ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND TECHNOLOGICAL
CHANGE: RESISTANCE AND CONTROL AMONG INSIDE
WORKERS AND LETTER CARRIERS AT CANADA POST
CORPORATION, ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND

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Economic Restructuring and Technological Change:
Resistance and Control Among Inside Workers and
Letter Carriers at Canada Post Corporation,
St. John's, Newfoundland

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comparative study of the changing
work experience and relations of two groups of Canadian
postal employees in St. John's, Newfoundland. Two related
factors are identified as underwriting these changes:
technological based reorganization of work and the demand
of a conservative state for a move to a private sector
model of operations. The latter factor includes the
requirement for a deficit free, and even profit-
generating, operation at Canada Post Corporation and the
divestment of public ownership. Underlying this empirical
analysis is a theoretical interest in the labour process,
technology and the managerial problem of control.

I argue in this thesis that among inside postal
workers, members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers,
technological change and the bureaucratic reorganization
of work which has surrounded it has undermined their
ability to resist management incursions on the shop floor.
The subsequent shift in the frontier of control has
enabled management to implement a number of productivity
and efficiency measures, which from the workers' point of
view, has had a major negative effect on their work
experience and relations. Moreover, the recent move

toward privatization and the generation of more flexible, casual labour further undermines the ability of workers to defend themselves.

While inside workers have had a continuous history of conflict over the degradation of work through technological change, letter carriers have experienced a relatively stable, institutionalized relationship with management during the past 15 years. This relationship, in contrast to the inside workers', may be characterized as "consent" based. However, with growing pressure on management to solve the economic "crisis" at Canada Post, the status quo between letter carriers and management is eroding and an ultimately antagonistic set of interests is being revealed.

The data from this comparative study lead to the conclusion that recent interest in the notion of consent within the labour process literature has definite theoretical and empirical limits which become apparent in examining production relations in periods of economic instability. On the other hand, the question of control of labour and technologicl change cannot be addressed in formulistic, determinist fashion. Rather, the unique organizational and historical characteristics of "each" labour process must be understood in its own context.

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A number of people provided a great deal of help in the preparation and completion of this work. I would like to note my gratitude to them.

Firstly, I hope the inside workers and letter carriers at the St. John's Post Office who face, on a daily, personal basis, the problems discussed in this work, will benefit from efforts to understand the issues they confront. I would like to thank the workers and officials from the Letter Carriers Union of Canada and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers who gave me their time, trust and insights. I hope my analysis is true to their actual experience of work. A particular debt is owed to Theresa Walsh, president of the St. John's Local of the Canadian Union of Portal Workers, who gave me a great deal of her own time whenever I needed help or information.

I would like to express special gratitude to Dr. Robert Hill and Dr. Peter Sinclair who acted as my supervisors throughout my M.A. program. Both provided a great deal of knowledge, encouragement, and guidance which made the research and writing of this thesis a personally rewarding endeavour. Their combination of patience and persistence helped enormously during the difficult periods

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Restructuring within the capitalist economies during
the 1980s has had far reaching effects on the attempts of
capital to reorganize labour and the labour process at the
level of the firm. This work examines particular social
aspects of this process within the state employment
sector. More to the point, it entails a comparative study
of resistance and control among two groups of employees,
members of the St. John's locals of the Canadian Union of
Postal Workers (CUPW) and the Letter Carriers Union of
Canada (LCUC).[1] The thesis is comparative in that the
letter carriers and their labour process serve as an
"experimental control." The St. John's carriers have had
a history of relative work stability, which has both
contributed to, and been reinforced by, the particular
managerial approach to control of their labour. This is

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[1]
During the writing of this thesis a merger ruling by
the Canadian Labour Relations Board was acted upon and
following a certification vote the LCUC ceased to legally
exist. All workers in both unions now come under the
representation of CUPW. Since this major change occurred
after my research work was completed I will continue to
treat the unions and locals as distinct entities
throughout this text.

contrasted to the inside workers whose labour process has been beset by technological change and degradation in the form of deskilling and loss of autonomy.

The primary focus of my analysis is the impact of technological change and work reorganization on work experience within the context of institutionalized struggle and a bureaucratized workplace. Two aspects of the control process, as posited by Burawoy (1979), Fox (1972), Littler and Salaman (1986), are drawn from this and examined. First, technological change may be used to enhance managerial control of labour during a period of increasing demand for productivity and efficiency. Second, however, tightening managerial control, by increasing the likelihood that management will meet its particular objectives, may undermine consent among workers for the existing conditions of the labour-capital relationship.

The analysis in this thesis rests on two historically intertwined dynamics occurring as a result of the restructuring of the Canadian Post Office which began with the initial mechanization of the 1970s. The first is the attempt by postal management to implement strategies of speed-up, increased supervision and discipline within a context of technological change. The second dynamic is the rationalization and casualization of the labour force through a process of contracting out, privatization and technological change. This resulted from the federal

government requirement for financial self-sufficiency in the post office, which required that the postal corporation move toward a close adherence to a competitive, private sector model of operations. Analytically, I link these dynamics through an analysis of the concepts of labour control and production relations.

This conceptual refinement is based on Littler's (1983) and Littler and Salaman's (1986) three tier conceptualization of management strategies toward work relations. Job design, structures of control and the employment relationship are posited as three distinct but interacting levels of work organization. The first, job design, refers to the division of labour and technology within the firm, such as increasingly deskilled and fragmented jobs. The second level includes the formal authority structure of the factory and the monitoring system - that is, the more overt control features of the firm, such as the use of responsible autonomy as opposed to highly proscribed work and the bureaucratic rules underlying either. Thirdly, there is the wider framework of the capital-labour relationship arising from the relation of job positions to the labour market (Littler,

1983: 42-43; Littler and Salaman, 1986: 58-64).

The key dimension of the employment relationship is the degree of worker dependency on the firm. There are two sides to this. On the one hand, alternative employment opportunities are directly affected by the form of the labour market and size of the labour reserve. As well, the need for welfare benefits such as pensions means that worker vulnerability increases to the degree that these resources are in the control of management. On the other hand, workers' ability to organize acts as a counter to dependence on the firm or the state and the strength of that organization is a determining factor in the degree of direct dependence workers will have (Littler and Salaman, 1986: 64).

The utilization of this more complex typology, based on Marxist analysis but incorporating Weberian

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2
The conceptual independence of these levels is shown in Littler's (1983: 43-44) illustration of the bureaucratization process. At the second level, bureaucratization refers to the formation of highly specified rules formalizing performance of tasks and disembodying the relationship of control between management and workers. Within the employment relationship, however, bureaucratization refers to the formation of structures for such processes as the selection of workers for particular jobs, (i.e. the seniority system in the bureaucratically organized firm). For workers the distinction is highlighted by the fact that in the area of overt control further bureaucratization is resisted while in the employment relationship it is desired. For management the reverse is true: increased specification and tightening of rules with greater freedom to allocate jobs and the like is desirable.

perspectives on organization and bureaucracy, allows an accounting of the mixed and contradictory nature of employer strategies.

An analysis employing these three distinct structures allows a discussion of control and resistance to move beyond the confines of the shopfloor. It is within the context of the employment relationship that Burawoy (1981) develops the notion of a "production politics" distinct from the relations entered into during the production process - the labour process itself, but regulating the struggles within the labour process. As in Littler's typology, Burawoy's argument is based on the degree of dependency of workers on the firm, which in turn, hinges heavily on the degree and form of state welfare provision. Burawoy argues that private sector capitalism, during a period of increasing international mobility of capital, is able to coerce workers by threatening, not individual job security, but the security of the firm's labour force as a whole through the threat of plant relocation. Threats to the viability of the firm force concessions from workers on and off the factory floor thus demonstrating the mechanism of worker control.

Using a similar analysis, a parallel argument may be made based on the phenomenon of privatization within the state employment sector. The emergence of neo-conservative governments among some of the western capitalist states has seen the privatization and

subsequent rationalization of state agencies. In Canada, for instance, twelve Crown corporations have been sold in whole or part to the private sector from 1986 through 1988 (Hannant, 1988: 3). Partial privatization, as is occurring at Canada Post, and contracting out gives management a lever to attack collective bargaining gains. Concessions from employees to management demands for such things as more flexible, casual labour can be pressed for with concomitant impacts on the shopfloor frontier of control.

Also unique to the state employment sector is the relationship between workers and the state and the potential this offers for politicization of the employment relationship. The situation of "state as employer" provides the linkages for workers' resistance strategies to become directly political (Johnston, 1980). Thus, in the state sector, struggle may more readily spill from the workplace to the public and political spheres and directly affect the consciousness workers have of the conflict between their interests and the interests of those holding state power.

1.1 Technological Change

A key dimension in this study is technological change, which I take to mean more than just the introduction of new machinery and its impact on the division of labour. Other processes which need to be

considered are conflict and struggle over change, the social reorganization of work and the workplace that both precedes and follows mechanization (Thompson and Bannon, 1985; Meis, 1985; Edwards, 1979) and the consequences of change for future struggle (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1976). In this study, technological change is not considered in deterministic fashion, (Wilkenson 1983; Littler, 1982; Burawoy, 1979) nor is it seen to be "neutral" (Noble, 1982; Shaiken, 1984). Rather the design and selection of particular technologies are the outcome of social choices. The implementation of technological change and its impact on workers is the product of struggle between the particular interests of workers and management.

This approach to technological change is in opposition to earlier sociological analyses which were heavily deterministic (Thompson, 1983; Batstone, 1987). These approaches neglected the social nature of the concept involving the social organization of work and divisions of labour shaped around the production equipment, which in itself was taken to be the chief determinant of attitudes and behaviour (Thompson, 1983: 16). Wilkenson (1983) labels much of this early work the "innovation approach" to technical change. Organizational characteristics of the firm are believed to be dependent upon the technology introduced. Since the particular technology is held to be the most efficient method of

production, any social impacts are a secondary
consideration - the inevitable consequences of the logical
and inescapable development of technology (Wilkenson,
1983: 17). More generally, the determinist thesis
suggests that technology requires that certain tasks be
done and that these therefore determine work organization,
attitudes and behavior (Batstone, 1987: 5). For instance,
Blauner (1964) argued that technology is a key factor in
shaping work experience, suggesting that there is a direct
relationship between the type of technology utilized and
the level of alienation workers experience. He argued
that alienation follows a curvilinear pattern as
technology "evolved" through several stages culminating in
continuous process production. Thus, while workers
experienced a maximum of alienation in mass production
environments, automation would lead to enriched and less
oppressive work, to integration of workers into the firm,
and to a subsequent decline in militancy and class
consciousness among workers.

Woodward (1965), following the socio-technical
systems approach as outlined by Thompson (1983), explored
the relationship between technology and the social
organization of the firm. She argued that work
organization and management approach were largely
determined by the form of technology. In simpler
technical forms of production the social organization of
the firm was seen to be shaped to meet the needs of the

coordination of the workforce. With more advanced forms of productive technology, particularly continuous flow, the machinery itself coordinates production and the social organization of the firm can be adapted to the needs of the people working in it (Gallie, 1978). Thus Woodward's claims were somewhat similar to Blauner's in terms of the outcome of the inception of particular production technologies.

Much of the criticism of the type of approach outlined above has been directed at the lack of attention given to non-work factors in influencing attitudes and behavior. Most prominent in this vein is the research into "orientations to work," which focuses on class and industrial society but which operates from the premise that consciousness of work is largely shaped by factors extraneous to the work situation. Goldthorpe's (1968) work on the emergence of a new "affluent worker" stands out among this literature. Goldthorpe argued that this new type of affluent and privatized worker was to be found largely in the mass production industries located in newer industrial centers to which large numbers of workers had relocated. These workers were said to be increasingly privatized, focusing not on solidary work groups, but on consumption within the family. Conversely, such workers held a highly instrumental orientation to work in which the conditions of work were of little relevance. The prior orientations approach to instrumentality among

workers has been challenged empirically by such writers as MacKinnon (1980) and theoretically by Westergaard (1970) and Burawoy (1979).

