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Atlantic Canada and "the End of History": Postmodernism and Regional Underdevelopment

1. Introduction

Within a year of Confederation, Nova Scotians twice voted to secede from Canada. Intermittently since then, there has been talk of a crisis in the Atlantic region. Cape Bretoners have experienced bloody industrial strife and given widespread support to anti-capitalist, even communist movements. Improved farmland in the region has fallen by nearly two million acres in the last four decades (APEC 30), while by some estimates fish harvests are now lower than they were in 1905 (Alexander 49). And Nova Scotia, which at the turn of the century produced half of Canada's steel and 14% of total industrial output, today contributes about 2% of the latter, an almost steady contraction since 1919 that far exceeds the province's relative population decline (George 9-11).

Dominated by externally-controlled banks and multinational corporations (MNCs), the four Atlantic provinces are, by many criteria, actually more dependent and underdeveloped now than countries which were formerly considered "Third World."¹ It is small wonder that many people in the region consider the period around the turn of the century as a Golden Age which has now given way to dependency, poverty and powerlessness.

A rich tradition of both scholars and politicians has attempted to explain in "macro" terms the causes and stubborn persistence of regional underdevelopment. This essays reviews some of the more recent claims in the light of the "postmodern" critique of modern "metanarratives."

Postmodernism purports to reject liberal, Marxist and feminist analyses alike. Taken to its logical conclusion, postmodernism asserts that class, race and gender do not exist as valid analytic categories and that History, as a coherent pattern of human development, is at an end. Many Marxists have rejected such notions with barely concealed contempt; however, the fact that they are now being employed by elements of both the Right and Left, and by both anti-feminists and feminists, make postmodernism worthy of serious examination. This essay will focus in particular on the gender component of regional underdevelopment in order to argue in favor of a less hasty rejection of "modern" historical materialism.

2. Paradigms of Underdevelopment

The first systematic attempt to analyze the causes of regional underdevelopment was made by the Duncan Commission in 1926 (Forbes 1978). It concluded that federal transport policies undermined the competitiveness of Maritime industry and recommended changes in the freight rate structure. Since then, many other theories have been advanced to explain the causes of the region's apparent economic collapse in ways that would also help to explain the present malaise, particularly why it is that neither market incentives nor government spending have undone the damage inflicted by the "misguided symmetry" of earlier federal policies.² These include the obsolescence of the technologies which demanded or gave "comparative advantage" to Maritime "staples," too small or dispersed a population, too large a population, lack of resources, lack of managerial skills, ethnic fragmentation and a cultural disinclination to hard work—the Maritime rustic being "content to be satisfied with the delights . . . of the status quo" (Rawlyk 41). A local favorite blames the perfidy of central Canadian politicians while they, at least under the present government, hold that unemployment insurance maintains an antiquated way of life, encourages "inflexibility" in the labor force and hence discourages investment.

These "liberal" theories, which may range from business apologetics to quite sincere critiques of capitalist excesses, have been thoroughly critiqued elsewhere.³ Generally, they are seen to contain elements of truth, descriptively valuable but analytically misleading. Rooted in the liberal paradigm which has been dominant in the West since the nineteenth century, they share the fundamental premise that under normal circum-

stances free enterprise and parliamentary democracy should bring sound economic progress. In practice, such an "idealist" understanding of history and of human rationality have led to the varied and often contradictory government policies which attempt to "fine-tune" the free enterprise system, that is, to correct or eliminate those perceived impediments to the full flowering of the capitalist potential. Their manifest failure to do so has contributed to making Maritimers the "most politically disaffected and cynical citizens in the country" (Brym 74) and to the creation of a significant amount of Marxist scholarship.

Marxism, however, seems to be in disgrace these days. One problem is that much of it has been oversimplistic and polemical and, consequently, often as misleading and futile as the theories it critiqued. The feisty Bolshevism of J. B. McLachlan, for example, whose views of proletarian revolution and the "inevitable" downfall of capitalism brought the Communist Party close to winning the Glace Bay seat in parliament in the 1920s, was far too crude to explain either the resilience of capital in surviving its periodic crises or the disunity of the working class (Earle 1991). The same is true of dependency theory, which flowered in the 1960s and 1970s as an attempt to overcome the shortcomings of the earlier orthodoxy.⁴ Its assertions about a local comprador "lumpenbourgeoisie" facilitating the "development of underdevelopment" in the interests of British, central Canadian or American "imperialism" have since been shown to be both theoretically and empirically flawed.⁵ For instance, the historical record of regional entrepreneurs is ambiguous—there are examples of both their "betrayal" of local interests (see for instance, Reilly, Frost and Burrill and McKay) as well as their resistance to foreign takeover, even to the point of siding with workers to force the American owners to sell out (Delottinville). It is furthermore well documented that much of the early industrialization was carried out by local, not foreign capitalists (Wood, Inwood 1980). Nor, considering that the Maritimes' industrialization took place *after* Confederation, can the notion of a consistent decline towards underdevelopment be empirically supported (Acheson 1972; Alexander).

On the positive side, the debate over dependency has helped to stimulate what has been termed "neo-Marxism." Concepts such as Althusser's "relative autonomy" of ideology, Poulantzas's "class fractions" and E. P. Thompson's "social history" have allowed for a much more nuanced understanding of class conflict. The "concrete" historical studies

which they have inspired illustrate well the complex interplay of forces that have combined to result in the region's deindustrialization. Yet neo-Marxism has also been criticized for reifying class structures to an extent that obscures actual, idiosyncratic human behavior. The tendency to "degenerate into static exercises in labelling and filling boxes," that is, to categorize workers purely by their relation to the means of production, frequently ends in frustration as workers fail to act according to theoretical prediction (MacDonald and Connelly 61). Perhaps more disturbing, arrayed in their formidable theoretical armor, Neo-Marxists have sometimes arrogantly dismissed alternative viewpoints, most notably those put forward by postmodern feminists.⁶ Neo-Marxists have therefore been accused of "falsely universalizing" and "totalitarian" tendencies which belie their own calls for a return to what Lukacs defined as Marx's only orthodoxy: his methodology, that is, historical analysis based on the principles of dialectical materialism (Flax 49; Hartssock 1979).

