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NOTEBOOK / CARNET

Andrew Parnaby and Todd McCallum

THIS SECTION welcomes commentaries on any issue related to labour and the working class. Submissions should be about 1000 words in length and sent to: Andrew Parnaby and Todd McCallum, Notebook/ Carnet, *Labour/Le Travail*, Faculty of Arts Publications, FM2005, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL, A1C 5S7; e-mail: <parnabya @hotmail. com>; <tlm8@qlink.queensu.ca>

Fight to Win

John Clarke

FOR SEVEN YEARS NOW, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has been on the front lines in a struggle against the Tory regime in Ontario and its implementation of what activist Jaggi Singh has called a "voluntary structural adjustment program." This is an apt term since the cuts to public services, the gutting of social programs, and the removal of protective regulations were not ordered by the International Monetary Fund but have been implemented by the Tories simply as a gift to the profit hungry. As an organization that mobilizes the poor and homeless, OCAP has been up against the most extreme effects of the Conservative agenda. The removal of an income support system, the freezing of the minimum wage, the obliteration of employment standards protections, the cancellation of social housing, and the removal of effective rent controls have combined to put thousands on the streets

and condemn a major section of the working-class population to worsening poverty.

As the Tories have systematically embraced social abandonment, they have shown an increased and predictable interest in the only alternative means of regulating those they are impoverishing and rendering destitute — direct state repression. Super jails are opening up across the province, "safe streets" legislation criminalizes panhandling and other acts of elemental survival, and police forces are encouraged to "socially cleanse" urban areas marked for commercial development or residential gentrification. I was recently told of two cops in one Ontario city who are now rendering the streets "safe" and driving out those begging for change by holding the hands of those who offend down on the sidewalk and breaking their fingers by stomping on them. This situation is not just a matter for deep humanitarian concern but a serious warning to the workers' movement. If the working class is reaching such a level of polarization and a section of it is experiencing such misery and privation, we are in a profoundly dangerous situation. It is this that prompts OCAP to by pass the politics of futile indignation and token protest and to build a massively disruptive form of social resistance which can actually stop the attacks and induce a political crisis.

A great deal of criticism has been thrown at OCAP. I reject much of it as the indignation of the comfortably irrelevant, without denying that we have made our share of mistakes along the way. What seems to me of greater importance, however, is the fact that OCAP, for good or bad, has stepped into a vacuum created by the failure of the labour movement to lead a sustained and generalized resistance to the most regressive government in Ontario since the 1930s. Even if we were to conclude that our small-arms fire has been misdirected, the real issue is that the big guns have all but fallen silent. In the late 1990s, we had the Ontario "Days of Action." No one who participated in them could deny that they gave us a glimpse of the vast social power of the working class. Anyone who saw the centre of the largest city in the country paralysed by a political strike would have to acknowledge the massive potential that had developed. However, at the same time, the Harris regime was far more serious and single minded than anything the labour leaders had dealt with before. Harris was not going to be bluffed with mere shows of strength. A real contest would have to be taken up that escalated economic disruption and social mobilization to the level where corporate interests could discern a massive threat and where the state could be thrown into political crisis. This, and I will return to this point in due course, was simply not a possibility for the present union leadership.

Having gone as far (and in some cases further) than they were prepared to go, the only option for the labour leaders was to call off the campaign. While many thought they were living through the prelude to a general strike, those at the top saw the Days of Action as a limited pressure tactic that had come to no avail and thus had to be ditched. A few years on, we now see the results of the abandonment of that

struggle. The Tories have continued with their attacks, replacing Harris with his former finance minister and a more conciliatory image for electoral purposes, while changing nothing of substance. Meanwhile, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) brings together working groups of union representatives and "social partners" to draft a "Peoples' Charter" — a wish list of proposals for a socially just Ontario. Their notion is to take this into the next election and present it to all three parties. The Tories and Liberals will reject it as "unrealistic" and the New Democratic Party (NDP) will endorse it since its demands will be deliberately tame enough for this to happen. The NDP, of course, will not be elected and, even if it was, would no more implement this Charter than it did the "Agenda for People" on which it ran in 1990. What we really have, then, is a set of demands being drawn up with no plan whatsoever to fight for its adoption and a free hand given to the Eves regime to do what it likes in the period leading up to the next election. The abandonment of the Days of Action was a tragedy; the Peoples' Charter is the farce that flows from it.

Clearly, the dismal procession of events I have just set out speaks to a crisis, and not one that is unique to Ontario. In international terms, we have seen well over two decades of neo-liberal attacks. The main working-class organizations have yet to fashion a winning reply. Indeed, as the attacks intensify, the passivity of the trade unions worsens. At a certain point, the retreat will become a rout unless the crisis of effective opposition is addressed. I am not trying to suggest that the retreat I speak of has meant workers and others under attack have not fought back, and from time to time shaken the regimes they have challenged. But, still, the consistent and generalized resistance to the global agenda of capital that is called for has not been taken up. That it has not been embraced by the OFL or its affiliated unions is beyond question.

I do not think we can understand much if we pay only scant attention to the question of the labour bureaucracy. On that basis, I want to suggest that the trade unions, for all the vast power they embody, are hamstrung by a leadership that is as unwilling as it is incapable of unleashing decisive social mobilization. The analysis of how such a leadership emerged is well established. The wave of union organizing in the 1930s and 40s forced a tactical retreat upon employers and the state and led to the recognition of the new workers' organizations. A process of limited and uneven concession granting was put in place in return for a truce in the class war. The class struggle became state regulated, compartmentalized, and held below the level of fundamental disruption. A new breed of union leader emerged to broker this deal. Certainly this leadership wanted to placate memberships with measured contract gains but, at the same time, was more than ready to deliver to the employers that which was their due under this arrangement. While regulated skirmishes were permitted, union leaders were under an obligation to police the truce and move in to restore order in the ranks of their organizations if necessary. As might be expected,

this new bureaucracy accrued privileges, created centralized structures, and developed methods of control and manipulation that befitted its role and function.