In relation to work itself, Goldthorpe fails to address the objective structures of the workplace. Work experience is understood through the attitudes expressed and not through a consideration of actual working conditions and experiences. In a replication of Goldthorpe's work, MacKinnon found instrumentalism not to be the result of a prior orientation, but due to work alienation itself (MacKinnon, 1980: 25). Moreover, workers' attitudes toward work and their behaviour do not necessarily correspond. The cash nexus may force workers to come to work and be a reflection of privatized attitudes. But it does not necessarily follow that their behavior at work will be void of attempts at resistance and struggle.

1.2 The Problem Of Control

The problem of control is understood as the requirement of capital to control the variability of labour power so as to maximize surplus value production and generate increasing levels of productivity. Particularly since Braverman's (1974) analysis the concept has served as one of the chief contexts for the analysis of technological change and workplace struggle and it is a current focus of research in Marxian related analysis of the labour process.

The Marxian critique of technological determinist theories argues that there is no logic of technological change or industrialism which results in a necessary and specific division of labour or social organization of work predicated on increasing control by machine. Rather, it is the development of the capitalist economic system based on opposed interests which has generated the need to maximize control and reduce reliance on worker input and cooperation (Hill, 1981). "Productive techniques are no longer reified and regarded as determining worker activity, because their use reflects managerial policy concerning the organization of work" (Hill, 1981: 111). For Braverman, and others, then, technology is linked with particular work experiences under capitalism and these experiences are inextricably bound up in the need for the accumulation of capital.

The primary means by which this occurs is, in Braverman's conceptualization, through the degradation of labour: the progressive deskilling and simultaneous routinizing and mechanizing of jobs which empties them of any intrinsic value. The capacity to control the labour process through machinery is seized upon by management as the prime means by which production may be controlled, not by the direct producer, but by management. Thus, Braverman argues that in addition to the technical function of increasing the productivity of labour, which would be a characteristic of machinery in any social

system, machinery also has the function in the capitalist
system of stripping control of the labour process from the
labourer.   Machinery provides the possibility for pacing
and control according to centralized decisions and these
controls can be removed from the site of production. Such
possibilities "are of just as great interest to management
as   the   fact that the machine multiplies the productivity
of labour (Braverman, 1974: 193).

Braverman's work has served as a strong corrective to
much of the debate over work and technological change but
it is limited on several fronts.   While offering an
anti-technological   determinist   focus,   Braverman lacks a
dialectic of control, struggle and change.   The   work   is
largely   based   on   his   structuralist   conception   of
capitalism in which the logic of the economic system,   in
the long run, proceeds according to its own laws (Storey,
1983). The degradation of work through deskilling is seen
as a pervasive, one-way affair, with Taylorism as an
unproblematically and universally implemented practice   in
which an essentially omniscient capitalist class gets its
own way (Wood and Kelly, 1982).   In fact,   Taylorism is
taken   as   "the"   control strategy of capitalism and
deskilling thus epitomizes the   development   of   the
capitalist labour   process.   In this view, not only is
management given a completely autonomous role but the
reorganization of   work   becomes the outcome of conscious
design.   This   approach   ignores   the   shaping   of   the

production process as a result of the struggles between management and labour, worked out in the context of market and technological opportunities available to enterprises (Wood, 1984: 17).

Elger (1982) and the Brighton Labour Process Group (1977) criticize Braverman for his unproblematic treatment of the deskilling process, arguing that, in Marxist terms, he moves too directly and unproblematically from the formal to the real subordination of labour. In other words Braverman, in emphasizing the inevitable drive by capital to cheapen labour costs through increasing subordination and deskilling fails to recognize that this process is uneven and complex (Thompson, 1983: 132; Elger, 1982 :32-33). This reconceptualization leads to a view of workplace resistance in terms of a "frontier of control" (Friedman, 1977; Heron and Storey, 1986) in which the movement of the frontier is contingent upon the varying power with which workers and management confront one another. Attention to resistance and consciousness in the labour process leads to the criticism of Braverman for failing to deal with alternative managerial control devices (Nichols, 1977; Friedman, 1977).

One of the most comprehensive attempts at addressing the inadequacies of Braverman's control thesis is Edwards' (1979) work on the historical development of various strategies of control within the labour process. Edwards emphasizes the social relations of the workplace and the

fact that it is only within the context of these class based relations that the roles of technology, efficiency and the like can be interpreted (Edwards, 1979: ix). Within this context he argues that the evolution of forms of control is governed by conflict in the workplace and economic contradictions in the firm's operations (Thompson, 1983: 144). Edwards identifies three basic forms of control that have been shaped by conflict and the problems of accumulation. Simple control, the personal and despotic overseeing of labour, typified control under early competitive capitalism and while it still persists in certain sectors, it has been largely displaced by structural forms of control, independent of personal power of the employer or manager. Technical control, residing in the way technology is used to organize the labour process and epitomized by assembly line production, emerges when "the entire production process of the plant or large segments of it are based on a technology that paces and directs the labour process" (Edwards, 1979: 113).

Bureaucratic control, the third type, institutionalized the exercise of capitalist power. Thus, hierarchical relations were transformed from relations between unequally powerful people to relations between job holders or relations between jobs themselves, abstracted from the specific people or the concrete work tasks involved (Edwards, 1979: 145). Once the structure of

bureaucratic control was put in place, Edwards argues, the system was self-directing. Though workers' resistance to regulations meant that a rule was not necessarily followed, the establishment of rules allowed owners or managers to determine the terrain around which the workplace struggle was to be fought (Edwards, 1979: 146).

While Edwards' typology allows room for resistance, conflict and changing forms of control, it presents several problems. Firstly, his treatment of each form of control as a distinct category is problematic in that within a given industry or sector there is clearly more than one form of control in effect at a given time. More importantly, however, is the degree to which a given category of control is linked to, or based upon, other forms. As Thompson (1983: 149) points out, bureaucratization of rules cannot occur without reference to scientific management procedures to produce the job evaluation, grading and rating of tasks. Similarly, the distinction between technical control and simple machine pacing suggests that mechanization which results in the latter cannot effect control throughout the social structure of the firm (Thompson, 1983: 150). This distinction is posited despite evidence to the contrary from early industrialization and more recent changes in numerical control in engineering (Shaiken, 1984).

A second problem in Edwards' work and one of particular importance for this thesis is his specific

treatment of bureaucratic control. Within the employment relationship, Edwards' emphasis is on the integration of the worker into the firm so as to win individual loyalty and to divide the workforce as a whole. Thus he argues in his case study:

> Polaroid's structure thus provides tremendous rewards - higher pay, more rights, greater job security - to workers who accept the system and seek, by individual effort, to improve their lot within it... The positive incentives, the relief from capricious supervision, the right to appeal grievances and bid for better jobs, the additional job security of seniority...push workers to pursue their self-interest in a narrow way as individuals, and they stifle the impulse to struggle collectively for those same self-interests (Edwards, 1979: 145).

Burawoy (1979) suggests that such features as internal labour markets and internal states, as he labels them, do not serve to legitimate power relations based on these structures as Edwards suggests. Burawoy argues that rules do not directly lend stability or predictability but act to set limits on increased uncertainty. Thus, the internal labour market is made up of a set of rules but it also increases the number of choices workers have available to them (Burawoy, 1979: 107) within the bounds of these rules. The deskilling and degradation of work continues but, for Burawoy, it is the expansion of choice within these important limits that allows the production mechanism to continue without crisis.

What needs to be examined here is the economic context of the firm in which Edwards and Burawoy stage

their arguments, for in the situation of heightened economic pressure in which reorganization and "rationalization" is occurring, workers may come up against the limits of these bureaucratic structures. Under these conditions it may become clear to workers that bureaucratic control structures do not or cannot serve their interests (Edwards, 1979: 157).

In a similar vein, the use of bureaucratic control as a dimension of the "control structure" on the shopfloor [3] has a two-sided potential. Burawoy emphasizes that the struggle over workplace rules, particularly in the context of "making out" games, does not contradict accumulation but may actually facilitate it. Managers tacitly approve of such actions because they win workers' consent to exploitation by offering them some limited autonomy (Gartman, 1983: 662). However, Clawson and Fantasia (1983) point out that when profitability is threatened management "comes in with a stick" (Clawson and Fantasia, 1983: 678). The informal shopfloor interpretation of rules can provide management with another tool of coercion. Rule breaking as part of the game of production may be tolerated by management as in Gouldner's (1954: 173) "leeway function" of rules but once workers have been implicated in it, infractions may be held "over their heads" as a means of management reprisal.

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[3]
  See previous discussion of Littler and Salaman's (1986) typology of control.

Edwards', (1979) and Burawoy's (1979; 1981) analysis of control and integration or workers into the firm through bureaucratic structures has led to a growing debate over the significance of the generation of workers' "consent" within the labour process. This point is taken up again in the conclusion to the thesis. However, it is important to note here that there appears to be three key lines of argument in the current debate. Those who have worked firmly within the Braverman tradition do not take into consideration the possibility of consent as a significant dimension of the labour process. At the other extreme are those (Cressey and MacInnes, 1981; Littler and Salaman, 1986) who suggest that some unspecified minimum of cooperation is always required. Cressey and MacInnes (1981) argue that Marx was wrong in conceptualizing the goal of capital as the absolute domination of the means of production over the worker. The authors argue that the relationship of labour and capital is contradictory because in practice, capital must to some degree and in the final instance, depend upon the subjectivity of labour and surrender control of direction of the work process. Thus, management is compelled to attempt to maintain consent in order to insure profitability. Lying between these poles is the argument by Burawoy (1979; 1981) that within the labour process there is room for the generation or "manufacturing" of consent which is contingent upon the pressure to produce surplus value and is reflected in the

attitudes workers have toward their labour. The need for consent, in Burawoy's conceptualization, arises from, on the one hand, the common interests in the outcome of production workers and capital have, and on the other, the posited necessity for economic exploitation in the production process to be hidden from labour.

1.3 Conclusion

While this thesis concentrates on the level of the firm it should be understood that the changes taking place in the labour process at Canada Post are both supported by and part of the broader changes in the labour-capital relationship taking place in Canada and the other western economies. Canada may not have experienced the same rise of neo-conservative ideology as Britain and the United States, but it has not escaped the strong state and free market practice evidenced in those countries (Panitch, 1988: 68). Since the late 1970s, capitalist restructuring has increased and this involves restructuring of the state itself, through deregulation, privatization and commodification of social services. Capitalist restructuring has also entailed changes in the labour process of the firm and in the state sector which require significant concessions in the terms and conditions of employment entrenched in existing collective agreements. (Panitch, 1988: 68).

As will be seen, Panitch's observations are a

succinct description of the trend in work at Canada Post.
The historical backdrop to these changes specific to the
Post Office are outlined in chapter three of this work
where I discuss the origins of the CUPW and LCUC and the
struggles of postal workers during the 1960s and 1970s.
In chapter four I attempt to delineate the general and
national pattern of management objectives for Canada Post
during the 1980s, emphasizing potential impacts on
workers. Chapter five deals with the impact of changes in
inside workers' labour at the shopfloor level. I offer
evidence to support the argument that in the case of the
St. John's inside workers, management was able to use
technological change to undermine worker resistance and
facilitate the subsequent changes in the labour process
which are now occurring. I then describe some of these
changes and their impact on the emergence of workers'
antagonistic relationship with management. Chapter six
extends the analysis of control and consciousness beyond
the shopfloor to the employment relationship itself. I
discuss the state-backed, Crown corporation drive toward
privatization and casualization of labour and relate
political "resistance" to this process. Chapter seven
presents an examination of the letter carriers in St.
John's. I suggest that until recently the letter carriers
have been part of a stable, non-automated labour process
with a traditionally homogenous workforce. This has
provided an environment in which consent has been produced

but is now being threatened by the focussing of corporate management on the reorganization of letter carrier work. The case of the letter carriers thus serves to emphasize, on the one hand, the indeterminacy of the shaping of particular "labour processes," and on the other, the potential impact of attempts to reorganize work and the division of labour.