Ironically, both the Right and Left now employ similar language in their attacks upon Marxism. Frances Fukuyama sees the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe as proof that liberal values have definitively triumphed and brought an "end of history."⁷ Postmodernists have likewise determined that "metanarratives" such as Marx's theory of historical change through class struggle necessarily suppress discourses and experiences which may contradict their attempts to structure a universally applicable understanding of human nature. Postmodernists argue that in place of History with a capital H, the best we can aspire to are discreet histories of different groups where every statement is culturally and temporally specific (Fraser and Nicholson).

But are we to believe then that nothing connects events such as the current recession, the Gulf War, free trade talks with Mexico, the constitutional impasse and massive, politicized strikes such as among nurses across the country and the (repressed) national rail strike in the United States? Surely not, for the fact remains that history in even the narrowest sense of class struggle *is* still observably happening. I would like to argue therefore, that far from being a dead issue, Marxism, particularly as elucidated by Gramsci and socialist feminist theorists, remains a vital source of inspiration and understanding in our efforts to struggle against the present forms of injustice and domination. That is to say, the demise of Marxism as an ideology is not an end of history but a vindication of Marxism as a methodology of historical analysis. Rather

than imposing an inflexible model of historical change, this can free the researcher to explore the complex relationships between class, gender, race, the environment, and so on, in a non-dogmatic and flexible yet "insistently" critical manner (Hartsock). In this essay, I contend that socialist feminism, or feminist political economy, offers the best guide to attaining that objective.

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Marxists with an interest in the "woman question" have long noted that there is a relationship between capitalism and the subordination of women. For Engels, the invention of private property represented the "historical defeat" of women as men's control over property made women increasingly dependent upon them. This process began before capitalism but was greatly accelerated by the removal of most production from the home to the factory during the Industrial Revolution. Women became, in effect, the domestic slaves of the wage slaves, an arrangement that enhanced the accumulation of capital in many ways. For example, the gender ideology that assigns women to the home or to certain nurturing "woman's work" has historically provided a huge supply of the unpaid labor necessary for the reproduction of the labor force, both in actual numbers and in the mentality best suited to labor in hierarchical organizations. By offering men exclusive rights to their wives' sexual and emotional services, it also restores the current generation's dignity, crushed as it is by the daily degradation of most work (Marx and Engels; Reich; Barrett).

Marxist feminists have noted many other ways that women's subordination to men is functional to capitalism. Among them, the ideology of women's domesticity sanctifies the existence of an enormous reserve army of labor which can be engaged and then dismissed whenever conditions demand. It also justifies lower wages for women and can be used as a threat against men to keep wages in general down.⁸ The commodification of women as sex objects and/or mothers is also a lucrative spur to consumerism.

Despite strong material and cultural reasons to resist the changes in the "sex/gender system" which accompanied the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the dominant class, the working class over time more or less adopted bourgeois notions of sexual propriety. This is partly because

working-class males were to an extent seduced by the patriarchal ideal. Capital took advantage of their fears of women's competition in the labor market. In nineteenth-century England the introduction of "protective legislation" largely removed women from the public workforce and effectively confined them to the private (Humphries). In much of colonial Africa, where capitalism developed in a way that was largely dependent on male migrant labor, the Europeans "reinvented" African traditions and stiffened the patriarchal spines of traditional chiefs and fearful male migrants as part of their effort to keep women from abandoning the rural areas (Chancock; Ranger). Closer to home, Marilyn Porter has shown how women's relative equality with men in the precapitalist mode of production in Newfoundland has been eroded by the introduction of industrial labor relations and consumer ideologies, in which working-class men, to their own ultimate detriment, colluded.⁹

With Marxists however, this awareness that patriarchy has a material base did not fundamentally change their analysis of class struggle as between predominantly male peasants, proletariats, and the bourgeoisie. Women's class position was assumed to be the same as their husbands and their struggles, which took place largely in the private or household sphere, were of lesser significance. Indeed, the subordination of women was seen more as a pernicious side effect of capitalism than as intrinsic to it. When pressed, even those Marxists who were sincere in their support for women's emancipation would protest that "there is no time now!" (Lenin 104). In other words, the "real" revolution demanded fullest attention and the gender revolution would follow.

Socialist feminism, by contrast, incorporates into class analysis some of the revolutionary ideas of radical feminism, most critically the notion that the "personal is political." In other words, personal choices in the "private" sphere (sexual orientation, clothes, language, sexual division of labor) have far-reaching political implications in the public. Indeed, socialist feminism holds that such dichotomies as private/public, body/soul, male/female, man/nature are not "essential" but have been socially constructed with the political intent of domination by one group over another. It therefore seeks not only to revolutionize the analysis of class and gender relations but, by erasing such political dichotomies, to challenge the very definition of what it means to be human. Gender thus becomes not a side issue but central to the analysis (Eisenstein; Sargeant; Jaggar, Tong).¹⁰

What can make feminist political economy "insistently" materialist is that the cultural assumptions which led to the theoretical dead ends described above have been identified and detached from the theory. The early Marxists were mostly, after all, European, bourgeois males. They shared a subtle but pervasive sexism which ignored or minimized the crucial aspect of women's unique role in production, a naïve faith in unlimited industrial expansion and progress, an Enlightenment-era confidence in a universal human rationality (or "species being"), and a tendency to underestimate the power of language or discourse. Socialist feminist theory can correct these tendencies in a way that best refines Marx's fundamental insights, capturing the essence and the complexity of class struggle without reproducing his Victorian assumptions. At the level of political strategy, it also best advances the goal of thorough-going revolutionary change. That is, it suggests realistic and democratic options in the effort to forge a sustainable opposition to the capitalist, patriarchal status quo by, for instance, rejecting Leninist principles of "vanguardism" and hierarchy.

