brothers." While forging cross-class links, the largely Protestant Masonic Lodge also reinforced powerful class divisions between Catholics and Protestants.

The authors assert that the Masonic network played an influential role in union politics, but they elaborate neither on this nor on the overlap between the Masonic Lodge's reinforcement of religious and ethnic divisions among workers. Although the authors note that the more or less homogeneous Anglo-Celtic workforce became more ethnically diverse after the 1960s, the impact of ethnicity on workplace resistance is given little attention.

In contrast, the authors place great stress on gender divisions. Faced with union organizing drives among its new female employees, management established a "Girls Club" to "build up the correct mental attitude of the women" and to "discover personal grievances." So control-obsessed were Inglis managers, however, that this company alternative to unionism failed to attract most of the women workers. Worker unity was more deeply undermined by the patriarchal prejudices of male workers. As elsewhere during World War II, there was adamant union opposition to the hiring of women for war production. The main rationale, premised on the importance of the male "breadwinner" role, was that unemployed males should have priority in the job queue. There was also fear that women would be used to further dilute craft skills (by the 1930s an estimated three of every four jobs in the weapons industry were semi-skilled or unskilled).

This opposition to hiring women went beyond any rational defence of male workers' immediate material interests. Indeed, it contradicted those interests. While it would have been understandable in terms of immediate material male interests if the union had also opposed management's use of cheaper female labour to undercut male wages, according to Sobel and Meurer union leaders were *pleased* that the women were to be paid less than the lowest paid male. In effect, union leaders exposed males to the downward wage pressure from females in order to protect gendered wage differentials. While the threat of skill dilution from female labour was real enough, no evidence is presented that the union similarly opposed such skill dilution from less skilled male workers. Thus union leaders (and by inference male workers generally) traded class interests for patriarchal privileges. Sobel and Meurer make gender relations pivotal to their history, but management's use of patriarchy to control labour deserves even more attention. In particular, to understand the formation of cross-class gender alliances as a limit on class struggle, the connections between the domestic and waged economies need further analysis. The analysis needs to emphasize the interface between reproduction and production, the role that gender relations in the home and the community played in gendering wage and job structures, and *vice versa*.

Explaining the decline of worker resistance and power at Inglis, the authors give more weight to the class compromise embodied in Canada's postwar Wagner model of industrial relations. It was this compromise, and the kind of bureaucratic unionism it generated, which led to a protracted marginalization of the plant's

"culture of defiance."[7] Sobel and Meurer argue that this ethos of workplace struggle had deep roots in the worker control traditions of craftsmen. Such workplace culture is by its nature largely secretive and informal, and therefore difficult to study. However, the authors provide evidence of its presence at various points in the history of the plant. While conflict between workers and management over control issues was, of course, never entirely eliminated under the postwar compromise, the union channelled much worker resistance into narrow, economistic collective bargaining issues.

The authors' linking of this workplace culture of defiance to a distinction between "traditionalism" and "militancy" is perhaps overdrawn. They root the former in a craft perspective "reflected in perceptions of masculinity, paternalism, and gender-controlled skill." They assert that both traditionalists and militants "reacted with similar anger to management's breaching negotiated rules." However, whereas a "more traditional worker would not tolerate an insult to his sense of dignity and skill," a militant "might react to management's mistreatment as an unacceptable increase in employer power." Yet evidence of the presence of militants and traditionalists as discrete groups is unclear. Rather than defining separate kinds of workers, it seems likely that these two currents, reflecting craft and industrial norms of resistance, coexist to varying degrees in many male industrial workers.

In any event, both currents of this resistance culture increasingly came into conflict with higher levels of the union hierarchy. *Working at Inglis* shows the growing separation between workers and their leaders as the latter became increasingly committed to the maintenance of industrial order as defined by the postwar compromise. The authors make the important point that this was not simply a division between leaders and members but between local leaders and higher levels of the United Steelworkers of America. Some local leaders continued to support work stoppages. Inglis remained a "rogue local" and its large size made it more difficult for the union hierarchy to control. This in turn attracted other militants to the plant, reinforcing the culture of defiance. The authors report that union leaders (and Inglis managers) retaliated with redbaiting. In an interesting aside, they argue that this resistance did not depend on any particular political ideology. Implicitly, the authors minimize the often-inflated claims by both social democrats and Communists that their parties were the main agents of worker politicization during the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, the social democratic/communist rivalry is given short shrift in this study. Instead, they write from a syndicalist perspective which distinguishes *Working at Inglis* from labour histories that privilege party and intellectual elites, and that tends to overestimate their roles in politicizing work-

[7]For an analysis of a similar marginalization of worker resistance, see my "Origins of Canada's Wagner Model of Industrial Relations: The United Auto Workers in Canada and the Suppression of 'Rank and File' Unionism, 1936-1953," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 20 (1995), 193-225.

place struggles. As a result, Sobel and Meurer provide a rare and persuasive worker-centred and workplace-centred perspective on class struggle.