Chapter 2

THE STUDY SETTING AND METHODOLOGY

The core of this study rests on 54 interviews with
members of the St. John's locals of the Canadian Union of
Postal Workers and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada
conducted during the spring and summer of 1988. A variety
of documentary materials gathered from public sources and
provided by both unions is also heavily relied upon, as is
information gained from a number of informal discussions
with union officials. In the case of CUPW, further
insights were gained through attendance at union
functions.

In this chapter I introduce the study groups through
a brief description of the work of each. This is followed
by a more detailed treatment of the methodology used and
problems confronted in conducting the study.

2.1 The Letter Carriers' Labour

Members of the Letter Carriers' Union work from two
locations: 60 carriers at the major postal station in
downtown St. John's, and 20 carriers at the Kenmount Rd.
mail processing facility in the commercial district of the
northwest approaches to the city. The downtown postal

station was the major mail processing and handling site
until the Kenmount Rd. plant opened in 1976. Carriers
report to work at 7 a.m. at both offices though during
this study postal management began requiring certain
workers to begin work at 6:30 a.m., thereby attempting to
tie letter carrier schedules more efficiently to those of
the van drivers who drop mail off to carriers on their
routes. There is general agreement that there is a better
working environment at the old post office away from the
large numbers of management and supervisory personnel who
work at the Kenmount Rd. plant and the factory-like
conditions of the inside workers.

All regular letter carriers perform the same duties
beginning with a one to one-and-one-half hour period in
the office each morning. During this time mail which has
been sorted into individual routes is further organized by
each carrier according to the various points of call on
the route. Mail is also divided into morning and
afternoon "sessions" and various administrative tasks are
taken care of, (change of address notices and the like).
What direct supervision there is for the letter carrier
takes place during this in-office time as it is important
to the efficiency of the operation that each carrier has
his mail prepared by the time the various mail vans are
ready to leave with mail for the green holding boxes along
each route. Carriers arrive at, and return from, their
designated routes by taxi, under contract to Canada Post.

The afternoon session involves very little office work. It might involve administration of customer forms, such as change of address or collection of any missorted mail that has been reprocessed by an inside worker.

The work of the letter carrier follows a regular daily pattern and does not require high levels of any particular skill. Carriers see the key to their jobs, in addition to the physical requirements, as being able to get along with customers on a day-to-day basis. As a group, these workers express a great deal of satisfaction with their jobs. The work, while unskilled, is semi-autonomous and carriers realize the flexibility and independence they experience would be unavailable to them in any other work they might be qualified to do. Carriers also tend to compare their positions to those of inside workers and invariably contrast their own conditions to the heavily supervised, inflexible shift work of the CUPW bargaining unit. With two exceptions, every carrier I talked to expressed the opinion that, given the education and skills they possessed, there were few jobs that could match theirs in terms of pay, independence, flexibility and satisfaction. These carriers also held no general desire to change jobs. Inside workers, on the other hand, almost unanimously stated they would change jobs "immediately" but for the employment situation in Newfoundland and the pay and benefits they received. Not surprisingly, many inside workers found it very difficult

to find anything they liked about their work, particularly under the conditions, as they perceived them, of heightened supervision, pacing, and surveillance, as well as managerial attempts to undermine their collective agreement.

2.2 The Inside Workers' Labour

Unlike the LCUC bargaining unit, the CUPW encompasses a variety of job types, the core of which is mechanized and manual sorting work. Workers in these categories are organized in three units. The forward manual section processes mail that is destined for points outside the St. John's area including the rest of the province, the mainland and international destinations. The city manual section handles the large volumes of mail for the St. John's area only. The automated, "mech," or coding section processes all mail able to be handled by machine, whether city or forward. Other groups of workers include the mail handlers who move the variety of large containers of mail and parcels from site to site in the plant and load and unload trucks; counter (retail) personnel; and workers in specialty areas such as registered mail and "Priority Post". Though this study focuses on the workers carrying out the central task of mail processing, it is impossible to ignore any of these job differences in the analysis. Workers invariably begin their jobs in the processing areas and, with seniority, move into more desirable positions such as counter work.

Inside work takes place in the large, open factory floor of the Kenmount Rd. plant. At the rear of the area are the loading platforms for outgoing and incoming mail, while much of the central floor area is taken up by various containers of mail requiring tractor vehicles to move them about. The main processing area forms a rough L-shape throughout the remainder of the available space. At the top of the L is the city manual section filled with large wooden sorting cases of various types. Much of the base of the L is utilized by the forward section with its complement of sorting cases and tables. Between these two areas is the mechanized section which includes automatic cancelers and cullers which cancel stamped mail and stack it in a manner suitable for automated processing. A long row of 12 attached coding machines called the "group desk suite" (GDS) runs to the corner of the L and meets the single massive letter sorting machine, (LSM). A self-contained room in this area holds a large computer and associated equipment which controls the automated functions of the processing equipment.

In the coding section, work centers around the GDS and LSM. Coders sit at their machines and key in the six digit code with one hand at a minimum rate of 1800 letters per hour. While this section catches the visitor's attention because of its concentration of unusual machinery, it also stands out immediately because of the

noise emanating from it.[1] Many coders put themselves "on automatic" as they work by wearing headphones and listening to music or radio programs. The headphones are also used to mask the din of the automated section when the LSM and GDS are both in use.

Coders work one of two, eight hour shifts: 1 to 9 p.m. or 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. There is no morning work in the mechanized section as the shifts are tied to a build-up in the flow of incoming mail. Throughout a weekly cycle there is a rotation of duties in this section, as in all areas of the plant, so that workers interchange tasks.

While there are differences in the technical details of city and forward section work, the pattern and types of work done are very much the same. Most of the shift involves sorting various types of mail: non-standard or rejected mail which the mechanized section cannot process

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[1] Both automated and manual sorting have been shown to offer considerable health risks but automated workers in particular are more likely to be affected by hearing and vision problems and mental and physical health problems related to stress (Lowe and Northcott, 1986). While on GDS duty, workers in about half the plants across Canada, including St. John's, were given a five minute rest period every hour. Unlike the manual sorters, coders cannot easily take a minute to stretch or move around. In 1986, Canada Post eliminated these rest periods as they were not part of any legal agreement. Workers were still given five minutes off the GDS each hour but were to perform other duties, including manual sorting during this time.

and oversized envelopes[2] and "flats" such as magazines. For most workers the epitome of the negative side of sorting work is "the hole," the six-foot high wrap-around cases with 150 slots which one person at a time enters to sort oversized mail. These cases curve around on three sides to allow better access to all pigeon-holes. They also isolate the workers who are using them.

Other work performed in the city and forward sections includes the sorting of small parcels, (mail handlers sort larger parcels in the central floor area of the plant); the preparation of special delivery mail, and preparing bags and containers of mail for dispatch. City and forward sections operate on three shifts: 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 3 p.m. to 11 p.m., and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. with more workers assigned to the evening and night shift than the day shift. Though shift work has been a long standing feature of inside work these particular shifts were put into effect shortly before this study began as management

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2
At the several larger plants on the mainland there is machinery in place which can automatically process larger than normal envelopes. Economic decisions involving volumes of mail have determined this type of equipment is not utilized in the Kennount Rd. plant. This is true for many other equipment innovations as well. In the large plants in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, for instance, there are automatic or semi-automatic parcel sorting processes in place as well as new, optical character reading, mail sorting machines which represent a major "technical" advance beyond the group desk suite technology. This new technology is discussed further in chapter six.

was attempting to optimize labour levels relative to mail volumes.

2.3 Researching In Sensitive Situations

When I began preparing for this study I intended to work through both management and unions. I hoped to gain access to the shop floor as a casual worker and proceed from there to interview both management and workers. Given the state of labour relations at Canada Post during 1987-88 this turned out to be a somewhat naive plan. Canada Post management was adamant in adhering to a policy of "...non-participation in outside studies of Canada Post." Like all interested groups from the public, I was given a courtesy tour of the St. John's mail processing plant. Because of difficulties in gaining corporate participation, management policies and strategies are examined through an analysis of the available documentary sources and from information given by union officials and workers. In hindsight, it is not difficult to explain the refusal of management to participate in the study. I began the research only several months after major strikes by both unions over job security. These strikes had been characterized by a number of violent confrontations and the use of "scab" labour. On the other hand, the Corporation was attempting to consolidate a number of its new productivity policies and was facing resistance to them among workers.

Having revised the research strategy to concentrate on interviews with workers, representative samples from both the letter carriers and postal clerks were sought. I approached executive members of both unions with a study proposal in mid-January 1988 and both unions designated contact persons whom I was to work with. From the start the CUPW expressed interest and I met on several occasions with the Local president to discuss my intentions and gain needed background information. The LCUC appeared to be much more reticent about becoming involved. A month passed before I was able to meet with a union official to discuss my proposal and address questions and concerns expressed by the union. Both union executives eventually brought the matter before their memberships and a number of workers in both locals expressed apprehension about my motives, particularly any relationship I might have with the Corporation.[3] This led to some difficulties in

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[3] I believe this was primarily a reflection of the general relationship existing between Canada Post management and workers, and the tension and fear generated by recent strikes which involved "scab" labour and picket-line violence. The response of workers I talked to subsequently was revealing of the two groups' underlying attitude towards management. Inside workers did question my possible alliance with management but generally expressed the view that they did not care if management heard any negative viewpoints. Letter carriers, while apprehensive about any connection I had with management, were also very worried about avoiding any situation which would add to the tension between themselves and management. A typical statement was to the effect that my work might be journalistic in nature, with the results gaining public visibility at a time when these workers did not wish to further antagonize the employer.

collecting the data which necessitated the extension of
the research period from February through July 1988.

2.3.1 The Study Groups

It was decided within both unions that I would have
no direct contact with workers until each individual gave
their consent to an interview. The inside workers
provided access to their union seniority list from which
to derive a selection of workers. The list was stratified
by sex and job classification to provide a cross-section
of the workforce and 60 names were selected for the
sample. The list was already stratified by seniority and
therefore, in an approximate manner, age was also
accounted for. My original intention was to interview 40
workers but a sample size of 60 was decided upon as a high
negative response rate was expected. A letter of
introduction and explanation was drawn up and copies were
distributed to specified union members. Despite the best
efforts of my contact person, (aside from regular work and
a heavy load of union responsibility as local president,
she kept in touch with me on a weekly basis), 24 positive
responses were all that were forthcoming in the first
month. A second set of 20 names was drawn and this
resulted in a total of 33 interviews.

[4]

The Local at the time had 167 members but 37 did not work in the plant itself. These included the wicket/counter service employees located in various postal stations. As it turned out, there was a negligible response from this group and the single positive response was used as a pretest interview. An overall 41 per cent response rate was achieved which represents 25 percent of the 130 plant workers of the local and 20 percent of the total local membership. In looking at the comparison of sample and union local in Table 2-1, page 33, there is a discrepancy at the two highest seniority groupings, but these groupings represent only nine out of 167 members of the bargaining unit and are composed largely of counter personnel who perform an atypical form of work in the bargaining unit. I do not, therefore, consider the absence of counter personnel from the study group as a major problem.

Table 2-2, page 35, summarizes the breakdown of the union local by type of work and offers a comparison of the study group with the full local. As can be seen from this

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[4]
At the time of this study there was a great deal of flux in the composition of the union local in terms of both numbers of workers and work positions. This was due to the changes taking place in the St. John's post office including job reassignments, freezing of positions and some firings. The total number of active workers and the numbers of workers doing particular types of work were arrived at through consultation with the union but do not reflect a stable organization.