Socialist feminism does all this primarily through its explicit focus on the role of culture, above all gender ideology, in the formation of the political economy. That is, it insists that the inferior social value accorded to women's biology, labor and psychology is not a "natural" or atavistic phenomenon, but rather, is part of an ideology which has been constructed over time in a relatively autonomous relationship to changing the mode of production. Moreover, women's subordination to men is seen as having been integral to capitalism's development as a distinctive mode of production. Patriarchy in this view is therefore accorded equal theoretical billing with capitalism, the "sex/gender system" and mode of production comprising "the two fundamentally determining and constituting elements of society (Chodorow 85)."¹¹

Some socialist feminists have called for scrapping gender-blind or biased Marxist terminology (for example, replacing "class" with "division of labor" analysis). Others have argued for "stretching" it to include a sensitivity to the standpoint of women. In this essay, I will adhere to the latter view. The term "women's standpoint" is emphatically not to assert that women are unified in their understanding of the world, but refers to a world view "grounded at the epistemological level of reproduction" (N. Hartsock 1985, 259). Basically, this broadens the Marxist emphasis on production in the public sphere to include women's reproductive labor in

the private. As discussed below then, class struggle in the broad sense includes the sexual division of labor and gender struggles within the household as equally important to labor struggles in the work place.

3. Class Struggle in the Broad Sense: A Socialist Feminist Interpretation of Regional Underdevelopment

The objective of socialist feminist theory is, as it was to Gramsci, to stimulate and guide effective revolutionary praxis by overcoming some of the impediments created by earlier revolutionary or radical theories (Hartsock 59; Connelly 6). The first essential step towards this objective is to gain a clear understanding of the nature of the enemy. That done, it then becomes possible both to conduct original research and to reinterpret existing scholarship in a way that presents, not the Ultimate Truth but "less partial and perverse representations" of it than what currently and misleadingly pass themselves off as objective, empirical or scientific (Harding 100).

It is important to begin by distinguishing those features of capitalism which are "systemic" (intrinsic and unchanging) from those which are "structural" (change over time). In this, socialist feminism basically accepts the traditional Marxist view that "relations of production based on exploitation and commodification of labor and its attendant class struggle" is perhaps the most important systemic feature of capitalism—it is the same now as it was in 1848, the year of the Communist Manifesto (Kolko 8).¹² The struggle by workers to survive and to preserve their dignity as human beings is the main motor of historical change under capitalism, eventually compelling the dominant class either to suppress or adjust to their demands in order to preserve its dominance. One of the principle contradictions of capitalism is that the bourgeoisie, compelled mainly by competition, both intensifies the degree of exploitation of labor and "socializes" workers in ways that tend to bring about an increase in the latter's consciousness of their class oppression. This then facilitates more effective worker organization and resistance which, in turn, presses capital to seek further changes. In that way, proletarian consciousness comprises a major factor in technical innovation and the modernization of capitalist structures. That is why Marx believed the first socialist revolution would begin in England or Germany, countries where industrial (and hence proletarian) development was most advanced.¹³

Following this argument, it has been asserted that the present weakness of the Maritime economy is at least partly due to the weakness of the labor movement, so conservative and disunified that it failed to force capital to fully modernize (Rawlyk). In fact, the Maritimes have a history of labor struggle and organization which is at least as radical as the rest of the country.¹⁴ Canada's first known guild was in Halifax (1798), while Saint John became notorious for worker militancy in the mid nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, some of the country's largest and most radical mass unions were found in the Maritimes. The coal miners and steel workers of Nova Scotia in particular fought huge strikes (McKay; Frank) while Amherst, with 3000 unionized workers out of a population of 10,000, was among the most completely organized manufacturing centres in the world (Reilly). That workers did not succeed in winning control over the workplace and, after the 1930s, appear to have been cowed into a notably submissive position, cannot therefore be attributed to a lack of trying.

A much more convincing explanation is offered by the theory of "semi-proletarianization." This describes a situation where independent primary producers (the fishers, farmers, and foresters who made up the original settler population) engaged in a "household" or "domestic" mode of production with "amazing 'occupational pluralism'" (Sacouman 1980, 235). While increasingly incorporated into wage labor, they still managed to retain the option to avoid it, mainly through land or boat ownership and free access to the sea and the forest. Semi-proletarians were often mercilessly exploited (as with the "truck system" which held fishers in virtual bondage), but this was offset to a degree by the fact that they retained a limited economic autonomy. As with the peasants of nineteenth-century France, this autonomy impeded both the development of a fully industrialized economy (which demands a disciplined work force compelled to wage labor by a lack of access to alternatives) and a revolutionary (as opposed to radical or undisciplined) proletarian consciousness.¹⁵

In other words, because the autonomy of primary producers was never completely smashed and they were never reduced to full "wage slavery" or organized according to bourgeois preferences, working-class traditionalism was able to endure as a form of resistance against industrial relations of production. This in turn contributed to the survival of an obsolete mode of production or, in Sacouman's terms, "truncated"

industrial growth (Sacouman 1980, 232). Underdevelopment in this view is thus explained by the seeming contradiction that capitalism exploits the Third World's resources but it does not exploit the people enough (Kay 55; Wood).

To fully appreciate the impact of class struggle in Atlantic Canada then, we need to recognize "primitive" as well as organized forms of worker resistance. These have included theft, sabotage or incendiarism, tenant or rent revolts, ritualized protest (like "mummery"), riots and desertion (Palmer 1983; Sider). Transience was especially significant in Atlantic Canada where there was always the freedom to migrate west and south or to return to subsistence production. Such actions, when carried out on a mass scale, were capable of thwarting industrial development to the extent that an unreliable work force was a disincentive for industrial investment.

That said, capital can certainly adjust to semi-proletarianization, profiting especially from the maintenance of a large, rural based reserve army of labor which can be engaged or dismissed with little disruption or inflationary impact as the business cycle progresses. Wages can be depressed and strikes broken more easily under such conditions. For example, the very high turnover rate of workers who left their jobs rather than remain in the intolerable conditions contributed to the extremely late unionization of the coal mines at Minto, while in Sydney, importing workers from Newfoundland and even Barbados was a deliberate strategy to undermine the strength of the local unions (Seager; Crawley). Transience was claimed to be a factor which helped destroy the sense of community in the Halifax "slum" of Africville and made it possible for the state to "develop" the area with relatively little opposition (Clairmont and Magill 75-77).