As noted, the authors situate the decline of militancy, including the bureaucratization of unionism, in the context of the displacement of a rank-and-file work-centred class politics after World War II. This rank-and-file culture of resistance had been strengthened by traditional working-class neighbourhoods and male-centred working-class cultural institutions (taverns, sports teams, etc.) that gradually declined as home entertainment grew in significance. Carrying the Inglis story forward to the present, they provide a multifaceted analysis of the decline of working-class power in Canada. Much of this decline is seen through the lens of the marginalization of craft production. Taylorist mass production during and after World War II meant the loss not only of craft skills and identities, but also of a unionism oriented to the labour process. Craft workers had used this brand of unionism to their advantage in their long war against the extension and intensification of management control over the labour process. While Sobel and Meurer's brief for craft unionism as a bulwark against management power is certainly compelling as far as it goes, it needs to be balanced more explicitly against the well-documented exclusivist limits of this kind of unionism. These limits include not only patriarchy (which the authors address well) but also nativism, a related disdain for the less skilled, and a jealous defence of craft boundaries and privileges relative to other workers.

The decline of rank-and-file power in the workplace is also attributed to the spatial and cultural fragmentation of the workforce, to suburbanization, and to the postwar waves of immigrants from different cultures. *Working at Inglis* also emphasizes changes in corporate ownership and strategy as causal factors in the decline of worker power. Implying that its original Canadian owners were more committed to Inglis, Sobel and Meurer cite successive English and US owners for their failure to reinvest in the plant. By the early 1970s, ownership of Inglis had shifted to Whirlpool, an American firm that did not tolerate unions in its plants. Labour-management relations became more hostile, exciting major strikes by the Steelworkers union in the 1970s and early 1980s. As Whirlpool "gradually picked the plant dry," plant managers came to appreciate a convergence between Canadian economic nationalism and their own career interests. In an observation that illustrates the ambiguous class content of Canadian economic nationalism, the authors note that this convergence, together with the union backgrounds of some Inglis plant managers, led to an alliance between local managers and the Steelworkers' against Whirlpool's corporate headquarters in the US.

Nevertheless, in the final analysis the authors distance themselves from a left nationalist interpretation of the decline of Canadian working-class power and the shutdown of the Inglis plant. Pointing to the broad historical processes already mentioned and to contemporary causes such as declining demand for the plant's products, the massive deindustrialization of Ontario, and soaring real estate prices

in Toronto in the 1980s, they conclude that the Canada-US "free trade" agreement did not have a decisive impact on management's 1989 decision to close the plant. Instead, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) "simply provided the plant's owners with an excuse to shut the plant down." Avoidance of the shutdown would have been "a miracle."

This brings us to the politically sensitive issue of the role that worker militancy may have played in the shutdown. The authors argue, not implausibly, that while worker militancy was "also a factor behind the closure," it did not cause Inglis to close the plant. This view is supported by the fact that Inglis also closed another plant near Toronto where labour relations were much less stormy. Yet Sobel and Meurer provide evidence which can lead to a different interpretation. The workers at the Toronto plant were so militant that they "hardly ever signed a contract without a strike." In the 1970s and mid 1980s they won important strikes that helped to lay the basis for later management decisions. The authors report that, according to the local union president, a senior manager "took the 1983 strike as a terrible personal loss" and "wanted to get back [at the union] something terrible." Moreover, the local initially opposed innovations such as the team approach and other concessions. "Without such concessions," they write, "Inglis managers believed they could not recommend that the [Toronto] plant be renovated." On the face of it, then, worker militancy may have played a weightier role in the shutdown than the authors have assigned it. That may have been a major reason why local union leaders adopted a more conciliatory posture by the mid-1980s.

The minimal role the authors also assign to the FTA is not entirely convincing either. The conclusion that the FTA was merely an "excuse" to shut down the plant seems to rest primarily on the views of union leaders. Yet the union was certainly not politically disinterested, given the implications the FTA, and the struggle against it, had for an international union that had long been facing nationalist criticisms both internally and externally. Once again, it is possible to construct a different interpretation on the basis of information the authors themselves provide. In particular, Sobel and Meurer note that the local had "confidential information" that with the FTA looming, Whirlpool (the US owner) had nixed any prospect of a Canadian-designed washing machine. It is unconvincing to argue, as many nationalists have, that the FTA was responsible for most of the shutdowns that took place in Canada after 1989. But this does not mean that the FTA did not hasten and facilitate processes that were already underway, or that in some cases it was not decisive in itself. So complex are the factors impinging on the location of investment that only on the basis of a detailed investigation of Whirlpool's strategy in relation to Inglis can one be confident that the FTA was not more consequential in causing the plant shut down than the authors believe.