Table 2-1:   CUPW by Seniority and Sex

A. CUPW St. John's Local

yrs. in job	males #	males %	females #	females %	Total #	Total %
1-5	10	9	5	13	15	9
6-10	48	41	17	44	65	39
11-15	42	36	16	41	68	41
16-20	9	8	1	3	10	6
21-25	2	2	0	0	2	1
>25	7	6	0	0	7	4
total	118		39		167	

B. CUPW Sample

yrs. in job	males #	males %	females #	females %	Total #	Total %
1-5	0	0	1	10	1	3
6-10	11	49	4	40	15	46
11-15	9	39	5	50	14	42
16-20	2	9	0	0	2	6
21-25	1	4	0	0	1	3
>25	0	0	0	0	0	0
total	23		10		33	

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

table, all operations employees are proportionately represented in this study.

The letter carriers, as a group, were more cautious and did not wish their names to be released at all. I was to draw my sample based on the seniority list number of each carrier in the local and the union would match the selected numbers with names on the actual seniority list.[5] Following the procedure I employed with members of CUPW, 40 workers were indirectly contacted. This process alone took over a month and to complicate things further I was given only the first names and phone numbers of those who expressed an interest in participating. In terms of anonymity this measure was obviously employed by the union more to reassure workers who were ambivalent about being interviewed than to prevent me from discovering identities. I contacted these workers to discuss the study and no individual, once having reached this point, refused to participate. By the time several interviews were conducted there was much less caution among those who volunteered.

Unfortunately there were only 13 volunteers among the 40 workers who received letters. With only 80 carriers in the local I decided to distribute letters to all remaining

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[5]
There is only one female letter carrier within the St. John's postal area. So sex was not a variable of concern in choosing workers from this group. As well, and unlike the inside workers, there is, with some minor variation, only one basic type of work performed by the group.

Table 2-2:   CUPW Members by Job Classification

	CUPW Local			CUPW Sample	
	Union Members	% of Local	% of Operations* Employees	CUPW Sample	% of Sample
forward manual	35	21	27	10	30
city manual	39	24	30	10	30
coding section	28	17	22	8	24
mail handlers	16	10	12	3	9
counter services	37	22	0	0	0
other**	12	7	9	2	6
Total	167	100	100	33	100

* operations employees exclude counter services personnel

** "other" includes worker in registered mail and Priority Post

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

members.[6] The outcome, in late July was 21 completed
interviews – an overall response rate of 26 percent.

Tables 2-1, page 33, and 2-3, page 37, offer a
comparison of key characteristics of the sample and
complete union locals.

Of particular note in both the inside worker and
letter carrier tables are the gender ratios. While the
national picture for letter carriers reflects a somewhat
higher female to male ratio, the virtual exclusion of
women from the St. John's letter carriers' Local and the
relatively low numbers of women among inside workers
underlines the importance of addressing and analyzing
factors in the local labour market, something which this
limited work does not attempt. Linked to this are the
repercussions for segmentation and control within the
corporation itself which will be touched on in chapters
five and seven. The data gathered for this study does not

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[6]
    There is actually another, distinct, group of workers,
the couriers, included in the LCUC local. These are the
van and truck drivers who move the mails to the Kenmount
Rd. processing site and distribute it to the various
postal stations and the green holding boxes seen along
letter carrier routes. This group was excluded from the
study for a number of reasons. The work of the couriers
is quite distinct from the carriers and historically, the
drivers, up until the mid-1970s, were not directly
employed by the post office. They worked for private
trucking firms contracted by the post office to provide
transport. When the post office began to provide its own
transport the privately employed drivers were hired by the
government and they were signed up by the LCUC. Since
then there has been little movement between the ranks of
the letter carriers and the couriers.

Table 2-3:   LCUC by Seniority and Sex

A.   LCUC St. John's Local

yrs.in job	males #	%	females #	%	Total #	%
1-5	6	8	1	100	7	9
6-10	7	9	0	0	7	9
11-15	39	49	0	0	39	48
16-20	19	24	0	0	19	24
21-25	5	6	0	0	5	6
>25	3	4	0	0	3	4
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total	79		1		80	

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

B.   LCUC Sample

yrs.in job	males #	%	females #	%	Total #	%
1-5	0	0	1	100	1	5
6-10	2	10	0	0	2	10
11-15	9	45	0	0	9	43
16-20	7	35	0	0	7	33
21-25	2	10	0	0	2	10
>25	0	0	0	0	0	0
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total	20		1		21	

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

allow a full and proper treatment of gender in the
restructuring of postal work.[7] Clearly, however, the
restructuring will have different and unequal impacts on
men and women in terms of both the utilization of the
supply of labour for increased casual and part-time work
and within the labour process and division of labour
itself. For instance, management may take advantage of
domestic sphere constraints which can make casual work
more manageable for women than full-time employment. On
the other hand relations within the labour process,
including resistance, may vary according to gender-based
differences in experience and consciousness brought to the
work place.

As can be seen there is a general, though imperfect,
correspondence between the sample and the actual union
membership on seniority, sex, and seniority by sex. The
correspondence is closer for the CUPW than the LCUC and
this may be due to the somewhat more reliable sampling
procedure undertaken for inside workers.

A potentially far more serious problem with the study
group selection rests on the high negative response rate

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[7]
I am dealing specifically with inside workers and
letter carriers. But there are many other groups in the
Post Office whose work and jobs are being affected by the
changes discussed in this study. For instance, cleaning
staff, most of whom are women and immigrants, have had
their work contracted out since 1986. Jobs that once paid
$8 to $12 per hour, now pay near ...inimum wages, with few
benefits and little job security (Hannant, 1988: 5).

among both groups. It may be that workers who were generally more union oriented or "politicized" than others tended to agree to participate. There was little that could be done under the circumstances to establish whether this was the case though one rough indicator may be union involvement. In the case of the LCUC Local, 62 percent of those interviewed, 13 of 21 workers, were active in the union at some point in time. Among CUPW members interviewed, 39 percent had involvement with the union in official capacities. These values suggest that in relative terms the LCUC sample was more adversely effected than the CUPW selection. However, this is not conclusive as a check with both unions suggests that among the more closely knit letter carriers many more members at some point in time have served in the union. If service of more than one term, or present involvement, is used as an indicator the difference is somewhat reduced: 33 percent for the LCUC and 21 percent for the CUPW.

The difficulties outlined here clearly affect the representativeness of the sample and this is reflected in the way the interview data are treated in the analysis. More generally, the difficulties raise concerns for all researchers as they highlight both the potential problems of conducting research in sensitive or volatile social settings and the need to maintain direct control over all aspects of one's work. Given the constraints of time and resources, my only alternative to the personally

frustrating route followed in this research was to have abandoned the study. However, in relinquishing control over much of the respondent selection process I had to accept that no matter how well intentioned my union contacts were, they had the extra constraints of their own work and union responsibilities to contend with.   In contacting and following-up the workers I selected for interviews, I had to rely on their sensitivity to the necessity of adhering to the agreed upon selection process.   Added to this was the increased ease for individuals, when approached by someone they knew on a day-to-day basis and who was not directly connected to this study, to put off making a decision or to make a negative one.

2.3.2 The Interviews

An interview schedule was devised and pretested during early spring, 1968. During pretesting a number of specific issues of concern were identified among both groups of workers and revisions were made to include, or improve, questions relating to these issues.   Interviews were conducted at the residences of workers or at the offices of the Sociology department at Memorial University, whichever was chosen as most convenient by the respondent.   The interviews ranged from one and one-half to three hours in length and consisted of two components. A set of standardized, close-ended questions was devised

to provide comparative measures of certain work, social and political attitudes. A set of semi-structured, open-ended questions was employed to gain details of changes in work and insight into the context in which workers perceived the impact of changes in both the technical aspects of their labour process and elements extraneous to the organization of work itself.

Chapter 3

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW OF

WORKERS' STRUGGLES IN THE CANADIAN

POST OFFICE PRIOR TO 1981

This chapter is intended to provide an understanding
of the essential factors shaping the key relationships and
organization in the Canadian Post Office at the time of
this study. While this thesis focuses on workers at a
single "plant" of a national corporation with 29 major
processing centers and thousands of retail outlets across
Canada, it is the broad but critical changes in the state
and the Corporation, as well as the national unions, that
provide the framework within which local events take
place.[1] As an aid to clarity I have treated two
interrelated topics, Post Office restructuring and the
shaping of worker struggles, in distinct fashion. It
should be remembered, however, that the struggles

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[1] Having made this statement I do not wish to suggest
that, conversely, this study may be directly generalized
to the national level. While certain trends are occurring
in the postal corporation throughout Canada, the
particular history of labour and organization in the St.
John's post office and the local labour market conditions
should make it clear that extrapolations cannot be readily
made.

documented here played an important role in the restructuring. It should be noted that more attention is given to inside workers and their union than to the letter carriers. This is a reflection of the different labour processes experienced by letter carriers and inside workers and the resulting impacts of management on their work and jobs. It is partly due to the greater attention given the CUPW in the secondary literature and the greater availability of material from the union itself, both of which reflect the restructuring and managerial intervention experienced by CUPW workers.

3.1 Restructuring

The restructuring of the Canadian Post Office began initially with an aggressive program of automation in the 1970. It continued with the move from government department to Crown status and efforts toward privatization. These developments can be traced to at least two key factors. The growth in mail volumes up to and through the 1960s, with business mail accounting for over 80 percent of pieces sorted, resulted in major changes in Post Office operations as management came under pressure to increase the efficiency of mail movement (Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986). At the same time, the Post Office deficit was of increasing concern to the state during a period of growing fiscal crisis. The last year the Post Office recorded a surplus was 1957 ($5.8

million), though in the previous 25 years the Post Office had garnered $115 million in total profits and experienced only three years with losses, (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 283). From 1965 to 1969, the Post Office deficit increased from $34 million to $80 million (Kates, Peat, Marwick and Co., 1969). By 1974, the annual deficit was up to $177 million and at its peak in 1977 was at $575 million (Canada Post Corporation Annual Reports, 1974; 1977). A number of reasons for the Canadian postal deficit have been suggested in various studies over the years, (e.g., Kates, Peat, Marwick and Co., 1969; Reynolds, 1981; Marchment, et.al., 1985) and several are deserving of particular note as they relate to the context of this study.

The provision of low, second-class rates for magazines and newspapers which resulted in a cumulative subsidy of about $300 million from 1958 to 1968 (Reynolds, 1981: 27), along with the governments' maintenance of low postal rates in general, had direct effects on the deficit. The postal deficit could be directly attacked by raising rates or through the application of tax dollars, the bulk of which come from individual taxpayers. Since commercial use at the time was running over 80 per cent of total mail business, the maintenance of low rates, in fact the lowest of major western nations (Reynolds, 1981: 28), amounted to a subsidization of private capital.

In the long run the costs associated with the

rationalization process itself have been identified as contributing to the maintenance of the deficit. As late as 1975, the postmaster general was speaking publicly about a $96 million mechanization program. In fact, by 1976, 26 centers had been automated and the cost for mechanization and the necessary new plants was about $1 billion (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 142; Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 49).

High labour costs and labour militancy are the chief factors identified by management as responsible for deficit problems. In recommending the formation of a Crown Corporation and the introduction of automation A Blueprint For Change (Kates, Peat, Marwick, & Co., 1969) cites, as a key factor, the rapid increase of labour costs with the onset of collective bargaining in 1967. There is some evidence to challenge the claim that postal workers made inordinate wage gains. While labour costs were traditionally a very high percentage of all operating costs in the pre-mechanized, labour intensive, Post Office, nevertheless the real wages of postal workers between 1961 and 1969 increased only marginally, from $2.07 to $2.50 per hour (Reynolds, 1981: 36). During this same time period, however, the labour force expanded by 26 percent reflecting the rapid growth in service and volumes. In 1962, three million Canadian addresses received delivery service. By 1969 the number was over four million and in 1974 there were over five million points of call (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 283).

In 1968, Postmaster General Eric Kierans initiated a series of 15 studies into the operations of the Post Office. Summarized in the report, A Blueprint for Change, these studies marked the beginning of the overhaul of the Post Office. The report supported mechanization as a key to cutting costs.