There is no denying that within this context a lot of working people saw dramatic gains in their living standards and huge improvements in their working conditions over several decades. It is one thing, however, to have a conservative bureaucracy keep the struggle within bounds while the system is making gradual concessions to the working class. It is quite another thing to have that constraint placed on resistance initiatives when employers and governments are systematically taking back the gains of an earlier period and working to weaken and destroy the unions themselves. In such a context, the labour bureaucracy is now brokering a dead deal. The very thing that was given up in return for concessions — explosive and serious social mobilization — is precisely what the union leaderships were developed to prevent. They do not welcome the neo-liberal offensive, of course, but an energized, democratized workers' movement that breaks the bounds of the post-war settlement would surely sweep them away. So they bluster their way through, perfecting angry but empty rhetoric for their disgruntled members and alternating between attempts to bluff their way out and the most slavish capitulation. Their more left-leaning elements are more ready to give limited resistance a shot while their right wing sees open collaboration as the best option. In the end, however, union officialdom can not pass beyond the function it developed around, and its continued stranglehold on the movement must be fatal.

Whenever you start to insist that the question of the labour bureaucracy must be a central consideration, someone always calls this a "hard left" oversimplification and points out that there are other factors that have to be considered. Not the least of these, you will be told, are the problems that exist in the working class itself. For my part, I have never suggested that all workers have revolution on the tips of their tongues but are kept back by a few hundred class traitors who hold office in the unions. Nor would I deny that the attacks of the last decade have taken a very serious toll. What I would suggest, however, is that the union bureaucracy imposes a dead weight of conservatism on the labour movement that prevents the emergence of the very struggles that could lead to new political developments and a leap in thought.

Let me give a small but instructive example. A couple of years ago, when the Tories were preparing to gut the province's employment standards legislation and return it to the level of the 1940s Master and Servant Act, the OFL convened a series of meetings for rank-and-file activists in a number of communities. I attended the gathering in Toronto, which was held in the inevitable and grossly inappropriate plush hotel. Like the other meetings, it was much larger than anticipated and the mood in the room was electric. OFL President Wayne Samuelson had got only a few words into his lacklustre presentation when an older worker near the back of the hall got up and yelled, "Shut the fucking province down!" The rest of the meeting took up this chant (without the obscenity). Now, I do not suggest that a few hun-

dred workers in a hotel calling for a general strike means that any leadership, however militant, would be advised to set a date for the following week. What I would say, though, is that this development was no small thing. Samuelson, of course, looked like a deer in the headlights and you could almost hear the cogs in his head turning as he struggled for a way to diffuse such a dreadful development as an outbreak of working-class anger. But what if we had people in positions like his that saw such a thing as an opportunity to move forward? How about an OFL president that, at such a moment, wanted to discuss how that force of rank-and-file leaders could take a message of defiance and resistance into their workplaces and communities and build on it? I would dare to say that, in such an event, the gutting of the basic protections for working people in Ontario would not have been the sure thing it proved to be, and that, more than this, we could by now be living in a very different situation than we are today.

Whatever their imperfections, the struggles of OCAP and, on a much larger scale, the anti- globalization actions that have awakened young activists are proof that social resistance can not be indefinitely anaesthetised. OCAP and the Ontario Common Front that emerged from its campaign against the Tories last year seek to rekindle a generalized movement against an especially reactionary provincial government. The anti-globalization protests represent a movement of challenge and disruption against precisely the international agenda of capital that the union leaders have abdicated responsibility for fighting against. In the present situation, however, those who are taking militant action are mainly organized outside of the workplace. The employed workers, whose collective power is the vital ingredient, are, as yet, somewhat hesitant to join in. This is not an uncommon problem, historically speaking, but the union leaders in this situation, rather than looking for ways to overcome hesitation and strengthen the movement, start to see those taking up a fight as a threat that should be stopped or, at least, isolated. The danger that arises is that the union leaders will stand aside if state repression is directed at groups like OCAP or, even worse, encourage or collaborate with such developments.

Last June, OCAP organized an eviction of the Tory finance minister from his constituency office in retaliation for the thousands being put on the streets by his government. His office equipment was damaged and, mistakenly, our press release on the action suggested that some CAW members who were present had been there in an official capacity. Seizing on this, CAW President Buzz Hargrove sent a letter to James Flaherty, the finance minister, expressing condolences for what had taken place at his office. Some of us were arrested shortly after and a few were detained in Whitby jail. While I was there, in an eight-by-ten cell with three other men, I read in the *Toronto Star* that Hargrove was meeting with the Tory labour minister to assure him that his organization would be withdrawing all financial support for OCAP. Now, as conservative as the man is in his thinking, I do not believe for a moment that he cares so much for Flaherty's office furniture that he would so openly jettison any semblance of working-class solidarity if that was the only issue. The real mo-

tive was that OCAP was calling for an autumn campaign of economic disruption against the Tories and CAW flying squads and locals were starting to sign on to participate in significant numbers. The CAW bureaucracy, especially in the Windsor area, was determined to prevent this from taking place and the issue of our so called "violence" at Flaherty's office was simply utilized to justify an attack that would have occurred in any case.

Even more shocking, however, were the actions of the OFL leadership at the Tory Convention in Toronto last March. The Common Front planned two actions to challenge the Tory gathering. On Friday the 22nd, we held an evening march through the streets that culminated in the takeover of an empty building slated for commercial redevelopment. Then, the next day, we marched to the actual convention site. We had planned our actions for months in advance but, with only a couple of weeks to go, the OFL announced its own rally to be held at exactly the same time of our second march. Having made mass arrests and used both tear gas and tasers at the Friday takeover action, a massive force of riot police attacked our Saturday march with staggering ferocity. Police spokespersons openly told the media that the labour rally was respectable and put only token forces in front of it. Our march was held back from proceeding to the convention site until the last OFL speech had ended. Even before the speeches were over, the OFL marshalls were urging people to get on the buses and leave. Pleas by trade union members to the OFL organizers to make an announcement calling for assistance to be given to the Common Front marchers under attack were rebuffed. It was an unprecedented act of collusion. The event was called to draw off any trade union support from our actions and was then organized in such a way that the cops would be able to attack us with impunity.

As the union bureaucracy moves towards passivity and outright collaboration, there are a couple of conclusions that I believe we must draw and act upon. First of all, the organizations outside of the labour movement that are taking up militant resistance to capital's agenda must continue to build their struggles. To demobilize would simply leave the field to those who want to prove to the workers that surrender is the best policy. The resistance we are organizing is an ongoing pole of attraction the bureaucracy can not shut down or even control. We will, of course, have to go down a hard road and take some lumps along the way, but the struggle must be kept alive if the mass of workers are to be inspired and influenced.