Socialist feminist analysis, with its explicit focus on gender ideology and gender struggles, can considerably deepen our insight into the process of semi-proletarianization and of class conflict in general. To begin with, like other streams of feminist thought, it "recovers" women's role in history, revealing, for example, that women were sometimes more radical than men in strikes and unionization.¹⁶ It also acts to balance the neo-Marxist tendency to focus on predominantly male "producers" to the exclusion of the "reproducers" whose domestic labor was often crucial in supporting both men's strike action and the semi-proletarian option.¹⁷ Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it blurs the false dichotomy

between the public and private spheres. This allows gender struggles taking place within the household to be analyzed for their impact upon the larger issues of political economy.

For example, what has been the role of women in the "amazing" tenacity of the outports? Porter (1987) has asserted that rural Newfoundland women have a far more sophisticated political culture than the men do, although this is hidden by the assumption and discourse that politics is men's work. In fact, through informal associations, women have adopted a political strategy that takes them outside the usual, narrow definition of politics. Their struggles to maintain the outport way of life might be dismissed as "gossipy" or "women's socials," but they appear to have had success in frustrating both powerful market forces and state coercion which demand a more "rational" economy centred around "growth poles."

Other studies have shown how gender ideology is manipulated by industrial management to create hierarchies and effectively disorganize the proletariat (MacCallum 1988), and how women's "disorganized" resistance to capital has sometimes compelled major changes in the production process. McFarland, for instance, found that a hardworking and loyal workforce in a New Brunswick company town eventually forced the company to abandon its long-cherished (and profitable) paternalism towards its mainly female workers. Those women may have been strongly anti-union but they refused to co-operate in company demands for greater labor flexibility. They called in sick, they wasted fish, and they conducted spontaneous slowdowns which finally led the company to adopt more modern technology and confrontational labor relations (McFarland 1988).

MacDonald and Connelly also offer a broad analysis of the ways in which differential class positions within the household affect class consciousness and conflict. To give one of their examples, in Nova Scotian fishing communities worker militancy fluctuated over time in a pattern that co-related to changes in family structure and employment. In the 1930s, the workforce was virtually all male. It suffered extreme exploitation, with wages below subsistence level supplemented by the domestic production of their wives. This contributed to a shared consciousness of class position within the family and thus to the women supporting their men in the bitter labor struggles of the 1930s. These were unsuccessful. Not wishing to encounter such strife again however,

capital and state favored a new labor policy in the postwar era which brought increasing numbers of women into the fish plants as a low-paid and flexible proletariat. Their husbands, meanwhile, came to regard themselves as in a bourgeois position, semi-independent petty commodity producers whose incomes and lifestyles were buttressed by their wives' earnings. This was "a combination that was not conducive to political action on either front—in the plants or on the boats" and for a long period therefore the fishing industry was characterized by labor quiescence (MacDonald and Connelly 78). Only with the restructuring of the industry in the early 1980s (which eliminated much of the independence of the men and sent them back to work in the plants alongside their wives) has there been a return to shared class consciousness and a resultant rise in worker militancy which now seriously threatens the power of capital within the industry.

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Socialist feminism emphatically does not focus narrowly on women or gender. In fact its stress on the "relatively autonomous" nature of ideology enables it to consider many other aspects of culture in a materialist way. Race, for instance, is a precapitalist phenomenon which has not only survived but in many ways intensified with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of liberal ideology.¹⁸ It is a significant issue in the Maritimes, where society has been characterized by sharp ethnic divisions and racial conflict. For example, prejudice against the Acadians and Micmacs continues to be reflected in business hiring practices, union exclusivism and state development policies so that the aboriginal reserves and the Acadian pockets are still among the most obviously impoverished areas in the region.¹⁹ Justifying the exploitation of a cheap, "barbarous" labor pool, prejudice against the Irish (especially the Catholics) was fundamental to the early development of industry and infrastructure throughout Atlantic Canada. Irish immigrants were imported in the holds of returning timber vessels in conditions scarcely better than the slave ships farther south and, as in Britain, subjected to nativistic violence and a host of overt discriminatory laws well into the twentieth century (Scott 1984).

Since the early 1800s, Nova Scotia has also had a black minority of 3-4% of the population, a racially distinguishable "lumpenproletariat"

frequently physically segregated from white society. Although sociological studies have suggested that black marginalization and disunity are purely "cultural," the history of Africville and the peculiar spatial development of Halifax and Dartmouth calls attention to race as an instrument of "class war" (Clairmont). Africville became notorious as Halifax's worst slum and was flattened in the late 1960s to make way for a bridge and container terminal. Yet for nearly a century it was a viable, close-knit community with an upwardly-aspirant petty bourgeoisie and a solid working class of artisans. The slum was created by decisions made by white city politicians; for example, the refusal to provide the most basic civic services (like water and firefighting), the routing of the railroad through the middle of the community, and the siting of the new city dump beside it in the 1950s. The haste with which Africville was bulldozed contrasts starkly with nearly 50 years of stalling on a plan to construct a bridge at the southern end of the Halifax peninsula where, again not by coincidence or culture, virtually the only blacks were servants.²⁰

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The environment has also clearly had a major role in shaping (and being shaped by) class struggles and must therefore be considered in an "insistently" materialist analysis. By the 1840s, deforestation around the major towns led to critical shortages of fuel and the cruelty of winter for the poor both contributed to outmigration and inhibited the development of trade unions (Fingard). Deforestation also hastened the development of monopsony in New Brunswick as small timber companies were eliminated and workers were ensnared by debt to company stores (Wynn). Environmental degradation, when it affects subsistence production, often impinges on women first and most heavily as they are generally the ones responsible for day-to-day family upkeep.

A closer examination of environmental and technical factors can also explain certain historical anomalies. For example, while Marxist theory predicts that the most advanced proletarian consciousness occurs where the means of production are most advanced, the most militant coal miners in the region were in fact first found in the most technically backward major mine, Springhill. One explanation is that the interplay of archaic technology and the environment (especially the danger of explosion and

the thickness of the coal seams) shaped the working-class culture of Springhill in such a way as to make it more self-assertive than theory would normally predict (McKay 1986b).