> The lag in productivity...can be related to the failure of the Canadian Post Office in comparison to major post offices elsewhere, to introduce mechanical sortation processes...The goal of postal automation is to assist in stabilizing the financial future of the Post Office. The cost of processing a first class letter can be reduced as much as 20 per cent through automation in the short term (Kates, Peat, Marwick & Co., 1969: 23-24).

The decision to automate the Post Office was made in 1970 though CUPW did not officially learn of the plan until late 1971. In December of that year union and management officials met and the union was told the program of automation would affect 15 centers by 1976. Ultimately 26 centers were actually affected, starting with Ottawa in 1972. This was followed over the next four years with plant openings across the country, including the St. John's, Kenmount Road processing facility in 1976. The Post Office chose not to implement the most advanced technology immediately. The use of optical character readers (OCRs) which, when perfected, would electronically read printed words and characters and translate them into machine code without human intervention were not introduced at first. The postal code was designed to be

read by OCRs when the technology was proven but the Post Office opted for investing in the well known "coding suite" technology in which letters are passed by machine before a human coder who punches in the postal code appearing on the envelope. The code is then reproduced as a machine readable bar code on the envelope for further processing. Complementing the "group desk suites" is the letter sorting machine (LSM). After coding of envelopes is completed, batches of mail are run through the LSM, which reads the machine code and sorts each letter into any one of hundreds of pre-programmed destination slots. Human labour is utilized in this process chiefly in the unskilled coding function and in the feeding and clearing, or sweeping, of the LSM. While automated methods account for the great majority of mail processed, manual sorting accounts for the bulk of the employment of inside workers since many types and sizes of mail cannot be handled by machinery or are rejected by the processing equipment due to improper or inadequate coding. Further technological adaptations implemented in the 1980s or planned for the near future will eliminate many of these problems.

The mechanization of the Post Office was seen as a major step toward solving its financial problems, and certainly by some, its long term labour problems through the elimination of the labour intensive nature of inside

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work.

Following the strike and the Anderson report, the
federal government established a Royal Commission of
Inquiry under Andre Montpetit into working conditions at
the Post Office. Montpetit addressed the desire of inside
postal workers to obtain collective bargaining rights and
the need to create a Crown Corporation to achieve this end
(Montpetit, 1966).

By 1969 A Blueprint for Change found the formation of
a Crown corporation to be a critical step in solving
Canada's postal problems. The authors suggested that

> efficient management of the Post Office demands
> the creation of an environment that will permit
> management to operate independently, flexibly and
> imaginatively. Only with such an environment will
> the Post Office be able to deal with increasing
> mail volumes and ever changing conditions. Crown

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. Expanding mail volumes could be handled without the
expense of increasing personnel levels and productivity
need not be hampered by "militant" workers.

However, automation was only one, though probably the
most important, direction taken by the state in addressing
its problems with the Post Office. A number of government
studies during the 1960s and 1970s pointed out the unique
nature of the Post Office in terms of the semi-industrial
work performed and in its revenue generating potential.
In relation to these factors, many of the reports
addressed the question of Crown corporation status.

During a key 1965 strike, involving both inside workers
and letter carriers, a commission of inquiry chaired by
Justice J.C. Anderson was critical of Federal labour
relations practices which equated postal workers with
other civil servants and attempted to peg postal pay to
other public service work when, in fact, their work and
working conditions were so different (Reynolds, 1981: 189

corporation status should permit such an environment (Kates, Peat, Marwick & Co., 1969: 12).

With the commencement of automation during the 1970s, the unions voiced their support for a Crown corporation. The CUPW was particularly forceful in its desire to see the Post Office gain Crown status. Under the Public Service Staff Relations Act, which governed all workers in the Canadian Public Service, employees and their unions were placed under restrictive bargaining conditions. Areas of concern such as technological change, job classification, hiring practices and work content were not open to negotiation as these were items addressed by other pieces of federal legislation. The Canada Labour Code, on the other hand, which applied to workers in the private sector as well as Crown corporations, allowed all these areas to be addressed in collective bargaining.

3.2 The Unions And Struggle

In examining the reaction of workers to the conditions of their labour it is necessary to understand the situation at Canada Post in the 1980s in the context of past struggle between workers and the state agency.

Labour strife has a long tradition at the Post Office with the first strike, by the then Railway Mail Clerk Association, in 1918 over what workers felt were broken promises of wage increases and bonuses already approved by Parliament. In 1924 the Dominion Postal Clerks

Association attempted to organize a national strike in most major cities. Strikers in Montreal, Toronto and Windsor were fired and in other centers demotions occurred (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 85). Support from civil service organizations and groups outside government spheres led to government rescinding its punishments two years later.

Joe Davidson, a key CUPW president during the 1970s, argued in his biography that these struggles had profound effects on workers' attitudes. Those who crossed pickets during the 1924 strike were labelled "cuckoos," and even 35 years after that strike, when Davidson was working in the Toronto Post Office, new clerks were informed of who the "cuckoos" were: "...if you were talking to an older man at your case and the call of 'cuckoo' ran down the aisle, the conversation ceased and from that moment the fellow ceased to exist," (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 61). A 1981 Canada Post history of labour relations notes that veteran postal workers consider these initial strikes as key elements in workers' continued support of their association during the decades prior to 1960 despite the fact that the associations were not unions (Stewart-Patterson, 1987). However, the major era of unrest and change in the Canadian Post Office began in the 1960s with the conjuncture of the growth of public service unionism, in which postal workers formed the vanguard, and the growing pressure on the state to cut deficits.

Prior to the 1960s there was "a pride built into the

system" which held both clerks and letter carriers to their jobs (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 88). The attachment to work appears to have been based in part on a military air in postal employment. Many workers were ex-enlisted men in the Canadian wartime services, while supervisors were heavily recruited from the higher ranks. This lent itself to a hierarchically patterned authority structure and contributed to stability (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 46; Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986: 142). As well, among inside workers there was a high level of pride in the particular memory-based skills of the mail sorter. Each clerk, over a period of time, built up a bank of some 10,000 bits of information relating to the sorting process (Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986: 141). This was epitomized by the railway postal clerks whose jobs were considered the pinnacle of success among Post Office workers. These clerks, who rode the trains throughout rural Canada, and pre-1949 Newfoundland as well, processed and prepared mail as they travelled. The chief expression of their ability and pride was that they would not use labels on their sorting cases. Cases, the large, box-like structures in which myriad slots are built to accept mail for different destinations, normally have each pigeonhole labelled. Among the railway clerks, and the better plant sorters, it was a sign of status not to need them (Davidson and Deverell, 1978).

During this time, relations between workers and

government were characterized by an essentially unilateral decision making process on the part of the federal government. Reynolds (1981) suggests that it was the inability of workers to bargain with their state employer, and the subsequent poor working conditions and low level of public service wages in relation to the private sector, that led to a general militancy in the mid-1960s. Davidson and Deverell (1978) identify postal workers as forming the vanguard of this movement largely because of the growing gap between postal salaries and those in other essential public service sectors. A 1965 wildcat strike by inside and outside workers helped push the government toward enacting collective bargaining legislation that recognized the right to strike.

Prior to passage of the Public Service Staff Relations Act in 1967, wage increases were determined by recommendation of the Civil Service Commission. With a rapidly expanding bureaucracy, this unilateral method of determining salary was breaking down and it collapsed in 1958 when the Diefenbaker government decided to cancel a general increase for the year (Reynolds, 1981). The following year saw a repeat of 1958 and it was not until July 1960 that the finance minister, Donald Fleming, announced the long delayed general increase (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 65). This was done in the face of growing strike talk among postal workers and was followed by several years of agitation among workers, including a major work to rule campaign in 1962 (CUPW, 1987a: 4).

During this period the paths of postal workers and other federal civil servants began to diverge as the president of the Civil Service Federation called for a system of compulsory arbitration to protect civil service salaries from the whims of government. The president of the Canadian Postal Employees Association (CPEA) labelled the attitude company unionism and an abrogation of the responsibility to represent the membership (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 73).

After five years of delayed and disappointing wage increases and unsatisfactory changes in working conditions, the federal government failed to grant a sought after annual increase in 1965. This action triggered a nation-wide wildcat strike initiated by a walkout of letter carriers and inside workers in Montreal. The national strike lasted 17 days and had a number of important impacts.

Following the strike, the rank and file of both letter carrier and inside worker unions rejected the current leadership. Workers generally felt the success of the strike was due to their own initiative and aggressiveness and that the executive of the Postal Workers Brotherhood, (a joint body comprised of officials from the CPEA, inside workers; the Federated Association of Letter Carriers, FALC; and the Canadian Railway Mail Clerks Federation), had in fact hampered the strike effort by urging a return to work and not sanctioning the

job-action (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 78). At annual conventions of both associations that year, much of the old leadership was voted out and those who had been active in the strike effort were installed as union officers. As an indication of the conscious movement toward an industrial union stance CPEA members voted to change their association's name to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, while FALC members changed their organization's name to the Letter Carriers Union of Canada.

With the enactment of the Public Service Staff Relations Act in March 1967, a more clearly institutionalized industrial relations process was created. However, while the state was forced to recognize the right to strike in the public service, since postal workers had in essence staked out the right in their national walkout, the Act was so restrictive that it created as many problems as it was intended to solve (Reynolds, 1981).

The Act provides that no collective bargaining may affect the right or authority of the employer to "determine the organization of the Public Service and to assign duties to and classify positions therein" (Public Service Staff Relations Act, Section 7). As it turned out, this meant that conditions of employment and technological change were not negotiable (Reynolds, 1981: 65; CUPW 1987b). Furthermore, the Act prohibits collective agreements from addressing matters already

covered by federal legislation. This includes pensions, hiring, layoff and dismissal of employees, promotions, demotions and transfers, and job classification (Reynolds, 1981: 66).

Under the Act two routes of bargaining are provided and the choice of processes must be selected before negotiations begin. The first route, arbitration, provides for an arbitration tribunal to arrive at a binding settlement where necessary. The tribunal must arrive at its decisions using the principle of "comparability," that is, basing settlements on the collective agreements of other groups in the public sector. This method of dispute resolution was favored by the Civil Service Federation which evolved into the Public Service Alliance of Canada with its traditionally conservative reputation (Davidson and Deverell, 1978). The second route, conciliation and strike, allows for legal strike activity but provides that before bargaining commences "designated employees," considered essential to the safety or security of the public, must be agreed upon. Both CUPW and LCUC, while bargaining under the Act, always chose the strike route alternative.

While the letter carriers and inside workers presented a common front throughout the 1950s and 1960s and, with the passage of the Public Service Staff Relations Act, entered into joint collective bargaining as a single certified agent called the Council of Postal

Unions (CPU) a merger did not occur and by 1975 the two
unions began individual contract negotiations with
Treasury Board.

3.2.1 The Letter Carriers

During the 1970s, the Letter Carriers Union of Canada
(LCUC) had developed a reputation as a "reasonable" union
in contrast to the CUPW. Carriers refer to their union as
"service oriented" as opposed to the more "politically
oriented" CUPW.

One of the most significant attacks on letter
carriers since collective bargaining began in 1967 was the
1968 decision by Postmaster General Eric Kierans to end
six-day delivery of mail as a cost saving measure. The
move meant a potential loss of one-sixth of their labour
requirements for the letter carriers. However, the impact
of the move was mitigated by a proposed merger with the
CUPW (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 88). As a first step,
CUPW agreed to let surplus LCUC members keep their
seniority rating if they transferred to inside jobs. This
was a very important concession in that the seniority
system at work in the post office meant the more senior
employees had first choice at the desirable day-time
shift, of the front counter assignments, and of the
preferred vacation times. Letter carriers, due to the
relative desirability of the work and the tradition of
attachment to their jobs, generally held more seniority

than many inside workers. When many older carriers began moving inside, to take advantage of the opportunity to finish their careers off the street, they added to the younger, "bumped" LCUC workers, taking many choice shifts and assignments. CUPW leaders were humiliated, however, when the proposed merger never went through. A referendum in January 1969 showed that members of both unions approved but the LCUC backed out of the merger in a vote at its next national convention (Stewart-Patterson, 1981: 99).