My second point flows from the first. If the pole of attraction I speak of is to have the effect it can, every effort must be made to encourage rank-and-file opposition inside the unions. The model that has been used to influence the direction of unions is that of the "left caucus." This method is based on left unionists forming themselves into a kind of ginger group that seeks to modify union policy. The caucus usually does most of its work at conventions when it organizes around resolutions. I want to suggest that we are now well past the point where this form of organizing offers very much. What is now needed are workplace-based committees that openly name and criticize the bureaucracy and work to challenge it. A few

years ago in Toronto, there was a strike by bakery workers who were members of the United Food and Commercial Workers. Their union bureaucracy denied the mainly immigrant workers any democratic control over decision making and tried to force them back to work. Militants responded to this by marching to the union headquarters and occupying it. The Toronto left was not very supportive of this initiative to say the least, but I believe it was an action that should have been promoted as an example of rank-and-file resistance to bureaucratic betrayal.

This small example gives a glimpse of how a real workers' opposition might start to form. In the Detroit of the 1970s, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (whatever its massive errors) offered a larger model of a challenge at the base that raised the level of resistance to the employer but had no hesitation in disrupting the bureaucracy. The shop stewards' movement in post-World War I Britain reached such a position of strength that, when the Clyde shipbuilders went on strike in Glasgow, the prime minister had no choice but to negotiate with the rank-and-file organization and ignore the official union leaders. It is quite possible to argue that, in the context of the CIO organizing of the 1930s and 1940s, left union activists were far too ready to operate within boundaries set by John Lewis. Once his desired level of bargaining power with the employers' state was attained, Lewis is supposed to have said to other labour bureaucrats, who were critical of his use of communist organizers, that "there are lots of differences between the hunter and the dog but the main one is that the hunter gets the bird." In fact, situations where the bureaucrats call on the services of left militants when some muscle flexing is to their tactical advantage, only to ditch or purge them when things have gone as far as they feel appropriate, are disconcertingly frequent.

During the Ontario Days of Action, the dithering agenda of the bureaucracy was allowed to throttle the whole campaign. No plan to escalate the strikes was developed. Each event was concluded with no sense of what came next. No clear articulation of the basic purpose and goal of the struggle was ever provided. Left activists, however, loyally threw themselves into getting people on the buses and, beyond chanting "city by city is way too slow, let's shut down Ontario" at some of the rallies, they left the union bureaucracy to vacillate and bungle things as it saw fit. No one even considered organizing workers to demand that the scale, area, and frequency of the strike action be extended. A powerful rank-and-file movement in that situation might well have been in a position to take such action over the objections of the bureaucracy. Of course, tactics in such matters are determined by the balance of forces and I am not unmindful of the dangers of isolating militant workers and setting them up for defeat. Certainly, I am not suggesting that a call by a few isolated leftists to extend the walkouts during the Days of Action would have been sensible. All I am trying to suggest is that we have to build in the unions a forthright opposition to the bureaucracy that challenges it and works to break its grip by way of a rank-and-file rebellion.

I do not suggest that the building of a grass roots movement in the unions will be anything other than desperately hard. But, if we are ready to look at the fundamentally collaborationist nature of the labour bureaucracy and how it can only disarm the labour movement at a time of mounting and fundamental attack, then it is time to rethink oppositional practices within the unions. The most vital issue, in my view, is for militant activists to stop accepting their place as tolerated left critics, to reject the terms of a dead social truce, to openly challenge those who still enforce it, and to fight to win.

The Sweat in the Tar Ponds

Scott MacAulay

SOMEWHERE IN THE TOXIC MESS that is the Sydney tar ponds is the sweat of my grandfather and my wife's grandfather. Both of them gave more than 40 years of their lives to the steel plant, located in the centre of Cape Breton's largest city. The Sydney tar ponds are the size of three city blocks (see figure 1). The steel plant's 80 year reliance on coke-ovens technology is the culprit. In the process of turning coal into coke, benzene, kerosene, napthalene, lead, and arsenic, a dog's breakfast of hundreds of thousands of tons of chemical waste, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), were dumped into a local estuary, Muggah Creek. The creek, which leads to Sydney Harbour, received, and continues to receive, millions of litres of raw sewage each day. That this is an environmental disaster is obvious; that it is simultaneously a class issue is not.

Official notice that the tar ponds were potentially lethal was given in 1980 when the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) found unsuitably high levels of lead, mercury, PCBs, and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in Sydney Harbour's lobsters. DFO shut down the local lobster fishery in 1982. Since then, the tar ponds have been a politically sensitive and expensive issue. In the 1980s, the federal government and the Government of Nova Scotia launched a clean-up effort, at the centre of which was an incinerator that would burn off coke-ovens' by-products. The effort failed due to problems with the technology and ran seriously over budget.[1] In the mid-1990s, the community was outraged by a

[1]The initial budget was $34.4 million. The final cost was $55 million.

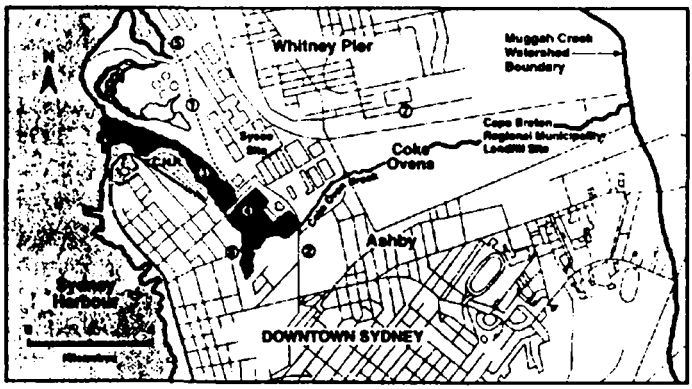

Figure 1: Sydney tar ponds and surrounding area. (Source: Maude Barlow and Elizabeth May, *Frederick Street: Life and Death on Canada's Love Canal* [Toronto 2000], introduction.)

proposal to simply put a cap on the tar ponds and sod the cap over. The Joint Action Group (JAG), made up of federal, provincial, municipal, and community representatives, was created to oversee the tar ponds' clean-up. Close to $100 million has been allocated to JAG and various government departments to conduct studies and to evaluate different proposals for clean-up.