Such environmental factors as affected the development of the labor movement were, however, ultimately secondary in relation to the development of capitalist relations of production. Thus, Halifax long-shoremen eventually did get organized despite the inhospitable environment of the harbor (McKay 1986a). So too have Newfoundland fishers, whom only 30 years ago Joey Smallwood despaired of for their intransigent individualism. This is a direct result of the "rationalization" of fishing in an industrial way: the breakdown of centuries of the domestic mode of production and/or a semi-proletarian way of life has facilitated the "amazing" success of unionization for virtually all fish workers in the province (Clement 1988).²¹

As the example of fishing also illustrates, technology has had a direct impact upon the environment which few economic theories, including Marxism, have adequately taken into consideration in the past. Most dramatic has been the capability of new technology to more effectively exploit resources. Deep-sea trawlers, longwall mining and giant farm combines all allow one worker to produce many times more than ever before. The huge capital investment needed for this technology is itself an incentive to overharvest. The result has been, from seals in the 1890s to cod in the 1980s, rapid resource depletion. If Port-aux-Basques is to be the most recent casualty, then it only follows in the tradition of Glace Bay, Londonderry and Bell Island as a community bereft of potential long-term industrial growth by the short-sighted exploitation of a resource. Agribusiness may have the same effect as well; New Brunswick's potato industry erodes and rapidly depletes the fertility of the soil. And while the forests have not disappeared, the indigenous trees mostly have, replaced by fast-growing pulp stock which, like any mono-crop, is susceptible to pests. Massive infestation by the spruce budworm has been resisted by a combination of spraying and clear-cutting, industrial "solutions" with potentially grave environmental and economic effects, especially for the few remaining independent woodlot owners (Burrill and McKay).²²

While eschewing the elitism of business history, socialist feminist analysis does take into account the nature and role of the bourgeoisie, whose control over investment decisions and ideology ultimately sets the parameters for the labor movement. In this it builds upon a considerable existing scholarship.²³ Studies have shown for example, that the military and merchant oligarchies who dominated the region at times showed a "violent, negative reaction" to efforts to establish manufacturing industries and continued to invest in obsolete technology (like wooden ships, still being built as late as the 1890s).²⁴ In Cape Breton, the General Mining Association "aggressively thwarted" local schemes to use coal for manufacturing purposes since these were seen as a potential impediment to exports (McKay 1987, 21).²⁵ In PEI, absentee proprietors and the local Compact, "would neither promote nor permit its cultivation" and violently suppressed attempts by tenants to expand agricultural production.²⁶ In Newfoundland, the St. John's "philosopher kings" who controlled the fishing industry made virtually no investment in it after the mid nineteenth century (Alexander). Atlantic Canada's present "neo-colonial" status stems partly from the failure of the industrial bourgeoisie to fully overthrow the dominance, or at least the limitations of the merchant class. Merchants continued to prefer to export capital to less risky ventures abroad than to muster the resources necessary to sustain local industry or to stave off foreign takeover.²⁷

Socialist feminism strengthens this analysis by more clearly demonstrating the role played by the "executive arm of the bourgeoisie"—the state. The modern state is one of the systemic features of capitalism. It is unchanging in the sense that, despite its many historical forms or structures, it seeks fundamentally and consistently to protect and promote capital accumulation. The liberal state provides arguably the most efficient means to do this, operating in a myriad of ways which promote the accumulation of capital under the guise of democracy.²⁸ For example, the liberal state has traditionally waived taxes and ecological responsibility for business, as well as often directly and massively subsidizing private profit-making enterprises.²⁹ Public money has been used to rescue private investors from spectacular bankruptcies like Bricklin, Sprung and Come-by-Chance. Indeed, public debt acquired in the protection of private entrepreneurs is a long tradition in Atlantic Canada. PEI assumed a debt of nearly £800,000 in order to buy out land proprietors in 1875 while Newfoundland's bankruptcy in 1933 stemmed in part from the

massive railway debt it incurred in the 1890s. In recent cases such as Sysco, the state was, in effect, left to pick up the tab to modernize a plant that had been run into the ground by forty years of short-term profiteering by its previous (foreign) owners.

The state's role also includes maintaining control over a potentially revolutionary proletarian class. At times this has involved overt repression, as with the deployment of the army in Cape Breton in the 1920s (Frank 1986). At other times, with its pervasive anti-labor bias, the legal system has been used to intimidate and silence radical opposition to the status quo, for example, J. B. McLachlan's 1923 imprisonment for sedition or the decertification of unions (Palmer 1983; McKay 1986b). As the Marshall enquiry recently showed, it has also been used to maintain the racial aspect of the class structure.

Outright coercion is less important to the modern liberal state than its ability to foster and support the "hegemony of civil society," that is, to ensure that bourgeois notions of propriety are disseminated throughout all classes. For example, as feminists have shown, the state plays a major role in promoting the stability of the male-dominated family. In 1991, all four Atlantic provinces maintain unconstitutional restrictions on access to abortion, have welfare and public housing policies that are massively biased against single mothers, and in general uphold legal double standards (such as denying, until very recently, that rape can take place inside a marriage).³⁰ The state also tolerates, if not encourages, pay inequity. It underwrites an education system which "teaches the schooled the superiority of the better schooled" (Clairmont 61). The "internal colonization" thus achieved by institutionalized patriarchy and racism has long been fundamental to the maintenance of the class structure and has alienated the majority of the population from meaningful democratic participation.³¹

All this is not to say that relations between state and capital are always smooth. On the contrary, they often appear to be full of conflict as when Joey Smallwood railed against "the thieves of Water Street" or when industries and institutions are pressured to adopt pay equity policies. This reflects both the demagoguery of politicians who can win votes by appearing to stand up for the little guy and the fact that the bourgeoisie itself is divided on many key issues. Where different fractions come into conflict (and the large state bureaucracy may itself be a fraction with distinct, even "imperialist" class interests) a "neutral" state

is essential to mediate the outcome. In this way, new policy directions can be decided in a manner that legitimates (as "democratic") the triumph of one group of accumulators over another (Poulantzas).