Sobel and Meurer's invocation of broad, long-term historical processes underlying the balance of class forces carries with it the implication that more immediate, conjunctural causes, including the role of particular union leaders, were less

significant in determining events such as the shutdown of the plant. The authors seem to suggest that there was little the local union at Inglis could do, but that the international union leadership and the Canadian labour movement as a whole could have been more effective. According to one local leader, and contrary to (due to?) its earlier militancy, by the mid 1980s the Inglis union local was working "behind closed doors" with local managers to such an extent that the members, had they known, would have thought that their leaders were selling out. By this time the Steelworkers, like many other unions, were embarked on a conciliatory industrial relations path that precluded militant mobilization. *Working at Inglis* includes excerpts from a letter sent by an Inglis worker to the leader of the Steelworkers in Canada:

> ... there is no concerted effort to mobilize the forces of all unions to combat the continuous plant closures .... We are all standing by watching, while one plant after another closes and [we are attempting] to negotiate a plant closure contract, that will only assist the workers in a short term basis .... It is about time that National Unions stop sitting on their hands, get up off their asses and start mobilizing the workers for a concerted effort in protesting the actions and attitudes of our present day government.

In highlighting the failure of union leaders to mobilize their members in the face of devastating shutdowns in the 1980s, the letter touches on the signal weakness in the structure of unionism that the authors doubtless understand but do not sufficiently integrate into their analysis. Like its federal political system, Canada's industrial relations system balkanizes working-class politics. It is commonly accepted that the industrial relations system which grew out of the postwar compromise forces struggles around common class interests to be fought out local by local and union by union. This fragmentation of potential collective power almost always leaves management with the upper hand. Certainly this was true at Inglis. By the later 1980s, the hyper-decentralized nature of collective bargaining had helped to turn the struggles at Inglis into collective begging. On the one hand, this decentralism gives large industrial locals such as Inglis the relative autonomy to carry out direct action with a degree of impunity from higher levels of the union hierarchy. This helps to explain the relatively high level of worker militancy after the war. On the other hand, this decentralism also vitiates the capacity of such locals to coordinate their struggles against firms such as Inglis/Whirlpool that have the flexibility to whipsaw workers. This spatial flexibility of manufacturing capital has been growing in the 1980s and 1990s (and been reinforced by the FTA and its sequel the North American Free Trade Agreement). In the absence of coordinated responses at the level of the international union and of the labour movement as a whole, the work-centred "culture of defiance" at Inglis was at one and the same time its greatest strength and its critical weakness. It is this irony which lies at the heart of the inadequacy of local unions, even large, militant ones, as bases of worker power in the late 20th century. If Sobel and Meurer had accented this structural

limit, an even better understanding of the inadequacy of Fordist unionism to meet the challenges of the Third Industrial Revolution would have emerged in their book.

When analyzing the Fordist working class in Canada, there are at least three major themes around which the containment and decline of labour as an historical subject in the 20th century can be organized. Following Braverman, one such theme centres on deskilling and the consequent loss of worker power during the transition form craft power to Taylorism. Today, this theme is also at the centre of debates about the interplay between cybernetics and work reorganization in the transition to post-Fordist industrial relations. Although *Working at Inglis* does not devote much attention to the post-Fordist transition, largely because the Inglis plant failed to negotiate it, the authors superbly analyse the transition from craft and craft culture to Fordism at Inglis.

The second major theme which provides a framework for understanding the decline of the Fordist working class centres on the postwar class compromise which legitimized a form of industrial unionism in which union leaders became, in C. Wright Mills' apt term, "managers of discontent." As a consequence, workers were demobilized, unions devitalized, and class politics did not emerge as a defining feature of the political system. To a lesser extent, Sobel and Meurer also develop this narrative, particularly in references to tensions between union leaders and the "culture of defiance" at Inglis, and in their reference to critics who castigated union leaders for failing to mobilize against shutdowns in the 1980s.

The third overarching theme around which explanations for the declining power of Fordist labour can be organized is the historical lag between capital's ability to exploit ever-broader and more heterogeneous and fragmented labour markets and the capacity of unions to regulate industrial relations in these labour markets. This theme, which the authors of *Working at Inglis* chose not to develop, helps to explain why locals like the one at Inglis were picked off one at a time, and why unions have not, by and large, been able to develop effective strategies for dealing with the class collaborationist logic of "competitiveness" when capital threatens to move to low-wage, high repression labour regimes such as the US South, the "Third World," or (as we will see) Napanee, Ontario. In the absence of a collective response by the union, by the Canadian labour movement, and by Canada as a polity, labour politics was confined to the negotiation of buy-outs and severance packages.

In emphasizing two of these themes, the authors have stayed close to the ground of labour history, in the workplace and the neighbourhood. They have provided us with a closely textured analysis of the interplay of working-class culture and the "contested terrain" of technological change and the organization of work. They have resisted the elite model of union history that leaves us with little more than the political biography of union leaders and the changing features of unions as collective bargaining institutions. Thanks to the authors' allegiance to a non-elitist historiography, *Working at Inglis* is a workers' social history with

workers as the central collective subject in day-to-day production relations and in the community. By providing us with such a well-researched understanding of the changes in the nature of worker resistance during more than a century, Sobel and Meurer show us how dramatic this reconfiguration of class forces has been. It is local histories such as this which will enable historians to piece together a bottom-up history of the rise and fall of the "golden age" of Fordist labour in Canada.