Internal disputes such as this, as well as a very different set of working conditions and needs in collective bargaining, ultimately led to the split-up of the single bargaining agent in 1975. Many letter carriers, with a sense of independence built-up from their particular work and with a seventy year heritage in Canada, were afraid of being swallowed by the more numerous CUPW membership (Davidson and Deverell, 1978: 106). The letter carriers were certainly a more homogeneous group, almost totally male dominated and all performing similar work. Inside workers were more diverse with a large number of women beginning to infiltrate the male ranks during the 1960s. These women were mostly part-time workers performing at reduced wages with no guaranteed hours and no fringe benefits. Moreover, the labour of both groups has generated divergent problems and conflicting goals.

Despite the reduction to five-day delivery in 1968, letter carriers have benefited from rapid Canadian urban and suburban growth in the 1970s. This growth meant new jobs for mail carriers and, unlike inside workers who were caught up in a war over technological change and job security, left monetary questions as the main issue.

A second major challenge to letter carriers occurred in 1970 when the Post Office undertook to in some way insure carriers performed a "fair day's work" (Stewart-Patterson, 1987). Because it was virtually impossible to supervise carriers directly, the Post Office pressed for a system of time allotments for each aspect of a carrier's job. A series of detailed time-and-motion studies was to be conducted to establish time values for every task a carrier might perform. These covered such details as filling-out customer forms, sorting mail, walking a route, (with different values for varying ground "slopes", etc.), and pushing letters through slots or into boxes. Through negotiation, time values were worked out and each carrier's walk was structured (and periodically reevaluated and restructured) so that the sum of the time values created a full working day.

Carriers, throughout the 1970s, benefited from this system in that it is based on walking a steady pace and following existent sidewalks and paths to each delivery point. Thus, given the weather and volumes of mail on a particular day, letter carriers are able, if and when they

choose, to get off early by walking faster, taking shortcuts, combining morning and afternoon mail volumes, and skipping negotiated breaks. While these benefits are to some degree balanced out by the often severe climatic conditions which letter carriers work under in winter, often forcing the opposite situation of working overtime, carriers by-and-large agree that a six or seven hour day is easily achieved.

A comprehensive audit of the Post Office by Auditor General Kenneth Dye in 1981 showed that postal studies demonstrated that the majority of carriers were finishing their routes in five to six hours. However, he noted that enforcing the system would not move the mail any faster as carriers deliver all the mail assigned to them each day (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 103).

Having won a five day work week and mitigated potential job losses, and consolidated a standardized system of work allotment, the letter carriers in the 1970s were on a much different footing than their fellow workers in CUPW. It has been suggested by members of both unions that the carriers were able to become somewhat complacent in their positions until increasing management pressure for changes in work rules and efficiency levels commenced in the 1980s.

3.2.2 The Inside Workers

The first negotiations between CUPW and the Post Office that dealt in any substantial way with technological change occurred in 1968. Article 31 of the new collective agreement stated that the CPU would be notified of changes in technology or operation methods that would substantially reduce the size of the bargaining unit. This notification would be given at least 90 days prior to implementation of the intended changes. This was essentially an information provision clause and gave the unions no legal leverage (CUPW, 1987a: 7; Reynolds, 1981: 88). The 1970 agreement added that the Post Office was to seek to minimize adverse effects on employees, which, it should be emphasized, did not carry any stipulation that adverse effects had, in fact, to be "eliminated". The agreement also provided for a joint standing committee on technological change which was consultative only. By 1975, the first year the CUPW and LCUC negotiated as separate bargaining agents, inside workers, following a 42 day strike, won a definition of technological change and the Post Office committed itself to eliminating all adverse effects of such change. The union also won job security with respect to technological change, protection from individual work measurement, improvements for part time workers and an obligation to minimize the use of casual labour. A special adjudication committee was established to deal with problems of technological change

and the Post Office was required to provide 90 day notification of intended changes as well as all pertinent information. Special adjudication committees were to investigate and issue recommendations which were binding on both parties. As it turned out, the actual committees and other technological change provisions identified in the agreement were undermined by postal management's legalistic interpretation of clauses and by their willingness to hide behind the Public Service Staff Relations Act when the need arose (Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986: 145).

Although the contract language on technological change has, even recently, been acclaimed to be among the most favourable towards labour in North America (DeBresson, 1987), management's attitude toward the technological change clauses became quite apparent in 1976 when the union charged that management failed to give proper notice and information with respect to mechanization at St. John's and London, Ontario. CUPW brought its complaint before the Public Service Staff Relations Board where management argued that once a technological change was introduced at one facility it no longer constituted a technological change at a new site. Since initial mechanization had occurred at Ottawa in 1972 they ruled that no notice of technological change was required in later cases (Reynolds, 1981).

A central issue in this dispute was whether

technological change could go ahead prior to the report of
a special adjudication committee. CUPW argued that it
could not. The hearing, chaired by E.B. Joliffe, found
that the technological change clause allowed management to
implement change and deal with adverse effects later. He
did find that management was in violation of the
collective agreement in not providing meaningful and
constructive consultation and in its specious approach to
the definition of technological change, but because there
was no penalty under the Public Service Staff Relation Act
for this, it was a hollow victory for the union. In
addition, the committee ruled that dealing with adverse
effects did not necessarily mean altering technological
changes as other methods such as monetary compensation
could be used (CUPW, 1987a: 22-23).

Following the Public Service Staff Relations Board
hearing a special adjudication committee was established
in accordance with the terms of the collective agreement,
but proceedings dragged on over two months while major
automation plans were proceeding. At one point in the
committee hearings postal representatives submitted a
document specifying that if any ruling of the committee
was, in the Post Office's opinion, contrary to the Public
Service Staff Relations Act or other federal legislation,
the ruling would be ignored despite the terms of the
collective agreement (CUPW, 1987a: 22).

With no resolution arrived at, rotating strikes were

begun in early October 1976 and a mediation process was initiated by the end of the month. These talks broke down in November and the conflict carried over into contract negotiations in April 1977. In the meantime postal plants across the country, including St. John's, were the sites of increasing tension with fifteen local strikes occurring during the 1977-78 negotiation period. Conciliation talks were entered into in April 1978 but without a satisfactory outcome. On October 17, a full-scale legal strike began and the same day the Trudeau government introduced back to work legislation and compulsory arbitration. The strike continued for another week with thousands of workers suspended and the union's National Executive Board charged under the Criminal Code (Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986).

With the consolidation of the major automation program, though not the end of technological change, and the approach of the date for conversion to a Crown corporation, a collective agreement was signed in 1980 without a strike. However, on the eve of the move to Crown status in 1981, a 42 day strike was precipitated when the Treasury board rejected a conciliation board report (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 145). The outcome was a number of gains for the union including improved health and safety clauses, protections from in-plant electronic monitoring and added job security protection (CUPW, 1987a). Job security was the chief issue in the strike and, as subsequent chapters will show, it has become the

primary focus of management attempts at contract stripping.

3.3 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have outlined the general historical context which gave shape to the present changes in work at Canada Post. In doing so I have attempted to illustrate several points of importance for the subsequent analysis in this thesis. Both inside workers and letter carriers entered the 1960s with a number of common problems and, in the context of growing public service unionism, dealt with those problems through a shared militancy. During the next decade, however, the two groups diverged as differing work design resulted in different sets of conflicts and needs. Among both groups there was a major growth in the institutionalization of conflict through bureaucratic industrial relations structures.

The Post Office's financial state has been of concern to management and government for a number of years and, at those levels, labour costs and militancy have been generally viewed as the primary underlying causes of the growing deficit. Automation of mail processing may therefore be viewed as a strategy to deal with problems of efficiency but at the same time it is a means of both disciplining and reducing reliance upon labour. The next chapter looks in more detail at the state's treatment of

the postal deficit and the consequences for labour in terms of further automation and the burgeoning trend toward privatization.

Chapter 4

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT: THE CROWN

CORPORATION, THE DEFICIT AND THE WORKERS

This chapter draws on Canada Post documents, including business plans and annual reports, as well as union commentary and interviews, to trace the deficit problems of the newly formed Crown corporation and their impact on labour. The crucial point of the chapter is that the actions of management in attempting to assert control over workers and deal with its financial problems have had two broad and related effects on the work force: weakening job security and increasing pressures to produce. These occurrences, however, must be situated within the particular political and historical context of the new Crown Corporation.

4.1 Movement Toward Self-Sufficiency

On October 16, 1981, the Post Office was officially proclaimed as Canada Post Corporation, a federal Crown Corporation under the Canada Labour Code. At the beginning, the new management stated three objectives it would pursue as called for in Bill C-42, the law which created Canada Post. These were improved service,

improved labour-management relations, and financial
self-sufficiency (Marchment, et.al., 1985). In the
November 1981 budget, finance minister Allan MacEachen
established 1986 as the deadline for Canada Post to break
even (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 240) and, from the
perspective of workers, deficit reduction quickly became
the primary objective.

Seven months later, in June of 1982, the federal
government introduced Bill C-124, imposing wage controls
in the federal sector for two years. Not only did the
bill impose increases of 6 percent and 5 percent on
500,000 federal workers,[1] but it also prevented the new
Crown corporation from increasing its postal rates by an
intended 15 percent as a means of reducing the deficit
(CUPW, 1987a: 43)[2]. In fact the domestic letter rate on
which Canada Post has a monopoly can only be increased to
the level necessary to compensate for the impact of
inflation and to recover portions of extraordinary

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[1]
In 1981 terms these ceilings were quite low as
inflation was running at 12.5 percent on the Consumer
Price Index. This compares with a Consumer Price Index
inflation rate of 4.1 percent in 1988 (Statistics Canada,
62-001).

[2]
A jump in the price of a first-class stamp, from 17
cents to 30 cents at the beginning of 1982 was followed by
a 2 cent increase during the price controls program. The
marketing and sales department at Canada Post reported
that current mail volumes, the sluggish economy and the
previous major increase suggested that there should be no
increase in 1984 (Stewart-Patterson, 1987: 242

expenditures beyond the control of the Corporation (Canada Post Corporation, 1987: 12). Rates on competitive and commercial products are in large part determined by competition from private sector business, such as courier and express parcel services. The limits on the ability of the Corporation to use its rate structure to reduce the postal deficit may be seen in its projected reliance on this revenue source. By the end of the 1992-93 fiscal year, the Post Office projects that the pressures on its cost structure will be met by a 41 percent business growth, a 31 percent improvement from service and efficiency programs and a 28 percent increase in revenue from rate action (Canada Post Corporation, 1987: 13).

The response of Postal management to restrictions extending from the political sphere was to attempt to compensate for reduced revenues through cutbacks in service and reduced staffing. An unsuccessful attempt was made in the Fall of 1982 to pressure Canada Post unions into reopening their collective agreements and taking wage cuts. In the case of CUPW, management demanded the union agree to $18 million in reduced labour costs or face a reduction of 600 positions (CUPW, 1987b: 4). Shortly after, the union was given a position paper which offered the staffing of contracted out postal outlets with CUPW members in return for a 50 percent reduction in CUPW wage and benefit costs. The union countered with the submission of a program entitled Job Creation Through Service

Expansion which proposed a number of initiatives the
Corporation could undertake which would increase revenues
through entry into new services while at the same time
increasing employment.

At least one of these initiatives is significant, not
for its success, but because it demonstrates the degree of
state intervention aimed at defending private business
interests. As will be shown in later chapters, both
workers and unions have become acutely aware of the
political context in which the supposedly "independent"
Crown Corporation operates. In March 1984, a 90 day
experiment in co-operation with Consumers Distributing, a
major national retailer, was undertaken. Customers in
rural areas could place an order from the company's
catalogue at one of eight test postal stations. The order
was processed through Consumers Distributing in Sudbury,
Ontario and immediately forwarded to the postal station
for pick-up. The experiment appeared successful but
opposition from a group within the small business sector
led to a political decision to terminate the project
(CUPW, 1987b: 45-46).