To return to the example of Newfoundland, the St. John's merchants who dominated the colony until 1949 were actually something of an archaic remnant from the nineteenth century. Their grip on the Newfoundland economy through the semi-feudal truck system had to be broken if modernization were to be effected. Smallwood and his successors offered a development policy based on federal aid and incentives to MNCs, thus representing the aspirations of the ascendent fraction of the bourgeoisie.³²

In the case of pay equity for women, on one side there are those who argue that the state should intervene to eliminate "anachronistic" sexism for reasons of both justice and economic efficiency.³³ On the other hand, conservatives argue that the market should be left to take care of such matters. Indeed, the recent free trade debate has seen prominent businessmen overtly acknowledge the danger of pay equity.³⁴

4. Restructuring Atlantic Canada

All in all, a society organized primarily for the accumulation of capital (rather than for social welfare) is rife with contradictions. To a great extent these mystify the realities of political economy, allowing us to accept the contention that profit (which is attained by destroying the environment, exploiting labor and alienating the humanity of real people) is honorable and desirable. Or to give another example, that state policies designed to enhance such exploitation (known as "modernization" or "recovery") are "developing" people. As Marx put it, these allow us to believe that the thief who is backing our oxen out of the barn is actually leading them in.

More concretely, these contradictions are integral to capitalism's most persistent and disruptive tendency, that is, for the rate of profit to fall over time instigating periodic economic crises. Thatcherites may argue that such crises are healthy in that they "streamline" the economy, however many capitalists themselves suffer in the process. Innumerable and ingenious strategies have therefore been devised to compensate for that tendency. From the narrow business point of view, they include investment in more productive technology, new management techniques,

the export of capital to underdeveloped regions, and the concentration (in monopolies) and centralization (in huge metropolises) of capital. Other compensating strategies or structures extend into broader political and cultural spheres, including changes to the constitution and to gender ideology.

The resultant structures—Fordism, colonialism, MNCs, piecework, the consumer-oriented nuclear family, and so forth—are what appear to us as the visible face of capitalism. They change, often with bewildering swiftness, as capital incessantly penetrates new parts of the world, "commodifies" new products or services and engenders new relations of production in the pursuit of profit.

In other words, because of the contradictions inherent in its systemic features, capitalism must adopt ever new "fantastic forms" in order to sustain itself (Lenin 1966b). It is the fundamental mistake of liberal historians and economists to interpret the rapid flux of these structures as proof that capitalism is capable of revolutionizing itself. While business strategies have changed dramatically since Marx's time, they have done so only to preserve the system as he first described it. To that extent, his insights comprise a vast improvement over liberal analyses of political economy. Yet from the socialist feminist perspective traditional Marxists also make a fundamental mistake in ignoring or minimizing the importance of gender relations in the restructuring of capitalism.

A review of the historiography of the Atlantic region from the socialist feminist perspective shows how changes in the sex/gender system fit into a pattern of periods of crisis and restructuring that occurred roughly every three or four decades. The rise and fall of the Golden Age is perhaps the most well-known. Beginning in the late 1860s, the depletion of forests, the advent of steam technology, and the end of Reciprocity with the USA combined to initiate a profound economic crisis. Restructuring at that time involved not only political and economic changes (most importantly Confederation and the National Policy) but also social. Supported by the liberal democratic state, a fuller "domestication" of women was carried out and industrial production became a largely masculine endeavor. Over the next few decades these changes tended to channel development towards a more settled rural population, industrialization and trade with central Canada, bringing with them a period of notable prosperity. The transition away from a subsistence/mercantile economy was never complete however (related again, in part, to the sexual division of labor

and the tenacity of the "domestic" mode of production), and thus the region was left open to the penetration by foreign industrial capital. This process was already quite advanced by the time of World War I, making the Maritimes particularly vulnerable to the externally induced crises that hit in rapid succession after the war. Of these, the sudden rise in railway rates in 1918 was the first and perhaps most serious. By the mid 1920s, Maritime industry was in a shambles (Forbes 1989; Acheson 1972).

Our present crisis has likewise arisen from the contradictions inherent in the capitalist structures of the previous 40 years or so. Unlike the Golden Age, these were based upon economic policies which hugely favored industrial development in central Canada, notably tariffs, subsidies and the St. Lawrence seaway (Forbes; Conrad). Behind these policies were enormous changes in the sex/gender system. Perhaps foremost was the vast movement of women into the paid labor force and a concomitant breakdown of "traditional" values, including extended families, as the region "modernized." This has served both to depress wages and "tame" worker militancy among the male proletariat.

These economic and social changes furthered the deindustrialization of the region since the Second World War. That trend was balanced somewhat by federal largesse and the expansion of primary exports to the booming American economy, a boom based, to a large extent, on the rampant consumerism associated with the ideal of a middle-class, nuclear family. This then gave credibility to the claims of a "revolution" of increasing prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s. Now, however, the appearance of modernity in key areas contrasts starkly with the quaint charm of derelict farms, villages and towns almost everywhere else. These policies have hastened the process by which independent petty commodity producers have been bankrupted, proletarianized, or tied by exploitative contract to large, integrated companies like McCain's, Stora and National Sea Products. The majority of the petty commodity producers in the Atlantic provinces has been displaced, forced to subsist on welfare or unemployment insurance, to move to towns in search of (scarce, low-paying) wage labor or to emigrate from the region altogether.

"Canada's Economic Recovery" today takes account of both the wrong-headedness of these policies as well as the dramatic changes in the global economy (Canada 1991). Indeed, the present crisis has its roots in the worldwide "recession" that followed the oil price hikes of the mid 1970s and the development of "the global factory." New technology

enabled relatively high-paying (predominantly male) jobs in the industrial heartlands of the West to be exported to assembly lines "manned" by predominantly female workers in the Third World.

Supply-side economics, first greeted with "howls of derision" as an economic theory, gained rapid acceptance under these conditions as a theory well suited to the increasingly international "grand" bourgeoisie. The "counter-revolution" of the New Right was launched in Chile in 1973, followed, more importantly, by Britain (1975) and the USA (1979) whence it could be imposed upon developing (and now even East Bloc) countries through the IMF and the World Bank (Toye). Perhaps because of Canada's long-standing tradition of state-led economic development and relatively strong trade union movement, the New Right was not able to impose similar policies here until very recently, in particular since Prime Minister Mulroney's second mandate began (1988). Now, Atlantic Canada is on the verge of a "calamity" that has occasioned an emergency debate in the House of Commons (*The Globe and Mail*; *Halifax Chronicle* 19 Dec 1989).