Bryan Palmer's *Capitalism Comes to the Back Country* presents a sequel to *Working at Inglis*. While *Working at Inglis* is about the death of craft power, followed by the rise and decline of worker resistance in one Fordist workplace, Palmer analyses the emergence of new dimensions of managerial control in contemporary post-Fordist Canada. While the focus is again on one community and one mass production industrial plant, the primary subject has shifted. Whereas Sobel and Meurer's book analyses the century-long creation and destruction of working-class culture, Palmer examines the creation of a more profoundly dominant *managerial culture* in the 1990s. The site is a new tire plant built by Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Napanee, a small town in eastern Ontario. Like Inglis, which relocated production to a non-union plant in the US, Goodyear abandoned its unionized Toronto plant in order to build the "world's most modern tire plant" in this bucolic setting, where the lack of working-class resistance was akin to that which Inglis found when it relocated from Toronto to Ohio.

Palmer's main theme is capital's new strategy for the "manufacturing of consent" to its own power. Although Palmer borrows this term from Burawoy's classic, *Manufacturing Consent*, the similarities between their analyses are few. Whereas Burawoy provided a detailed account of the ways that the extraction of surplus value is disguised by day-to-day production relations, Palmer's lens is trained on how capital generates compliance outside the labour process in peripheral local labour markets. His chief concern is to critique the cultural translation of the interests of capital into an "avalanche of 'benevolence,' highlighting not the inequities of social relationships but their supposed reciprocities." This transformation of corporate exploitation into perceptions of corporate generosity relies, argues Palmer, on the imposition of a certain perspective, a particular aesthetic and historical image, on its victims. Quoting Marcuse ("Domination has its own aesthetics and democratic domination has its democratic aesthetics"), Palmer calls this book "an exploration of the 'democratic aesthetics' of capitalist domination." Capital, he argues, "is extremely adept at presenting its 'singular visual space,' at 'harmoniously' integrating visions that contain — in both senses of the word — fundamental conflict." Goodyear's coming to Napanee is his case in point.

Highlighting management's quest for more "flexible" workplace practices, Palmer notes that capital's success in subsuming class conflict under an imagery of "almost 'naturalistic' consensus" is conditioned by the spatial restructuring of capital away from traditional industrial locales to "underdeveloped peripheries and

marginal enclaves of unevenly developed but economically advanced nation states." This relocation of manufacturing capital to peripheral labour markets reflects opportunities not only to avoid worker resistance but to garner active support from workers, governments, schools, and communities desperate for new investment and jobs. Palmer calls this deeper capitalist hegemony "an act of colonization, a kind of cultural imperialism." It signifies, he argues, a "recolonization of capitalist 'backwaters' within which intensified managerial 'freedoms' can be cultivated." It is this "constructed primitive accumulation of hegemony" that Palmer's *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* critiques.

Palmer begins his critique with the "pre-history" of Goodyear's "invasion." He outlines Goodyear's history of familialist, anti-union welfare capitalism. Alongside such conventional features of welfare capitalism as company social and health benefit plans, a hospital, a newspaper, sports teams, and a "university" to train employees in business skills, the heart of Goodyear's Akron, Ohio-based corporate familialism was a company union, the Goodyear Industrial Assembly. The Company allowed employees (if they were US citizens, spoke English, had worked for the company for at least six months and had not been absent from work more than a week) to vote for industrial assembly representatives whose decisions were subject to management veto. Having set up this company union after World War I to ward off "Bolshevism" in the workforce, Goodyear was forced to disband it in the face of increasing worker militancy prior to World War II. Yet Palmer argues that the values underlying this earlier welfare capitalism have lived on to become a key part of Goodyear's "program of familialist incarceration" in Napanee in the 1990s.

The author argues that one reason Goodyear came to Napanee was to avoid the Rubberworkers' Union. By the 1980s, Goodyear was losing money, partly due to the costs of fighting a major takeover bid. The Rubberworkers helped Goodyear fight the takeover. Moreover, the union leaders were "cautious and conservative" and generally met management demands to restructure work, including weaker craft jurisdictions, twelve-hour shifts, the implementation of teams, and other concessions. Despite this cooperation and the union's weak strategic position (some 40 rubber plants had been shut down since the 1970s), Palmer maintains that Goodyear still saw the existence of the union as a limit on management power over the labour process. Claiming that it could no longer afford to keep its unionized Toronto plant in operation, Goodyear closed it in 1987, eliminating about 1600 jobs. With the assistance of millions of dollars worth of government tax breaks, grants, and interest-free loans, the company built a new plant in Napanee and installed a non-union, "flexible" production model imported from its Oklahoma site where managers had "absolute control of all materials and processes." Palmer contends that in order to establish this model in Napanee, Goodyear needed to project a familialist image to Napanee and to its new workforce. In order to "deflect this hurt in the historical process [the jobs that were lost when it shut down its

Toronto plant], Goodyear and its Napanee allies mobilized and embellished the positive (and positively *local*) attractions of Napanee ...."