The human health effects of the tar ponds remain the subject of intense debate. People in houses surrounding the tar ponds complain of respiratory problems. Rates of cancer and heart disease are substantially higher than national averages, as are the rates of birth defects and miscarriages. Organizations like the Sierra Club of Canada and the Council of Canadians have brought the tar ponds to national attention, arguing, along with many residents, for compensation and immediate relocation of entire neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, the federal and provincial governments continue to study the problem to determine the absolute cause-and-effect relationship needed to identify and justify what they will consider to be appropriate action.[2]

[2]See Maude Barlow and Elizabeth May, *Frederick Street: Life and Death on Canada's Love Canal* (Toronto 2000); and the "special four-day report on Sydney's toxic waste nightmare" that ran in the *Chronicle-Herald* from 26 February to 1 March 2002; and <www.muggah.org>.

Culture and Community

Steel making began in Sydney in 1900. Employment in the industry was the foundation of the city's economy. Having peaked at 5400 men and women during World War II, workers numbered in the thousands for decades to come. In the early 1990s, even in the middle of the long crisis in resource and heavy industries in Western economies, there were more than 700 employees. In 2000, after more than 30 years of provincial ownership, Nova Scotia Premier John Hamm announced the closure of the plant. The province, he said, could no longer support a dying industry. Plans to find another buyer failed or, from the workers' perspective, were never given a chance to succeed. In 2001, the steel plant's assets were auctioned off. What remains is an industrial site devoid of industry.

For much of this period, my relatives watched as ownership changed hands from the British Empire Steel Company (BESCO) to the Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO), to DOSCO coming under the control of Hawker-Siddeley, to the day in 1967, Black Friday, when Hawker-Siddeley announced it was shutting the whole thing down. They fought then, as thousands of steel workers in Sydney had fought since the turn of the century in their struggle to unionize, for dignity, for the right to have a say over the fruits of their labour. In 1967, the community stood with the workers — the steel plant was too important to the local economy, its merchants and property owners — and the provincial government was forced to act. The Sydney Steel Corporation (SYSCO), a provincial crown corporation, took over the industry.

Perhaps the *truly* black moment of 1967 was when the provincial government decided to step in. Along with the federal government taking over the coal mines, the period marked the beginning of Cape Breton's economic decline, as dependence on government increased and workers and communities stubbornly defended workplaces doomed to extinction in a post-industrial economy. From an environmental perspective, the decision to keep the steel plant going simply perpetuated damage being done to people's health, damage long suspected by workers and residents of the neighbourhoods surrounding the steel plant.

The sweat of the steel workers that lies in the tar ponds, though, along with the sweat left under the ground and ocean by the coal miners, is the sweat that built a culture deeply embedded with the values of place and family. The fight for steel and coal in the 1960s was a class fight to ensure that the limited wealth won back through union struggle would last long enough to give the sons and daughters of workers — and, by extension, the sons and daughters of merchants and property owners — a chance to determine their own destinies. The fight was right. It was practical. It was necessary. If we forget this, we are doomed to view the tar ponds as simply an environmental tragedy, and our culture not as a source of solidarity and

analysis, but rather, as Ellison Robertson puts it, through the lenses of "nostalgia and self-parody."[3]

Steel making caused the tar ponds, but it was the class system, plain and simple, that took away the tools the community needs to deal with them. In the current debate, experts — physicians, toxicologists, environmental scientists, community developers, to name just a few — float in and out of various and overlapping bureaucratic structures saying that we need to be absolutely and scientifically certain of the right course of action. Their claims to criteria of rationality and fiscal caution may legitimate them in the eyes of their peers and the broader tax paying public, but it pisses on local autonomy, for which Cape Bretoners have always struggled, and the desire to act, even in the face of uncertainty, to enhance quality of life.

Surely, the right to act without certainty should not only be reserved for the wealthy and the powerful. The neighbourhoods of Mount Royal and Rosedale would never be so patient. Governments and corporations would quickly find themselves in court. People *would* move and they *could* move, well before the test results came in; they would have the money at hand. Besides, their commitment to place would not be the same as the commitment created by generations of toil.

In 1967, after Black Friday, more than 20,000 people marched in a "Parade of Concern" to keep the steel plant going. Today, there are many people who are trying to take the issue of the tar ponds back, as a community. The regional newspaper, *The Cape Breton Post*, regularly prints letters from people urging that action be taken. In the neighbourhood of Whitney Pier, adjacent to the plant site, the new community-based newspaper, *Novynka*, has printed stories on the tar ponds which focus on the anger and frustration of residents, and the actions they demand. Bus loads of local families have gone to the steps of the Nova Scotia legislature to protest. In the summer of 1999, hundreds of people camped across the street from the home of then premier Russell MacLellan. They wanted the government, just heading into an election, to commit to a policy of relocation and compensation. On Intercolonial Street, in the city's north end, houses line one side of the street. The other side marks a boundary of the steel plant site. There, residents have erected a series of signs and scare crow figures. One of the signs says "Welcome to the gates of hell" (see figures 2 and 3).

Yet the tar ponds have not been the object of a unified "Parade of Concern." Unlike the imminent closure of the plant in the 1960s, the tar ponds sit on the fringe of middle-class consciousness in the region. What is left of the middle class is no longer dependent on steel and coal. The industries no longer exist and many daughters and sons have moved away. Those who remain — the professionals, the teachers and professors, the bureaucrats, and the business people — "tut-tut" at newspaper descriptions of the environmental disaster, wonder at bureaucratic folly

[3]Ellison Robertson, "How She Goin' B'ys? Cape Breton Culture: A Critical Look," *New Maritimes*, (September/October 1991), 12.

Figure 2: Waiting for the big dig: Intercolonial Street, May 2002.

Figure 3: Paradise lost: "Tar Pond Monster," Intercolonial Street, May 2002.

as governments look for a solution, and curse the tar ponds (and the unions that preceded them) for giving Cape Breton a bad reputation to would-be investors. Unemployed people are told to be patient and "re-tool" for a post-industrial Cape Breton: build the right skills and have the right attitude; capital will find you and take care of you.

If we think of what our culture and history teaches us, though, we should be skeptical. For, as Raymond Williams has written, "beyond all the alien categories, there is wealth only in people and in their lands and seas. Uses of this wealth which discard and abandon people are so profoundly contradictory that they become a social disaster, on a par with the physical disasters which follow from reckless exploitation of the lands and the seas."[4] In the tar ponds, the only thing that is not toxic is the sweat.