Local politicians and MNCs with existing investments in the region are fighting back by, above all, trying to win back the labor "flexibility" that was partially lost through unionization and social welfare programs over the last few decades. This is made possible to a certain extent by new technology and workers' fears of unemployment. Nevertheless, climate alone means that wages and productivity are unlikely ever to reach levels competitive with the NICs and southern USA and, indeed, the NICs may soon be displacing even raw commodity production where the Maritimes once had a comparative advantage. Pulp plantations in the tropics, for instance, where trees can be harvested every three to five years, threaten the comparative advantage of forestry here. Governments are therefore continuing to subsidize "endangered" private enterprise, to facilitate "efficient" corporate concentration and to underwrite energy mega-projects and new high tech industries. With abysmal success in the latter, governments are also actively seeking to promote the one "industry" where Atlantic Canada can possibly retain a comparative advantage—tourism.

Without increasing the deficit, this spending in support of private enterprise has to be compensated for by privatization or cutbacks to state-owned corporations (for example, VIA Rail and the CBC). From a socialist feminist point of view, more significant are cutbacks in the

social services which have been of greatest benefit to women and the working class—universal education, daycare, public transport, unemployment insurance and so on. By the federal government's own admission this will most likely involve the final eradication of outport villages, increased outmigration, lower wages, the closing down of "inefficient" industries and a transition to an economy based even more predominantly on tourism, raw commodity exports and government spending.³⁵ Unspoken, but readily observable both in Atlantic Canada and other countries undergoing such "structural adjustment," are the rise of an "informal" service economy, increased homelessness, the "feminization of poverty," the further commodification of women and sex, generally rising functional illiteracy rates, and the recrudescence of racism and narrow "nationalism."

* * *

The conclusion to all of this is that history in the broad sense of class struggle is still going on. The overwhelming majority of the world's population continues to suffer exploitation and alienation. A significant and increasing portion suffers absolute poverty, a global condition that will almost certainly worsen now that the United States enjoys clear military hegemony. Capitalism is presently restructuring itself along lines which suggest intensified suffering and alienation for the majority of people, particularly women. In short, the New World Order we are being promised seems to boil down to a more equitable global distribution of the "Third World," one no longer confined geographically to the countries of the South but extended now to the East and, even more than previously, to segments of our own society.

That said, the contradictions of capitalism do leave room for cautious optimism that present developments contribute to the growth and extension of a culture of resistance. Working-class, feminist, native and environmentalist consciousness and organization are increasingly connected and extend across borders. Moreover, new technologies like the microchip and the personal computer may provide the means for small-scale production and alternative media which can crack the dominance of the multinationals and their "executive arm." There is now the potential therefore to create an economic niche where workers (including housewives) can begin to build real solidarity and to exercise real self-

determination, lifting "the veil of money" (and sex and race) which obscures or mystifies their understanding of the world. We see this beginning to manifest itself in many ways, from the "political correctness" and affirmative action debates on campus, to the widespread support for native rights, to public hearings (and new legislation) on sexual abuse in boarding schools and doctors' offices. Even the conduct of the war against Iraq, which was seemingly based upon the need to expunge "the Vietnam syndrome" (that is, democratic opposition to war), suggests that a significant culture of resistance has already developed in the West. Interestingly, the strength of the alternative movement was demonstrated most forcefully in the West by the massive anti-war protests in Germany, now, as in Marx's day, the most advanced industrial nation.

Of course it would be naïve to see in these developments the imminent demise of capitalism or patriarchy. Capital and states have vast resources, ingenuity and a well-proven willingness to resort to violence. There is also the insidious omnipresence of ideologies of accumulation, waste and dominance which preclude any "automatic" socialist revolution (as, for that matter, they did in the transition to socialism in former "worker" states). What a socialist feminist analysis makes clear though is that forces are at work, engendered by the activities of capital itself, which restrict the latitude available for capital and the state. As scholars, both women and men, we can help to turn an awareness of these forces into a more meaningful, broad and consistent political opposition, something which liberalism perforce cannot do and both Marxism and feminism have until now largely failed to achieve.

Postmodernism is to a large extent a reaction against that failure, a semantic rejection of theories which have tended to disappoint or even betray the hopes placed in their emancipatory power. But while postmodernism may be taken to almost nihilistic extremes, it may also be useful. That is, to the extent that postmodernism can contribute to the critical application and further development of a revolutionary theory that is sensitive to the diverse experiences and perspectives of different groups of people yet can draw them together by recognizing and respecting their common humanity and the commonalities of their oppression or alienation.

NOTES

1. For instance, earned per capita income in Newfoundland is well below Singapore and Hong Kong and roughly equal to Puerto Rico (Canada 1985; World Bank); the manufacturing sector contributes less to the Gross Domestic Product of Nova Scotia (15%) than it does in at least 35 developing countries while in PEI (at 7% of GDP) it is less than Chad or Burkina Faso (George 16; World Bank); the region exports mainly primary products and imports an estimated 80% of its consumption (Alexander 93); "basic" illiteracy in Newfoundland (20%) compares to Cuba (4%) and the Koreas (1%) (Calamatai 20); "natural" levels of unemployment (13.3%) and outmigration approximate those of "migrant labor reserves" in the Third World (Brookes, Economic Council of Canada, *Globe and Mail* 5 Aug. 1989); all four provinces depend on levels of transfer payments and subsidies from the federal government which exceed, for example, Soviet aid to Cuba and American support of its colony, Puerto Rico (Canada 1985, World Bank, United Nations).
2. See Forbes (1978) and Sager (1987) for historiographical essays which review and critique these theories.
3. From within the liberal paradigm itself (George; APEC) as well as from the Marxist (Sager, Sacouman 1981).
4. See Alavi and Shanin for an overview of the dependency debate and Archibald, Matthews, and Burrill and McKay for samples of its application to Atlantic Canada.
5. See Chilcote and Johnson for a general critique of dependency theory and, in the Atlantic context, Sager and Gidengil.
6. See, for example, Palmer 1990.
7. Fukuyama's end of history thesis was widely reprinted in mass circulation newspapers, including *The NY Times* and *The Globe and Mail* in November 1989.
8. On average, women are paid about two-thirds of what men earn, a statistic that has scarcely improved since 1900 (Canada; Prentice).
9. Porter (1985). See also Porter (1987) and Campbell for historiographical overviews of women in the region and Prentice for an overview of the "domestication" of women on a national level.
10. My thanks also to Angela Miles for her distinction between "transformative" or "integrationist" and "assimilationist" feminisms.
11. This "dual systems" approach is challenged by some socialist feminists who argue that capitalism and patriarchy are unified and incapable of existing except in a symbiotic relationship to each other (Young; Mies). My own view is that they are theoretically distinct. While capitalism presently thrives on patriarchy it could, in this view, conceivably exist without it. Capitalist logic ultimately demands a fully humanized work force that offers greater opportunities for the creation and extraction of surplus value than one where half the population's talent and education is effectively wasted. Kay, Warren and Miles all support this argument in "traditional" Marxist terms.