In October 1983, Canada Post released a draft of its
five-year business plan. The plan indicated that the
Corporation was considering a number of service-cutbacks
including closure of postal stations, alternate day
delivery of mail, and a customer fee for letter carrier
delivery. While there is no evidence of the last option

materializing, alternate day delivery of mail has been on the bargaining agenda with letter carriers and is considered a future threat to job security.[3]

In addition to service cut-backs, the business plan called for a reduction in staff despite the fact that mail volumes were predicted to increase by 4.5 percent between 1983-84 and 1984-85. In total, 1,200 person-years were to be eliminated in 1983-84 and an additional 1,335 person-years in 1984-85 (CUPW, 1987b). While coming largely from the ranks of inside workers, these losses were also to affect the ranks of letter carriers, supervisory, technical, clerical and managerial groups. The five-year business plan draft suggested that staff cuts were to be facilitated through further introduction of new technologies, more contracting out of retail services, planned changes in collective agreements designed to generate a more flexible workforce, efficiency programs, and attendance management programs. (CUPW, 1987b).

The "attendance management plan" instituted by the Post Office to battle its long-standing problem of high levels of absenteeism has been a central issue in claims of management harassment among both inside workers and letter carriers. The plan involves the close monitoring

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Alternate day delivery could mean secure work for only one-half the workforce with each carrier walking two routes, each on an alternate day.

of sick-leave among employees. In 1986, for instance, all employees with eight or more sick days were being interviewed or "counseled" by management. While the problem of stress, injury and illness in the Post Office has been well documented, particularly by the work of Lowe and Northcott (1986), postal management has simply used the attendance program to boost its' productivity and enable positions to be cut rather than address worker problems. Between 1982-83 and 1986-87 the Corporation reduced its absentee rate, the number of days absent per employee, from 18.4 to 15.5 (Canada Post Corporation Annual Report, 1986-87). The Corporation projects that by 1993 it will have cut the absentee rate to 9.0, less than half the 1982-83 figure (Canada Post Corporation, 1987). CUPW estimates that a 4.3 day reduction per worker would permit Canada Post to eliminate about 400 positions among inside workers (CUPW, 1987d).

As will be seen in Chapter 5, efficiency programs and attendance management programs have translated, from the viewpoint of St. John's inside workers, into major programs of speed-up. This has involved stepped-up supervision, increasing performance standards with attempts to use them as the basis for productivity competition, individual work measurement and harassment beyond the bounds of the collective agreement and workers' normal expectations. Because of the nature of their work, speed-up campaigns have not yet greatly impinged upon

letter carriers, but perceived harassment has had
significant impacts on these workers' relationship with
management.

In July 1984, CUPW and Canada Post entered into the
first full round of negotiations under the Canada Labour
Code. The central concern among workers was the planned
massive reduction in the positions in the union. In the
two years preceding negotiations, the number of positions
in the bargaining unit declined by 2,000 (eight percent)
while mail volumes increased by 19 percent (Canada Post
Corporation Annual Reports, 1982-83; 1983-84). By July
1984, job positions were being eliminated at a rate which
exceeded the rate of worker attrition through turnover and
retirement (CUPW, 1987a: 46). These problems meant there
was less opportunity for night shift workers to move into
day shift and no opportunity for part-time workers to move
into full-time positions.[4]

Following a conciliation process, a settlement was
reached in March 1985 which, the union felt, clearly

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[4]
In St. John's, most part-time workers came into jobs in
the late 1970s with the expectation that, as always had
been the case, they would become full-time employees
within one to two years at most. These workers are, for
the most part, still on part-time status with little hope
of movement in the near future. While part-time workers
are unionized, they do not share in the full benefits of
pension plans and other fringe benefits. They do have
guarantees of 20 hours of work per week and, in fact, in
recent years their work weeks have consistently approached
the 40 hour mark. This is seen as a result of the
reduction of full-time positions within the Corporation.

reconciled its objective of job security with the Corporation's objective of deficit reduction. Included in the settlement was a full job security clause protecting workers from lay-off; a cap on the number of part-time workers in the Post Office; wage increases of 2.9 per cent in each year; several job creation measures and several benefits adjustments. But following the settlement, five major local disputes across the country, including sit-ins and wildcats, were triggered by continued efforts by management to maximize the use of casual and part-time labour, to reduce full-time positions, and to transfer positions from day to night shifts.

In the February 1986 budget, finance minister Michael Wilson declared a new break-even deadline for the Post Office of 1988/89. Canada Post planned to meet that deadline by working for a $26 million surplus for that year and increasing the surplus to $91 million for the 1992/93 fiscal year (see Table 4-1, page 74). To meet the 1988/89 deadline the Corporation closed over 72 rural post offices in 1986 alone, along with a number of large urban offices across the country. In St. John's, the Harvey Rd. Station was closed in 1986 and in 1988 the Water St. East office was closed. The public now uses privately operated subpost offices in these areas.

Table 4-1: Projected General Operating Statistics,
            Fiscal Years 1987/88-1992/93

Year	67/88	88/89	89/90	90/91	91/92	92/93	% Change 87/88-92/93
Govt. Funding ($ millions)	30	–	–	–	–	–	
Net Income ($ millions)	(50)	26	31	39	86	91	282
Paid Hours (millions)	1.28	1.25	1.20	1.16	1.12	1.11	(13.5)
Originating Volumes (millions) of pieces)	7674	8361	8925	9138	9705	10,284	34.0
Salaries & Benefits ($ millions)	2266	2359	2377	2413	2447	2556	12.8
Total Revenue ($ millions)	3121	3445	3667	3879	4119	4379	40.3
Total Operating Expenses ($ millions)	3193	3379	3566	3747	3918	4159	30.3

Source: Derived from Canada Post Corporation 1988/89 to
         1992/93 Corporate Plan summary and supporting
         documentation.

         Values in parentheses are negative.

4.2 Privatization and Other Measures

It has been suggested (Reynolds, 1981) that the political climate at the time of the automation drive in the Post Office was not conducive to supporting attempts at privatization, though various forms of contracting out had taken place for a number of years. It was not until the 1980s that a changed ruling party and altered political ideology generated conditions in which large-scale privatization had become an acceptable strategy. The 1985 Review Committee on the Mandate and Productivity of Canada Post Corporation considered two methods of privatization. The first involved outright and total turnover to the private sector. The second involved privatization of distinct parts of the organization. The committee suggested the first method could be tenable except for the immediate problem of the deficit. The continuing history of annual losses would make the post office an unattractive candidate for sale in its entirety.[5] The second strategy would require provision for continued service to the less financially profitable rural areas. The Committee recommended that the Post Office be given the chance to reach financial

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The plan to generate an increasing annual profit, as opposed to simply eliminate the postal deficit, may be taken as a point of concern along these very lines. If Canada Post can begin to produce a profit level that is attractive to the private sector its outright privatization becomes much more feasible.

self-sufficiency but if the objective is not reached by
1990 then privatization be considered (Marchment, et.al.,
1985: 20).

The attack on the inside workforce at Canada Post
through privatization has been concentrated at the
profitable retail level, particularly in the promotion of
subpost offices and postal franchises. Subpost offices
are small postal outlets operated by private contractors
for profit. While they have been in existence for some
time, a rapid expansion was undertaken in 1984. A subpost
office owner contracts with the Post Office to provide
service and the Corporation pays a commission of
approximately 13 percent of sales (CUPW, 1987b:7). In
1984-85, the top 50 subpost offices took in revenues of
over $22 million while Canada Post paid them over $2.8
million in commissions. On average, the ten largest
subpost offices received commissions of $76,956 (CUPW,
1987b: 8).

The most important phenomenon in privatization began
in March 1987 with the "franchising" of urban postal
stations. This strategy is just taking shape but its
importance to the Corporation is reflected in its goal to
open 50 franchises in the first year and an additional 71
by the end of 1988. By 1996, 971 franchises are to be
operating. Franchises are critically distinct from
subpost offices in that a franchise operator buys the
right to own and operate the full retail services of the

post office. Instead of an operating fee from Canada
Post, the franchise owner sells postal materials and
services for a profit. As several union officials have
commented, this trend is seen as the "MacDonalding" of
Canada Post with all the accompanying impacts on jobs and
wages.

In terms of the rationalization of Canada Post, the
various privatization strategies are only one line of
attack. Another avenue involves increasing the efficiency
of the postal automation program through the introduction
of new equipment and new strategies for its use. As will
be seen in Chapter six, this has included the introduction
of fully automated optical character readers to displace
postal coding work; the national reorganization of the
process of sorting and distributing mail to increase the
efficiency of manual sorting tasks; and a major program,
tied to the private capital sector, of large-scale
financial incentives aimed at encouraging firms to prepare
business mail in ways which minimize the need for worker
intervention in its handling.

Collection and delivery service jobs have been, and
will continue to be, affected as well by the decision to
cease door-to-door delivery to new areas in favour of the
use of "super mailboxes" and the contracting out to
private carriers of some advertising mail which was
previously delivered by letter carriers. While the
introduction and expansion in the use of the now familiar

super mailbox will not have an immediate effect on the job
security of letter carriers, many workers view it with
concern as a potential problem down the road. Postal
policy at present is to preserve carrier service to areas
already receiving it but in all new areas to provide the
neighborhood group boxes (Canadian Post Corporation,
1987). Many workers feel, however, that as the
supermailbox service expands, (500,000 points of call will
be added to the service in the next three years according
to Postal Corporation projections), and becomes a normal
part of the public's service expectations, Canada Post may
begin to push backward into areas now covered by carrier
delivery.

Up to the present, position losses in the post office
have occurred through attrition. But it is the stated
intention of the Corporation to achieve worker lay-offs
beyond this level. In its five year business plan for
1988/89 to 1992/93, Canada Post indicates that it
"...requires the negotiation of the flexibility to
downsize the organization when attrition, retirement
and/or transfer are insufficient to realize the necessary
efficiencies..." (Canada Post Corporation, 1987: 10).

The picture drawn by workers and confirmed by
Corporation data is a Post Office with fewer and fewer
workers processing increasing volumes of mail. A staffing
survey carried out by CUPW using mandatory union dues
payments as a source, showed that between 1982 and 1986,

2403 positions were lost from the bargaining unit (CUPW, 1987b). The Corporation predicts that between 1987/88 and 1992/93 there will be a 13.5 percent decrease in paid hours of operations labour but a 34 percent increase in the volume of mail handled (see Table 4-1, page 74). During the same period it is expected that the productivity of inside workers, as indicated by pieces of mail processed per paid hour, will increase by nearly 19 percent. This compares with an increase of just over 12 percent during the first five years of the Corporation's existence. Letter carriers are expected to increase their productivity, measured as points of call per hour paid, by 10 percent, somewhat less than the 12 percent efficiency improvement generated between 1982-83 and 1986-87 (see Table 4-2, page 80).[6]

Increasing pressure to improve efficiency reaches down to the shop floor where the push for productivity improvements has required allowing further position cuts. It has also led to problems of intensified work pacing and worker perceptions of harassment. In addition, there is an increasing utilization of non-unionized casual labour as a means of creating a flexible labour force which can be matched to fluctuating mail volumes.

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[6] These figures reflect a projected increase in productivity of nearly 50 percent for inside workers and 29 percent for carriers during the first ten years of the Postal Corporation's existence.

Table 4-2:   Corporate Measured Worker Productivity

| | ------actual----- | | | ----projected---- | | % total change |
	82/83	86/87	% Change 82/83- 86/87	88/89	92/93	% Change 88/89- 92/93	82/83- 92/93
Pieces processed/ hr. paid	220	251	14.1	277	329	18.8	49.6
Points of call/ hr. paid	42	47	11.9	49	54	10.2	28.6

Source: Canada Post Corporation Annual Report 1986/87 and Corporate Plan for 1988/89 to 1992/93.