[4]Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (London 1989), 125.

After the Moratorium

Rosemary E. Ommer

IN 1992, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT declared a moratorium on the northern codfishery in the waters off Newfoundland. In the ensuing months, further moratoria followed. Indeed it was feared — and still is — that the groundfish fishery was facing commercial and biological extinction. The unspoken consensus seemed to be that the outports, along with the codfish, might well be doomed. In the wake of the fishery's collapse, an interdisciplinary team of social, natural, and health scientists from Memorial University of Newfoundland researched what went wrong and, perhaps more importantly, if rural Newfoundland might have the strengths, both in terms of human and natural resources, on which to build a future.

The human history of this region has been marked by nearly continuous occupation for thousands of years — by First Nations and, since the 17th century, white

settlers. White settlers, like aboriginal populations before them, used a combination of different resources, woven together into some form of seasonal round, as a way of surviving. Cod, though, was king. For centuries, fishers and their families have always been the people closest to this resource, fishing both for merchants in a barter economy, and for themselves in a subsistence mode. This arrangement made it possible for them to live in relatively isolated rural communities; it also permitted merchants to run profitable enterprises because they did not have to pay their workers — families — a year-long wage. This basic socio-economic structure remained in place, in various forms, up to World War II.

But with the end of the war and Confederation with Canada, it was considered backward, a drag on the new province's economic future. Simultaneously, the state, which had demonstrated its capacity to manage civil society during the war, was seen as a catalyst for modernization and progress. The implications of this paradigm shift were profound. With Confederation came the social safety net. To those who lived and worked in the outports it was a welcome introduction to Canada. Yet despite the obvious benefits for people who were, by our standards, desperately poor, the sudden flow of cash disrupted the old internally-reliant structure of the household economy which had been based on occupational pluralism. Over time, it became less and less viable, even desirable, as ready cash permitted people to buy things that they once produced themselves. Many subsistence activities declined or disappeared.

At the same time, large-scale industrial schemes and commercial farming were, increasingly, looked upon as the *sine qua non* of a modern economy. According to Joey Smallwood, mega-projects, such as the oil refinery at Come-by-Chance on the Isthmus of Avalon, would drag Newfoundland "kicking and screaming into the 20th century." Indeed, in the post-World War II period, the icons of progress, captured in government-sponsored promotional films, were belching smokestacks, whirling gears, and busy factories, not pitchforks, hand lines, and dories.

What of the fisheries? Prior to the 1940s, the annual fish catch for Newfoundland was around 150,000 tonnes; this number increased in the 1950s as foreign fleets, which possessed "historic rights" to fish in the area, expanded their efforts. By the end of the decade, both domestic and foreign fishing fleets had adopted factory freezer technology, sophisticated sounding equipment, and new gear. As a result, by the 1960s, offshore catches exceeded inshore catches for the first time since the early 1700s. The total annual catch now stood at 810,000 tonnes, nearly a fourfold increase in less than 40 years.

Against this backdrop of resource exploitation, inshore fishers moved further offshore, while the offshore fleet expanded its zone of activity. All along there were voices of protest, largely from fishers who worked the inshore fishery and used older methods: the fish were getting smaller, they said, and they were getting harder to find. And they were right. It was becoming more and more difficult for fish to find safe places to spawn, regenerate, and recover, and the overall effect was star-

tling: between 1962 and 1977 the biomass of cod for harvest declined 82 percent to 526,000 tonnes, and the reproductive portion of the stock fell by 94 per cent. The establishment of the 200-mile limit in 1977 provided a temporary reprieve from this intense predation, but the direction of change — toward a capital intensive, high-technology industry — was undiminished. In the years after 1985, the spawning biomass finally succumbed, falling to one percent of its historic maximum in 1992. That is the historical evidence and it is compelling.

* * *

How are rural Newfoundlanders responding to the crisis? Memorial University's researchers constructed a rich data base of information on residence, migration, occupational histories, experience of unemployment, attitudes to social issues, views of the environment, household division of labour, formal employment, and use of the informal sector. The data base was built out of a survey of 786 people, aged 16 and over, who lived on the Bonavista Peninsula and the Isthmus of Avalon (see figure 1). It was statistically analyzed and enriched by detailed interviews designed to reach beyond the descriptive data into people's thoughts, ideas, and motivations. Field workers lived in the area for nine months to one year, administering the survey, recording daily observations in field journals, and conducting life histories with a range of people.

Our investigation revealed that there was a general sense of insecurity about the future, and remarkably strong attachment to the area despite the fact that nearly one-third of the people we spoke to expected to leave within five years. It was the younger and better educated who spoke of doing that, while stayers often hoped for a revival of the fishery and a chance to live as they did before. Those who were taking steps to find a new occupation or set up a small business through education or retraining opportunities were, sadly, in the minority. We also found a tendency for people to deal with problems either on their own or within the confines of the extended family. On matters of the formal economy, communities themselves were often divided on how to proceed, though informal collaboration was still in place.

In general, those who wished to stay in the outports put forth two different, though not mutually exclusive, approaches — strategies that looked "backward" and/or strategies that looked "forward." "Looking back" took the form of employment in a resurrected fishery in combination with Employment Insurance; "looking forward" took various forms, usually based on moving into new occupations such as tourism, skilled trades, and small farming. Combinations included a preference for returning to the fishery, but linking that to other things as well, such as starting a small business, fruit and market gardening, to name but two possibilities. While rural problems often seem intensely local, they are, as this evidence suggests, in fact structural, and strategies that build the necessary infrastructure to support small scale, self-reliant, and locally-rooted business in such areas will pay dividends in the form of sustainable communities and a sustainable tax base.