This cultural "invasion" of Napanee began with a frenzy of land speculation when it was rumoured that a multinational company was considering building a plant in the area. Rising real estate prices stimulated local boosterism and led many Napanee residents to welcome Goodyear as a saviour of the depressed local economy. Goodyear presented Napanee with misleading sketches of the new plant, including "air-brushed aesthetics" such as tennis courts, a golf course, ponds, and other features which were not in fact built. To celebrate the start-up of its new plant, management organized a $100,000 "Friendship Festival" ("bread, circuses and a blimp" at a "corporate love-in") for 10,000, in a town of fewer than 5,000 residents! Nearby, Goodyear erected an enormous billboard proudly naming Napanee the "Home of the World's Most Modern Tire Plant."

The main arena for creating and sustaining an image of corporate beneficence, however, was the local high school. Goodyear claimed that its decision to come to Napanee was largely due to seeing a video of a school assembly where Napanee students, prompted by the school's guidance counsellor, voiced their concerns about what the loss of jobs would mean for them if the firm did not locate in their town. Teachers and school officials campaigned to encourage community cooperation with Goodyear. Although the students at the rally were, in fact, "unpeppy," Goodyear claimed that its decision to locate in Napanee reflected the students' enthusiastic support and the school's strong commitment to imbue its vocational and technical students with "attitudes that most businesses would cherish." To its shareholders, Goodyear told a different story: Napanee was chosen because of government support and the town's proximity to major auto plants. There was no mention made of the students. Thus, the company used the student council assembly to reinforce instrumentalist values of "education as the cultivation of attitude and job initiative."

Along with other Fortune 500 firms such as Ford, GM , Chrysler, Dupont, and Northern Telecom, Goodyear subsequently became one of the school's main donors, supplying it with hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of supplies (some of which came from government subsidies to the firm). Goodyear also paid for school officials to visit its model production facilities in Oklahoma. Afterward, the principal developed "a taste" for integrating the school more effectively with Goodyear's labour requirements. Among other initiatives, the school set up a special program to encourage students to "have the right attitude ... for future success." According to Palmer, the program was designed to replicate the corporate culture that Goodyear was trying to create in its plants. The school also developed a FIRE program in which students whose performance, attendance, attitude, etc., were deemed unacceptable were placed on a "probation list." "Fired" students could be "hired" back if they completed special assignments and exercises. *Capitalism Comes to the Back Country* argues that this program puts school life "on a

terrain in which everything can be related to a conception of work stripped of discontent, alienation, and resistance and sustained only as duty and responsibility." As one student put it, the school "tried to make us into a company." The already porous boundary between labour markets and schools was all but erased. The school and local Board of Education helped hire instructors for the firm's government-subsidized training program, the school served as a hiring centre for Goodyear (in place of the government's employment and immigration centre), and students in several classes worked on labour-displacing technical improvements for the company. The school even held staff meetings at the new plant.

Having largely accomplished its main ideological goals in the town and school, management shifted attention to its new workforce. Each applicant was put through an interview process that totalled over 26 hours. The interviews laid less stress on the applicants' skills than on their attitudes toward management and their ability to cooperate in work teams. Those with union backgrounds were culled out. Reminiscent of William Whyte Jr.'s managerial "organization man" of the 1950s who was expected to anchor his whole being in his firm, Goodyear wanted its workers to become part of the corporate family. The interview process included an assessment of candidates' spouses and parents to see if they too were fit to be part of the Goodyear family. All of this leads Palmer to compare the corporation's recruitment process to "being trapped between the pages of *Psychology Today*." Applicants who made it through the interviews process were subjected to "a steady diet of Goodyear imagery and rhetoric" as well as months of training that some termed "brainwashing." The chosen few had to be "willing to subordinate both their individuality and their collectivity to the corporation's understanding of the priorities of the workplace." Having selected its workforce, Goodyear continued this ideological conditioning inside the plant, including unpaid meetings for each "team" of workers prior to each shift, and an annual "Team Appreciation Day" featuring a plant tour and reception for workers and their families. "Metaphors of family ties, once used to link Goodyear and the Napanee region, now enclose workers, managers, and the Akron multinational in a circle of productivist kinship," Palmer concludes.