12. Some feminists would take issue with this, but I argue that patriarchy's theoretical importance is not diminished by including it as a (and arguably *the*) most fundamental form of labor exploitation and commodification.
13. This prediction of his is one of Marx's most apparently wrong and one of the bases of the liberal case against him (see Fukuyama). It is a shallow and unsustainable case, which has been refuted thoroughly elsewhere. True, male workers in the West have won extremely significant concessions from capital (like the family wage and the welfare state) which profoundly undermined worker radicalism. Nonetheless, while Marx did not anticipate the degree to which this would mitigate the grosser excesses of capitalism, the general trend in modernization (when examined on a global scale) remains precisely as he observed, that is, towards intensified exploitation, relatively lower wages, closer supervision and more dehumanizing conditions. This is known today by such euphemisms as "labor flexibility," and "global assembly line," and is spearheaded by computer technology. Lenin and Mao may also have wished Marx wrong on this but the history of socialism built upon predominantly peasant societies suggests again that he was not (Warren; Kay; Braverman; Callinicos).
14. For general discussions, see Kealey; Wallace; McKay, 1983; Frank; and Palmer, 1983. Earle (1991) provides a detailed examination of the roots and the defeat of worker militancy in Cape Breton.
15. In Marx's analogy, they were "a sack of potatoes," united by class but divided by their individual consciousness (Marx and Engels 172). Sider makes the same conclusion in his analysis of the culture of Newfoundland outports.
16. This is asserted in Penny; Connelly and MacDonald; Luxton; and mentioned in passing in Palmer 1983 and Earle 1988.
17. McKay (1986b) illustrates that in the case of Springhill. See also Connelly and MacDonald.
18. See Greenberg for a comparative, Marxist analysis.
19. Restigouche and Kent counties, NB, both had official unemployment rates of over 25% in 1981 (McKee 14).
20. Clairmont; Clairmont and Magill; Millward and Keuper. It must also be noted that the combination of racism and gender ideology is especially pernicious. Black women in the "Watershed" district of Dartmouth earn on average 69% of black men who earn on average 42% of the rest of the county's working population. Nearly two-thirds of the predominantly black community's population earned below the poverty line. *Halifax Mail Star* 21 Sep. 1989.
21. The striking unity of the town of Port-aux-Basques behind the violent protests of fishers there in March 1991 is another manifestation of the same.
22. Clow also makes the point that environmental factors must be included in the analysis of class struggle.
23. The literature is reviewed in L. R. MacDonald and Drache.
24. Acheson 1979; similar conclusions are made by Sutherland and Winson.
25. See also Wylie for a discussion of how the "comparative advantages" of obsolete technology undermined the ability of the region to attract or hold large-scale industry with cheap electricity.

26. This was the view of Lord Durham in 1839 (Sharpe, 83).
27. In that respect, it is necessary to place the local bourgeoisie in the context of the national one, whose failure to stand up to foreign domination must be considered as a key factor in the underdevelopment of the region. It has been calculated that, without the domination of the manufacturing sector by American corporations which was a result of the post World War II branch-plant strategy of industrial development, the Maritimes would have kept up to 20% more of their industry (Veltmeyer 25).
28. The success in promoting private capital accumulation of Japan and the NICs, especially the authoritarian regimes in east Asia (including the People's Republic of China), as well as the anti-democratic tendencies in the West has called this into question lately (Kolko; Harris).
29. In Nova Scotia the incentives granted to foreign investors in the 1970s comprised an average annual subsidy of \$20,000 per job created (L. G. Barrett 279). By 1991, that figure reached up to \$154,000, the majority of which obviously did not go to the workers themselves but may in fact have disappeared through business fraud (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency).
30. Veinott offers a historical perspective of the ways that the law was used to enforce bourgeois ideals of family structure and control female behavior, especially sexuality.
31. To those ends, the state also fosters the illusion of an oppositional media and intelligentsia through an autonomous crown corporation (the CBC) and university system, which are structured to help rationalize the transfer of wealth to the capitalist class (Chomsky and Herman). Socialist feminists have pointed out that even the most ostensibly radical ideas (such as postmodernism) or sincerely "objective" academic research serve, if unaccompanied by concrete personal/political activism, to buttress the existing class structure and gender relations (Delphy; Lovibond; DiStephano).
32. Brian Peckford's retirement dinner certainly suggests as much—the scions of Canada's and Newfoundland's new establishment bidding him "thank you" for his years of service with a \$100,000 cash gift. It was enough to make one suspect that Peckford's abrasive nationalism, which ostensibly held up the development of Hibernia for years, may well have been in the long term interests of the big oil companies, insofar as it promoted the decentralization of political power (*St. John's Telegraph* March 1989; Walsh).
33. This was Mary Wollstonecraft's argument in 1792 and the basis of the liberal feminist position which has won widespread rhetorical support in state institutions, including universities, the World Bank and the federal government.
34. "The cost of new social legislation, particularly pay equity for women, will cause hardships for Canadian industry and harm its ability to compete in export markets" (*Globe and Mail* 23 March 1989). Given the prospect of free trade with Mexico (where a predominantly female workforce earns, on average, less than a dollar an hour) there is strong reason to suggest that the conservatives will win this particular debate.

35. Department of Regional Industrial Enterprise analysis of free trade projections (1987). Documents courtesy of The Pro-Canada Network.

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