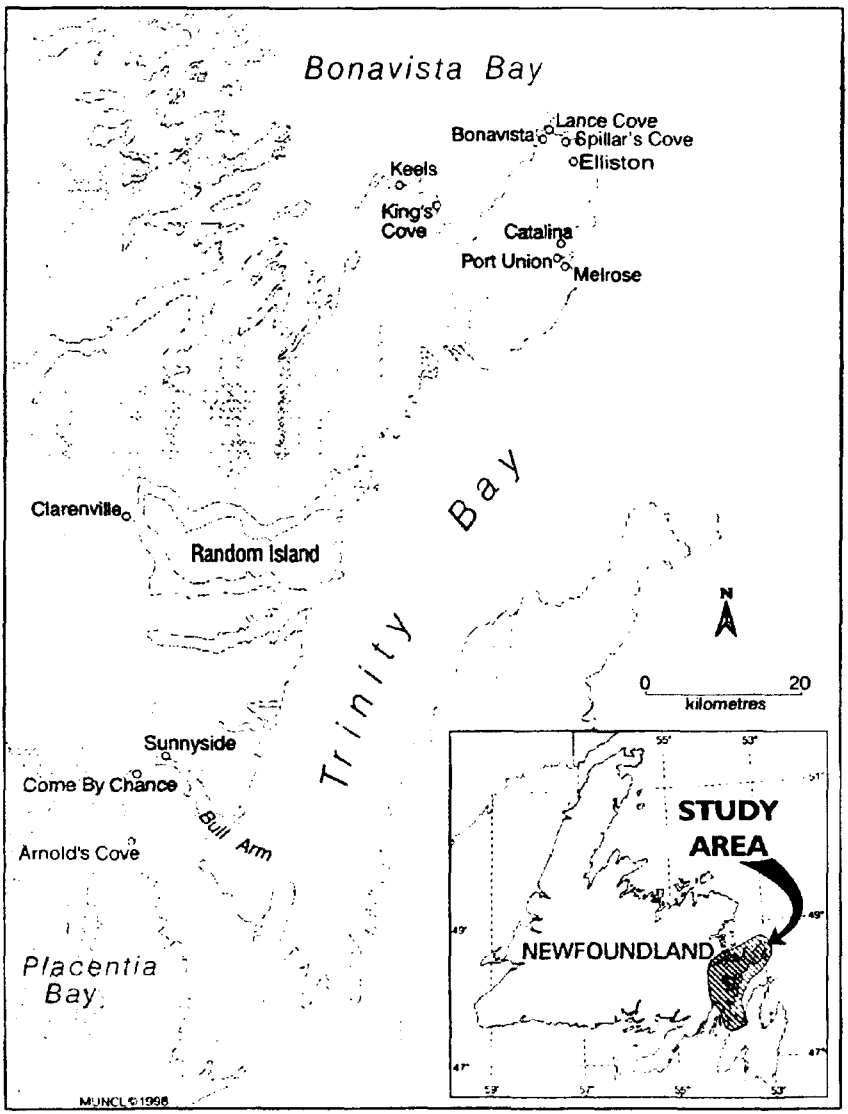

Figure 1: Area of research (Source: "Final Report of the Eco-Research Project: Sustainability in a Changing Cold-Ocean Coastal Environment," [St. John's 1998], 106).

Significantly, the informal economy continued to play an important role in people's lives: rural Newfoundlanders build their own homes and provide much of their own sustenance through berrying, gardening, hunting, fishing, and wood cutting. But our informants warned that these skills can be lost, and it must also be noted that cash inputs of some kind remain essential to this lifestyle. Modern ways of living, including mortgage arrangements and other urban-industrial structures, undermine informal structures, which actually provide a cheap and efficient safety net for communities in hard times. Without some way of recognizing the value of this set of strategies, and giving them formal development support, they are unlikely to be enough to sustain local communities.

How do people feel? Our health scientists' survey of the effects of unemployment on people's health found the same high degree of anxiety about the future, lack of confidence in the federal and provincial government's ability to solve the economic crisis, and a moderate amount of stress related to the moratorium in most cases. Women experienced more distress than men, which is consistent with other studies of this nature, but most people said they had adequate methods for coping. Parents cited kin and friendship networks as important in this regard, as well as being involved in the community, and most people participated in some kind of local volunteer activity — behaviour that underscores the linkages between family, community, and population health.

The children who participated in the study were, overall, socially and personally secure, exhibiting no maladaptive behaviour. They were also, like their parents, happy with life in Bonavista and with their family and friends. Unlike them, however, they were practical about future expectations, knowing they would have to leave, and knowing they would need advanced education to make this possible. Pessimism about local employment opportunities was high and the vast majority — about 90 per cent — plan a post-secondary education and a career NOT in the fishery. In sum, neither parents or children in this study exhibited the mental distress, lowered self-esteem, higher social anxiety, or weakened social support so typical of unemployed people in the research literature. It is clear that the kinship network is such that communities have a remarkable capacity to absorb shock.

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What, then, of the future? Key people in the community who might be expected to spearhead future development still look to the government or outside capital for the way forward, but see local control as vital. Everyone recognizes that there will be a severely reduced fishing sector under any future scenario, and the historical evidence for the danger of continuing what has been a very long-term strategy of increasing capital intensive technology in the development of the fisheries can not be ignored. It is critical that the fisheries be managed as an ecosystem, made up of human and fish communities, both of which need to be sustained. Foreseeing and forestalling any biological risk to commercial and non-commercial species will re-

quire a variety of political, economic, and technological innovations, not the least of which is the incorporation of fishers' local knowledge with that of government scientists to make fruitful partnerships between managers and local harvesters. Fish catchers possess a complex way of seeing and interpreting the oceanography of their different fishing grounds, and their knowledge is nuanced, enormously detailed, and vital to stock assessment and policy implementation.

What is immediately clear, of course, is that under this kind of scenario outports would have to diversify (probably building on existing informal economic structures) and government would have to take diversification seriously, adopting a sustained approach to local human, as well as fisheries, development. This implies the development of other small-scale activities: ecotourism, in its many manifestations, is an obvious possibility and a real one, given that, with the crucial and tragic exception of the decline in fish stocks, both the marine and terrestrial parts of the ecosystem are relatively healthy. Fortunately, in this age of communications technology, many of the old locational difficulties for rural small business development are being removed. The existence of a still flourishing informal economy, and a very strong personal attachment to the area, are precisely the kind of building blocks that are needed for such a policy to be feasible. They also provide a potent counterargument to the proposed "they should move away" solution, which does not come to grips with the serious adjustment costs of outmigration, or what would happen to the displaced and unemployed, let alone the valuable social and cultural features that would be destroyed in the process.

Rural Newfoundland could become sustainable again. Outport people with real responsibility for their livelihood and environment would regain their historic self-reliance, and be in a position to match their rich local knowledge with that of formal science, to develop a range of small business activities which would ensure the survival of a cultural heritage and environment for themselves, their descendants, and the many visitors that would come to the dramatic and beautiful places they call home.