The author's analysis of Goodyear's sustained "primitive accumulation of hegemony" is the basis of a bold claim about the nature of linkages between culture and space in the context of massive capitalist economic restructuring in the late 20th century. Referring to his "highly problematic and certainly unorthodox deployment of traditional Marxist categories," Palmer calls attention to what he calls a "new imperialism, concentrated not on the Third World ... but on the undeveloped peripheries and marginal regional enclaves of unevenly developed but economically advanced nation states." Echoing earlier criticisms of theorists of a new international division of labour who focused too exclusively on the transfer of low-skilled jobs to Third World labour markets, *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* underlines the degree to which economic restructuring is transforming

not only North-South production location in the global political economy but the location of production within "developed" economies such as Canada's.[8] In doing so, he implicitly revives unresolved debates from the 1960s about the nature of metropolitan-hinterland relations within Canada and between Canada and the US. Here, however, the question is not whether Canada should be viewed as a "colony" of the US but whether Napanee is a "colony" of Goodyear.

It is important to stress that Palmer situates the cultural dimensions of this imperialism within relations of economic dependency; he specifies that his use of the concept "manufacturing consent" is to be understood in the context of "capital's capacity to create a climate of community compliance *when jobs are at stake*" (emphasis added). Nevertheless, Palmer gives the cultural dimensions of capitalist hegemony very great weight indeed, and this raises fundamental questions about the nature of capitalist hegemony today. The key question concerns the relationship between economic coercion and cultural seduction. In this case, how difficult would it have been for Goodyear to gain support from Napanee residents *without* such cultural efforts? As the author stresses, this was a period in which all of eastern Ontario was suffering a "downward recessionary spiral" which made Goodyear "exceedingly attractive to young job-seekers and older workers." Four out of every five graduates from the high school had to leave the area every year to find work. So attractive were the jobs Goodyear was offering that at one point 2700 applied for 130 vacancies. Given the deepening scourge of unemployment and underemployment, especially in chronically weak regional labour markets such as eastern Ontario, is it not likely that job competition and job fear would have been sufficient inducement for most citizens of Napanee, students and workers included, to cooperate with Goodyear?

Another question concerns management's need to avoid unionism when weak unions are anxious to serve as extensions of the personnel department. Having lost many battles in the 1980s, and having shrunk to a membership of only 11,000, the Rubberworkers were a beaten and tamed union by this point. Is it plausible that management saw the Rubberworkers as much of a threat to their flexibility goals at the new plant? And with capital so clearly in the driver's seat, is it appropriate to describe Goodyear's coming to Napanee as "colonization" and "an invasion"? Palmer points out that this colonization was "courted and pleaded for by the subjects and future subjects of its subordination — to the point that voices of resistance were all but silenced." Moreover, it is ironic that much of Goodyear's

[8]For a critique of the "New International Division of Labour" see Erica Schoenberger, "Multinational Corporations and the New International Division of Labour: A Critical Appraisal," in Stephen Wood, ed., *The Transformation of Work?* (London 1989), 91-101. For an example of analysis that highlights the role of public policy in shaping uneven labour market development among regions within the US, see the essays in Helzi Naponen, *et al.*, eds., *Trading Industries, Trading Regions* (New York 1993).

effort to provide Napanee with images of corporate benevolence probably had little impact on its new workforce: most of those hired were not Napanee residents.

For all these reasons, it is unclear to what extent Goodyear was in practice engaged in a process of "primitive accumulation of hegemony." The term itself conventionally signifies establishment of the historical preconditions for capitalist accumulation, as for example, the dispossession of peasantry from the land in order to create "free" labour. For this reason, the author calls the book's title a "misnomer":

> The title would seem to posit an opposition between, on the one hand, capitalism as a full-blown economic order and, on the other, the backcountry, a rural enclave of structures and sentiments somehow pristine in its freedoms from the impersonalities of the cash nexus, the exploitation of labour measured by the wage, and property privatized so as to shatter the hold of moral economies and customary practices of tenure and use. But that opposition is most emphatically not what I want to convey.

Instead, he wants to convey the way that Goodyear disguised its own interests as universal needs in Napanee. Yet as Palmer points out, "placid non-union eastern Ontario ... seemed a hospitable environment for a beleaguered capital. *The colonization of the region, moreover, had already been accomplished, indeed welcomed*" (emphasis added). Does this not mean that in towns such as Napanee the petit-bourgeois norms of the family farm and shops, combined with the legacy of Tory Loyalism, had not already culturally transformed the particular interests of capital into an appearance of universal needs? Napanee seems to have missed much of the postwar Fordist period. One wonders, therefore, if there is not less of a cultural transformation taking place in towns like Napanee than in cities of declining Fordism such as Windsor, Hamilton, and Oshawa in Ontario. Perhaps this is where the real cultural transformation of late 20th-century capitalism is taking place. Consider the workers laid off from Goodyear's Toronto plant. Their "consent" took the form of twelve hour shifts, looser work rules, abandonment of craft jurisdictions, team work, and other concessions, all in an effort to "work with management to bring costs down and raise plant productivity." And their "consent" was more profound when they joined management to fight off a corporate takeover. When all of this failed to satisfy management, it was these Toronto workers who had to make the cultural transition from (albeit limited) norms of Fordist class, workplace, and neighbourhood solidarity to the marginalized individualized fates of the older unemployed. Similarly, the Goodyear workers in Valleyfield, Quebec, after heavy job losses and defeats, gave management "very good cooperation." This is similar to the cultural transformation that Sobel and Meurer analyse as the decline of a culture of defiance.