Secrecy and Safety: Health Care Workers in Abortion Clinics

Sarah Todd

Whether [the anthrax threat] is a hoax or not, it's a criminal act and that act will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law .... It hit innocent people and I want to make sure that we do everything we can to protect those public servants

The people buying gas masks are trying to impose a shred of control over a potential threat that is silent, invisible. A monster that could arrive in the morning mail, on an autumn breeze - in your next breath. At least that's the fear.

RECENTLY, I HAVE FOUND MYSELF READING half-a-dozen breathless and fearful articles like the two above, describing the risk that anthrax poses for government and media employees. This threat has, at least momentarily, become a credible issue for workers. As someone who has worked in an abortion clinic, watching my mail for "powdery substances" is not an unusual practice. It has been a year since I was an abortion counsellor at a clinic in a large Canadian hospital. I remember the anthrax information session and the blue binder filled with protocols to be followed if clinic staff were exposed to this "dangerous powder." I remember opening unfamiliar packages with caution. What strikes me about recent news reports is how anthrax is perceived as a "new" danger for Americans and, to a lesser extent, Canadians. This "new" threat, while no less deliberate and focussed than the anthrax risks to which abortion service providers are accustomed, is perceived as a broad social concern whereas our earlier fears are not considered to be a general threat. Instead, the safety concerns of abortion workers are contained within abortion debates.

The media headlines rest in my thoughts as I write a paper about social workers and abortion services. I am reminded of the cultural ambivalence, if not silence, that surrounds abortion work and which, I argue, makes it difficult to position issues facing abortion workers in relation to more general workplace safety concerns. While we are able to recognize the potential threat that anthrax poses to workers now that it has entered "respectable" workplaces, the safety issues faced by abortion workers seem to be construed as "part of the job" when it occurs in abortion clinics. I suggest that the safety concerns of abortion workers are linked to the vulnerability of all workers who may have jobs (or whose work comes into contact with jobs) that attract violence or threats of violence. In order to understand these links, we need to move beyond the sensationalized debates that often dominate any reflection on abortion services and attempt to understand the daily workplace risks faced by workers in these clinics. Although such a task is beyond the scope of this

brief paper, I would like to use this opportunity to establish a conceptual framework for such a rethinking.

Three assertions ground my discussion. First, since 1988 abortions have been recognized as a legal health care service. As such, this exploration of the conditions under which abortion workers practice will focus on our experience as "everyday" practitioners of health care. In fact, abortion workers' daily tasks (and thus working experience) differ little from the employment experiences of any health care provider. Our days are full of providing accessible, safe, supportive, and responsible health care to people who have a right to these services. We are housekeeping staff, social workers, physicians, nurses, receptionists, and technicians. In these roles we provide, for the most part, ordinary health care services and go home to ordinary lives.

Secondly, workers within abortion clinics are often not pro-choice activists or radicals. Although most workers in these settings are committed to women's access to legal and safe abortions, the cultural and religious ambivalence that surrounds abortion is also reflected in our daily struggles with the nature of our jobs. In addition, when clinics operate within a hospital setting, some of the health care professionals engaged in this work have little choice as to whether or not their technical skills are implicated in the provision of abortion services. As a result, many health care professionals approach their work within abortion clinics, not as a political practice, but as part of an imagined politically neutral health care system.

Finally, the daily practices of abortion workers take place within a hostile, often dangerous environment. Anthrax threats — sending powdered substances to clinics with notes inferring that the contents are anthrax — appeared as a method of harassing abortion clinic staff in the late 1990s. This was, however, just the most recent manifestation of what have been several decades of violence. For some time, many of us working in Canadian abortion clinics could rationalize that, however tragic, these types of dangers only existed for clinics in the United States. Then, on 24 January 1992, Dr. Morgentaler's clinic in Toronto was bombed; on 8 November 1994, Dr. Romalis was shot and wounded in his Vancouver home; and on 11 November 1995, Dr. Short, a Hamilton doctor, was shot and wounded also while in his home. In 1996, there was a butyric acid attack on the Morgentaler Clinic in Alberta and in 1997 Dr. Fainman was shot and injured at his home in Winnipeg. Though most anti-abortion violence has been aimed at physicians, clinic receptionists, nurses, and security staff have all been terrorized, wounded, or killed because of their work in abortion clinics.

This type of sustained yet unpredictable violence is, as Dr. Morgentaler has suggested, "a terror tactic to spread panic among people who are providing abortion services." On this level, it is an effective strategy. A number of studies suggest that anti-abortion violence results in fear and stress among clinic staff. These events form the basis for my third assertion, that abortion workers are employed in a context that is perceived by them (evidence suggests that this perception is grounded in

reality) to involve a significant degree of personal risk. This risk takes two forms: the fear and actual experience of physical harm and a pervading social stigmatization. Each has a particular effect on workers, shaping their sense of workplace safety or lack thereof.

Although these assertions suggest that abortion services could be explored through established notions of workplace safety, there are two central problems with such an integration of analysis and practice. First, it is not easy to apply pre-existing concepts of workplace safety to abortion work. The models that many authors have developed to address health care workplace safety, though useful, are often concerned with patient violence, domestic violence that spills into the workplace, and random violence by the public. These frameworks are cumbersome when trying to account for the ideology-based, systematic, and yet random threats and assaults by multiple unknown assailants. In other words, the pattern of violence that defines the working practices of people employed in abortion clinics is not easily understood within traditional notions of workplace safety.

The second barrier to applying notions of worker safety to abortion services relates to the ways in which abortion work is positioned in our society. A number of authors have drawn on Everett Hughes's (1971) sociological concept of "dirty work" to explain the ways that abortion is positioned as morally reprehensible. Hughes describes "dirty work" as that which is defined by powerful others as morally reprehensible and work that general society may require, but would prefer to avoid even thinking about. Despite a long struggle to have abortion legalized and recognized as a valid medical procedure, it is still either hotly debated in moral terms or positioned in the shadows, discussed only in whispers. The inadequacies of language in discussing the specificity of abortion and the parallel construction of abortion as dirty work are mutually reinforcing; our silence and polarized moral debates about abortion increase the likelihood that it can be imagined as dirty work, which in turn manifests the silence and moral judgment. These disjunctures between abortion work and workplace safety leave us clumsily considering a number of issues that, in turn, challenge us to find ways to rethink abortion work and notions of worker safety.