Another issue concerns what the Goodyear study tells us about the spatial reconfiguration of capital. Other studies have concluded that the spatial diffusion

of manufacturing in sectors such as rubber and auto is rather strictly limited to the periphery of the industrial core of the economy.[9] New plants tend to be set up relatively close to extant clusters of industrial production. To an important extent, this was true of the location of new plants in the heyday of Fordism in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, the major auto producers built their new plants in the cornfields of Ontario, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan (hence "greenfield" plants) as consumer demand accelerated after the war. An additional factor shaping this spatial pattern today is the growing emphasis on "just-in-time" production which makes it important for suppliers to be relatively close to their industrial clients. As a result, there has been little industrial relocation to the real backcountry of Canada in places such as northern Ontario, the Maritimes, or anywhere outside southern Ontario. The same phenomenon helps to explain why the auto industry and its suppliers in the US are still concentrated in a transportation corridor in the Midwest and why auto production on the east and west coasts has declined so precipitately. Another major factor accounting for this pattern of new investment location are the narrowing differentials between union and non-union wage levels, which reduces the incentive to move too far afield from the traditional unionized areas when setting up new plants. Given these parameters, post-Fordist capitalism may only be coming to the *near* backcountry, and the phenomenon may not be as new as it first appears.

Goodyear's coming to Napanee illustrates a more general quest of post-Fordist capital for more flexible forms of production. The implication is that Goodyear is out to create a "postmodern" workforce in a "pre-modern" labour market. The fundamental motivators are technological and organizational changes inside the labour process. Human resource management theorists argue that in order to attain increases in productivity with this more flexible labour process, firms such as Goodyear need their workers to internalize norms of active compliance. This has become almost an unquestioned orthodoxy, particularly in regard to firms adopting hybrid Japanese management practices such as "lean production."[10] However, for the argument that workers need to internalize Goodyear's familialist managerial ideology to be compelling, we need evidence to show that this internalization (as opposed to mere acceptance, the logic of economic coercion) is necessary to such flexible production. Unfortunately, Goodyear does not allow access to the plant by outsiders and *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* is substantively silent on this point. The labour process at the new plant remains unexamined. In addition, the book does not provide much evidence that the Goodyear workers have internalized the norms management is seeking to impose. If there was enough evidence of

[9]See, for example, Candace Howes, "Constructing Comparative Disadvantage: Lessons from the U.S. Auto Industry" in Naponen, *Trading Industries*.

[10]Indeed, Napanee youth refer to the Goodyear plant as "the Jap plant," although, with the Japanese takeover of Dunlop and Firestone, Goodyear is the only major tire company that is still US-owned. Kenney and Florida, *Beyond Mass Production* (New York 1993), 193.

internalization, we would still need to know how much of it derived from worker norms that pre-existed Goodyear's arrival in Napanee. In any case, claims about the internalization of managerial norms are almost impossible to prove. It is extremely difficult, for example, to separate out that part of worker compliance with management which stems from an instrumental response to economic coercion (fear of job loss, etc.) from that which stems from deeper forms of consent to the norms of post-Fordist management.[11]

None of the foregoing is meant to quarrel with Palmer's compelling thesis that Goodyear has been attempting to manufacture a deeper "consent" to managerial goals and power. As the author aptly notes, this attempt bears comparison with the firm's earlier phase of welfare capitalism. Palmer is suggesting that something potentially very significant is happening in places like Napanee these days. Older Fordist boundaries between labour and capital are being overlaid by new boundaries separating the Goodyear/Napanee "family" and its equivalents from non-members, the economic outcasts of the emerging post-Fordist order. These insights bear elaboration. What are the main implications of welfare capitalism revisited for the future of disorganized capitalism? Is Canada, in effect, "turning Japanese" by creating an enterprise-based welfare capitalism as a partial substitute for the welfare state and a weakening civil society? Is Goodyear's corporate familialism transforming a core of flexible fulltime workers into an aristocracy of labour? If so, does this presage a class politics in which the labour-capital cleavage is crosscut by competing segments of the labour market (for example, primary core labour market vs. secondary contingent labour market vs. burgeoning underclass of permanently unemployed)? Does it lead to an unregulated capitalism in which small islands of economic stability are surrounded by a sea of social chaos? These are some of the questions Palmer's analysis stimulates but does not address directly. If *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* is eventually reprinted, a new chapter which draws out the implications of Goodyear-style imperialism for the future of labour politics would be welcome.

Palmer's analysis of the external challenges facing Goodyear's earlier Fordist corporate welfarism is more developed than his analysis of the company's new corporate welfarism. In a chapter concerning the "pre-history" of Goodyear's paternalism, he situates the firm's earlier phase of welfare capitalism in an environment where management was threatened by worker power (worker militancy, the Wobblies, the inspiration of the Russian Revolution, etc.). The new phase of welfare capitalism, however, is situated in an environment in which the chief threat is defined as competition from other corporations. *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* needs to address this difference more fully. In the absence of a detailed

[11]For a more extended critique of the argument that late-20th-century capitalism is producing a new cultural hegemony in the workplace, see my "New Dimensions for Labor in A Post-Fordist World," in E.J. Yanarella and Wm. Green, eds., *North American Auto Unions in Crisis* (Albany 1996) 191-207.

comparative analysis, a thorough assessment of continuities and discontinuities between the two phases of welfare capitalism is impossible. Such a comparative analysis would also be welcome in a future revised edition.

Palmer closes his account of the new managerial hegemony with a prediction that, once again, workers like those at Goodyear in Napanee will gain a sense of the contested meanings of history. Although he does not provide a specific rationale for this confidence, one could be found in the multifaceted critique of the contradictions of lean production which has developed over the past decade or so. Particularly helpful is the work of Parker and Slaughter who have emphasized the degree to which the new work practices rely on work intensification, leading to higher rates of worker stress and injury.[12] Other analysts have highlighted the tensions and contradictions between new forms of work that "unleash powerful new sources of human creativity" while they channel these new forces within highly authoritarian organizations.[13]

Moreover, the same features which make the new production systems efficient also make them fragile and vulnerable to stoppages. While worker and community dependency on capital increases, so does dependency of capital on worker flexibility and cooperation. This is the significance, for example, of the 1996 strike at a General Motors parts plant in Ohio which led to the closure of most of GM's assembly plants in Canada and the US for 17 weeks, cutting the firm's first quarter earnings by $900 million. This is one reason why firms such as Goodyear are keen to ensure a high level of worker commitment to management's productivity goals (including continuity of production).

Yet it is still an open question whether it is possible for managers to obtain such commitment without providing high levels of job security. In an increasingly competitive market, job security is harder to guarantee.[14] Indeed, it is clear that the productivity increases associated with the new production systems generate massive job losses. Thus, Goodyear's "success" is captured by a 30 per cent increase in tire production between 1988 and 1992 — with 24,000 fewer employees.[15] The same contradiction applies to wages. Goodyear's flagship plant in Oklahoma (on which the Napanee plant is modeled) made major productivity gains with no increase in wages. Goodyear explained: "Until we get real wage levels down much closer to those of the Brazils and Koreas we cannot pass along productivity gains to wages and still be competitive." Clearly the corporate image-makers will have to work overtime if they are to succeed for very long in covering such glaring conflicts of interest with a veneer of familial benevolence.

[12]See, among other works, Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering* (Detroit 1994).

[13]Kenney and Florida, *Beyond Mass Production*, 300.

[14]Just as core firms in Japan have been laying off workers for the first time, so also are Japanese transplants in Canada.

[15]Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work* (New York 1995), 136.

A final contradiction in a post-Fordist economy modeled on the Goodyear/Napanee nexus writ large is that it radically diminishes the meaning of citizenship that evolved under Fordism. As a result, it undermines the social controls that citizenship embodied. The new corporate welfarism is being built around cuts in the social wage that augur what Jessop refers to as the "Schumpeterian workfare state."[16] The shift from citizen to employee — as the primary basis of entitlement to the pensions, health care, training and a host of other requirements for the reproduction of labour — is fertile ground for extraparliamentary politicization and mobilization, as neo-liberal governments are learning. For all these reasons, one could go further than Palmer in making the case that this new imperialism is pregnant with the seeds of counter-hegemony.

In these new times, there are no issues more important to the future of progressive social change than these. Both Palmer's *Capitalism Comes to the Backcountry* and Sobel and Meurer's *Working at Inglis* use historically informed analyses of transformations in working-class resistance in the workplace to help us frame these issues. In important part because they focus their attention on class relations in the workplace and the community, they have been able to analyse transformations of great magnitude without falling into structuralist determinism. Instead, because their analysis builds on a "worm's eye" view of history, concentrating on more immediate class relations in production and in communities, they perceive major shifts in the balance of class forces that were not preordained but were continually reshaped by class struggle. Likewise, both understand the future as contested. Of great significance to these shifts in the nature of class power, as these authors argue compellingly, are the meanings both workers and employers give to their class relations. Anyone wanting to understand the role of culture in workers' resistance and "consent" to Canadian capitalism, from the craft era to early welfare capitalism, and from Fordism to the disorganized capitalism of the Third Industrial Revolution, will want to read these books and engage the debates these authors have raised.

[16]Bob Jessop, "Toward a Schumpeterian Welfare State?" *Studies in Political Economy*, 40 (Spring 1993).