The silence that surrounds abortion work magnifies workers' insecurities and increases the isolation many of us feel in our jobs. It is not only the fear of physical violence that constitutes the hostile environment in which we work. It is also our fear of social stigma that regulates silences regarding abortion and subsequently leaves us dealing with our safety concerns alone. The pervasiveness of this stigma was never more evident to me than when the very women to whom we were providing services expressed that they could not understand how we could be involved in this work; even some of the women who access abortion services consider it to be dirty work. Many abortion workers find it difficult, if not impossible, to tell friends, neighbours, and often even family members about our jobs. Our vulnerability and thus the constant heightened awareness we have that friends and neighbours might

discover "what we do" is often a source of ongoing stress. To illustrate, shortly after clinic staff received a fax confirming that pro-life groups had all of our names and addresses, my neighbours posted a sign in their front window with the slogan "justice for the unborn." I was completely unnerved, uncertain as to whether this was a statement for the general public or a message aimed directly at me. Each day I would return home from work to see the sign sitting there and remain unsure as to whether I needed to be concerned for my safety. It is these broader "workplace hazards" that make abortion workers' concerns even more difficult to contain within mainstream notions of workers' safety. When the danger that originates in our workplaces slips incessantly into our private spheres, our ability to find ways to address these concerns within existing frameworks seems grossly inadequate. At the same time, perhaps the problems that abortion work presents provides an opportunity to consider the multiple ways in which many aspects of workers' safety fail to be contained within spaces of employment.

Another challenge in addressing the safety concerns of abortion workers is that the dangers faced by health care workers more generally have only been brought to light in the past decade or so. Abortion workers' experience of verbal harassment, placard-carrying protesters, hospital staff placing various religious paraphernalia in the clinic, and staff silences and avoidances all serve to imbue our workplace with a virtual miasma of threat and uncertainty. We only have our first names on our name tags. We do not have names or titles on our office doors, the hallways surrounding our clinic have security cameras, and a security guard often sits at the front door of the clinic. Around Remembrance Day — which has, for a number of years, signalled an escalation in pro-life violence — we become increasingly cautious, particularly when using isolated parking spaces. The police have, at times, recommended that we vary our routes home. In this atmosphere of vague threats, perpetual caution, and little institutional or social support, our emotional responses are often difficult to organize in terms of paranoia versus legitimate precaution, which also makes it difficult to discuss our work fears. Why should a pro-life bumper sticker on a car in the hospital parking lot raise my anxiety as I ride up the elevator? Then again, why should it not? This lack of a space in which we can confidently assess our fears as legitimate or otherwise ensures that the silences regarding our work continue. We are left vulnerable and isolated.

The reluctance to explore the work of abortion workers and our safety issues is, moreover, a factor of the continued focus on patient safety; the patient's well-being is our number one concern while our own fears of violence shift to the periphery. We take care of the patients, but who is taking care of us? Although I do not suggest that patients should be anything but a priority, when this hierarchy of concern is situated within a context where much of women's caring labour is devalued, the issues faced by abortion workers fade into the background.

What might be possible to consider within existing frameworks for debating worker safety is the broad restructuring of the health care system and the institu-

tional structure in which many Canadian abortion clinics operate. The relationship between clinics and their parent hospitals has always been ambivalent. In 1995 Carole Joffe noted that, even after the legalization of abortion services, there was a significant degree of institutional resistance against their provision. In today's neo-liberal economy, this relationship has the potential to become even more strained. For instance, hospitals increasingly rely on private donations as opposed to government funding; abortion services threaten those types of donations. If hospitals are forced to prioritize the acquisition of private funding, what will happen to the place of abortion services within the hospital system and what will these changes mean for patients and staff? Fiscal concerns have also resulted in an increase in part-time labour and the out-sourcing of services such as security, which presents new challenges to clinic staff who are often forced to depend upon less-specialized security personnel who may know little about the specific safety concerns of abortion workers. Shifts to the private sector often ignore the special needs of hospitals, particularly abortion clinics.

The dynamics that evolve from these new funding relationships result in a less supportive workplace and increase the need to keep one's work secret from other hospital staff. This atmosphere is further complicated as our roles change. We find that our jobs are becoming more rationalized and routinized with an increased emphasis on technical aspects and less of a focus on caring and interpersonal relations. Although many of us draw on the caring components of our practice to deflect our attention away from our fears and ambivalences, organizational pressures mean that "caring" has little significance in our overall work performance. These changes in health care are seldom considered in terms of their possible impact on abortion work, particularly in its location as dirty work. When workplace discussions increasingly focus on technicalities, our safety concerns seldom receive formalized responses from hospital administrators or proactive preventative work from unions. Instead safety issues are left largely in the hands of clinic staff. I think we seldom ever asked administrative or union staff to become involved in our concerns because we had internalized the notion that violence, intimidation, and fear were "just part of the job," and that the priorities of our work were the technicalities (i.e. number of patients seen, hours worked, staff seniority, rate of complications among patients, etc.). We were probably also worried that raising our concerns would threaten what we perceived as our tenuous hold within the health care system. We would often speak about trying to stay quiet and under everyone's radar.

The changes in health care priorities will have a particular impact on the safety concerns of abortion workers. What will it mean to have part-time workers rotating through clinics? Will this type of employment structure not diminish the informal structures that offer staff security and safety? The caring component of our work is one of the few aspects that help workers negotiate its rather slippery moral terrain: if that falls away, what will be left? These are all significant aspects of considering

workers' safety. They are also the issues that concern all health care workers. How will health care restructuring affect our understandings of worker safety?

The ways in which our society responded to the "anthrax concerns" of postal workers as a general threat to Canadian workers is interesting when compared to our earlier responses to similar fears expressed by abortion workers. Our responses signify the cultural ambivalence we have towards health care workers who provide abortion services. This is to the detriment of all workers, but particularly the nurses, social workers, ultrasound technicians, receptionists, security staff, housekeeping staff, and physicians who are struggling through the day-to-day safety issues involved in abortion work. Unless we begin to find ways to explore abortion work from the perspective of workplace safety, the important issues that are facing these workers will continue to be ignored. Abortion work is principally a regular health care service carried out, for the most part, by unsupported health care providers in an extraordinarily hostile environment. At a time of enormous transition within the health care system, and in our current heightened sense of insecurity, it is important that the uneasiness of these workers be recognized as credible concerns for workers in general.