Casual workers at the Post Office are non-unionized, receive no fringe benefits and can, but for union intervention, be called to work "on demand". The use of casual and part-time labour in the post office is one of the oldest points of contention between unionized workers and management, largely because an erratic flow of mail is a perennial operations problem. Mail, particularly business mail which accounts for 80 percent of postal use, is usually processed during the evening and night as the bulk of it is posted at the end of the business day.

Moreover, volumes of mail show tremendous fluctuation over weekly and monthly periods and thus present a major difficulty to management trying to maximize labour efficiency. Between 1982-83 and 1986-87, the number of full-time person years utilized at Canada Post decreased by 5 percent, while the number of casual person years increased by 48 percent (see Table 4-3, page 82).[7] During the same period full-time salaries increased by 15 percent but casual salaries, while accounting for fewer total dollars, increased by 124 percent (see Table 4-4, page 82).

4.3 Conclusion

The paramount concern of both the LCUC and CUPW during the 1980s has been the issue of job security. Among inside workers in particular, struggle has produced apparently strong clauses protecting individual jobs but these have been challenged with demands for rollbacks and with managerial circumvention of the collective agreement. Major strikes in 1987-88 centered on preserving job protection in the contracts of both letter carriers and inside workers. These strikes were noted by the public

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In this brief overview several statistical units of measure have been employed, including paid hours of work, person years and salary expenses. This mix is the result of the unavailability of a uniform set of data spanning the years in question.

Table 4-3:   Labour Utilization in Person Years,
             Fiscal Years 1982/83 - 1986/87

	82/83	83/84	84/85	85/86	86/87	% Change 82/83- 86/87
Full-time	53,989	53,488	53,544	52,771	51,389	(4.8)
Part-time	5122	4967	4956	4999	4829	(5.7)
Casual	1623	1499	1972	1831	2397	47.7
Overtime	1468	1532	2005	2215	2360	60.8

Source: Canada Post Corporation Annual Report 1986-87.

          Negative values are in parentheses.

Table 4-4:   Salary Expenses ($ millions),
             Fiscal Years 1982/83 - 1986/87

	82/83	83/84	84/85	85/86	86/87	% Change 82/83- 86/87
Full-time	1315	1429	1483	1498	1513	15.1
Part-time	127	136	137	143	150	18.1
Casual	37	40	55	56	83	124.3
Overtime	66	67	98	114	124	87.9

Source: Canada Post Corporation Annual Report 1986-87

for the incidents of picket line violence, as "scab" labour was used for the first time by a government agency.

In the case of the LCUC, a series of contract-stripping proposals by the Corporation was rejected. However, a strike was finally triggered by, among other items, the demand to have carriers take their negotiated lunch break at a convenient point on their routes. This would have eliminated the half-hour travel time allotted each carrier to return to their station and back to their route at lunchtime. More important, the real effect would have been the potential loss of one of every fifteen carrier jobs, as restructured routes would take advantage of the ability of each person to spend a half-hour more doing actual delivery of mail. Letter carriers eventually were able to retain that clause in their collective agreement but lost in other areas, including a new management right to contract out the delivery of certain forms of bulk advertising mail.

Inside workers also faced threats to job security over such issues as the no-layoff clause in their agreement, the use of casual workers in postal plants, and the relocation of workers whose positions have been declared redundant. CUPW strikers were legislated back to work but through arbitration were able to maintain their job protection clauses for the time being. The union was particularly concerned that an existing clause guaranteeing redundant workers a relocation within 40

kilometers of their present place of employment would be eliminated. This would open the way for the post office to require workers to move to any region of the country where positions might be available as the only alternative to taking lay-off.

The various pressures on the collective agreement protections and the labour processes of both inside workers and letter carriers are, in large part, the outcome of the broad economic and political factors outlined in the thesis introduction and in this chapter. The ruling party has defined deficit reduction as a primary goal and is carrying out this aspect of its agenda within a strongly pro-private capital context. Within the structure of the state agencies this has meant an attack on labour through privatization and cut-backs in staffing, and through technological change and work reorganization in the work place. The following chapters explore some of the dynamics and consequences of these processes in the St. John's post office.

Chapter 5

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, BUREAUCRATIC CONTROL

AND THE UNDERMINING OF RESISTANCE

In this chapter I want to show that inside workers in
St. John's have lost much of their control of the shop
floor and are now experiencing as "assaults," a number of
management strategies aimed at consolidating corporate
control and increasing productivity. This process is
reinforcing a sense of injustice among workers which is
directed at the corporation. Workers' resentments are
based on their perception that management is ignoring the
collective agreement and the informal work relationships
established in the plant. While management's lost
legitimacy sours the relationship between management and
labour (Littler and Salamaan, 1985; Thompson, 1983),
inside workers find themselves constrained in their
ability to resist. This is not just because of management
tactics to undermine existing formal and informal
agreements, and the effects of technological change, but
also due to restrictive federal state legislation which
provides for discipline or dismissal for formal or

informal work actions.   Technological change has brought
a direct loss of workers' discretion and control over the
labour process as a result of the design of the mechanized
postal equipment.   Perhaps more importantly, automation
has enabled a plant-wide reconstruction of work.   In
combination with management's willingness to stretch the
limits of the bureaucratic features of the work place,
this has enabled the frontier of control to be pushed back
in favor of the Corporation.   Ironically, the outcome of
this reorganization was largely shaped by rights won by
workers themselves in 1976 during the struggle over
technological change.

5.1 In The Zoo

The overriding sentiment of workers I interviewed was
that there was a pervasive hostility on the shop floor
between management and workers and that the post office
management "was out to get us." What this came to mean
was that management wanted to cut costs and increase
productivity and, in the eyes of most workers, management
would not allow them to stand in the way of these
objectives.

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[1]
As discussed in Chapter three, the inside workers 1987
national strike was ended by back to work legislation.
The legislation outlawed all job actions and provided for
individual and union fines and job discipline.   The
legislation remains in effect until summer 1989.

For the majority of workers interviewed from the main processing area of the plant, this conflict made coming to work an often unwanted experience. This was not to say that every minute of the work day, or even every day, is wrought with problems, but as some workers noted, a good day meant just getting through – simply doing your job without hassles and going home. It is not surprising to find that almost all the operations employees were highly "instrumental." Seventy-six percent of workers said the most important, and best liked aspect, of the job was the money, and a significant number of these workers said that even this was rapidly diminishing as their relative wages have been eroding in recent years. Fifteen workers (45 percent) could find nothing else about the job they liked! Other workers felt that along with money, given the tight labour market in Newfoundland and their level of education,[2] they were once grateful for the job security. However, workers today, even those with greater amounts of seniority in the union, are beginning to seriously wonder whether they will have a job to go to in a few years time.

Workers deal, or fail to deal, with the stresses of "working in the zoo", as many workers have begun to call the plant, in their own ways. For most, the problems of worker-management relations are not easily shut out. One

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[2] Sixty percent of respondents had a high school education while 30 percent had some, incomplete, post-secondary training.

worker who lives several miles outside St. John's epitomized the feeling that affects much of the workforce, at least some of the time.

> When I drive into work I'm fine until I reach the overpass, (a highway overpass informally marking the city's edge), and then I can feel the stiffness coming back in my neck and the tension coming on. Its like that for the week then depending on what's going on — if the supervisors have been told to crack down or if you've been sick or something and get called in for counselling as they call it, or harassment as we call it.

Other workers deal with the pressures better and do not mind confrontations with supervisors: "It keeps them on their toes and makes the shift go faster." Others, when they want, spend their shift with radio headphones on, giving them a respite from some of the physical working conditions and, in some cases, isolating themselves from the various conflictual relations in the plant.

The friction between management and the workforce springs from such factors as over-supervision, surveillance, the perceived "unfairness" of management, and a universally expressed anger over inconsistency in the application of rules. Compounding this is a widespread feeling of inability to do much about it. There is also a general concern that what is happening on the shop floor is a reflection of a general assault on previously won protections in the collective agreement covering issues from individual work measurement, use of

non-unionized   casual   employees,   to   job   security
protections.

5.2 Inside Workers And Control: Divisions On The Shop
Floor

The   inception   of   technological   change   in   the
mid-1970s   provided   the   foundation   upon which the inside
workers'   control   of   the   shop   floor   was   undermined.
Throughout   the   1970s   challenges   in   the   work place were
often met by spontaneous job   action   including   wildcats,
sit-ins,   sabotage   and   various   other   anti-management
tactics.   Older workers, those who were at the St.   John's
Post   Office   prior   to   1976,   recall   that until the late
1970s these occurrences reflected the power of   the   union
and workers on the shop floor:

> It   used   to be that we could pretty much have our
> way in there.   The union had the upper hand   then,
> (particularly prior to the early 1980s), and if we
> didn't like what management was doing we   all   did
> something   about   it.   I'd say that management and
> the supervisors were afraid of us.   Now,   since
> they   decided   they   have to make a profit they've
> changed their attitude and you can't even move   in
> there.

While   not   all workers feel this way, this sentiment
was expressed by nine of the   older   workers   interviewed.
Other, newer workers, said they always hear the stories of
how   it   used   to   be   before   moving   into   the   modern,
mechanized,   Kenmount   Road   facility,   but   they feel the
"togetherness" that existed will not be recaptured.   For

instance, the older workers describe the mail center in downtown St. John's as overcrowded and in many ways uncomfortable, but everyone was close together doing the same work. At that time it was typical for a group of workers to take lunches together in downtown restaurants or go for a beer after work. Organized functions, supported by both union and management, were held throughout the year and, in the recall of workers, there was a general cohesiveness among employees.

A number of factors have led to a change in this social cohesiveness, among them the mid-1970s growth in the labour force and its diversification. With the rapid growth in the number of workers during the five years after 1976, a second wave of younger workers entered the post office, (the first after 1965) and, at the same time, the number of women among St. John's inside workers rapidly increased. But the move to the Kenmount Rd. processing plant and the changed working conditions also affected the union. Nineteen workers indicated they will occasionally socialize with other inside workers but usually with a small group whom they see as their "outside friends." Seven workers said they rarely or never socialize with other workers and four indicated they frequently see other workers outside work. Most workers say that the way things are in the plant, with the noise from the machinery, the increasing pressures of work and the resultant constant talk of the problems, they just

want to punch out after work and get away from any reminder of the post office, including most of their fellow workers.[3] On the other hand, workers also say that, in general, despite divisions among groups there is no open animosity in the plant.[4]

With mechanization in 1976 and a surge in hiring to meet increased mail volumes and operate the coding machinery, there were at least two major negative results that impacted upon the ability of the clerks to control the shop floor. In the battle over technological change, CUPW won the right for workers who were employed before mechanization to refuse assignment to the mechanized mail sorting sections. This was a major victory for the union in giving workers some direct control over the type of work they did and allowed manual sorters to maintain their

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[3]
Many workers do not escape their work outside even when they deliberately attempt to do so. Five workers I talked to said they often feel very uncomfortable at social occasions because they dread to be asked what they do for a living. They feel people they do not know often see them as "trouble making, overpaid workers," an image, they believe is popular among the public but which belies the reality of their employment.

[4]
As worker-management relations have deteriorated, especially since the 1987 strike, there is a sense of growing solidarity over their cause despite other divisions. For instance, following the strike, there have been attempts among some Local members to revive the defunct union social committee in order to coordinate some organized socials. What effects the strike and especially increasing attacks on work and job security may have on solidarity in the future is of critical importance but outside the bounds of the present study.

traditional work pattern. Many of the senior workers, who were accustomed to the control of work they enjoyed in preceding years, remained in manual sections and, moreover, have since retired or, as their seniority allowed, transferred to the more desirable work positions in the bargaining unit. Most of these more desirable positions were not in the plant at all but were on the front counters at various postal stations throughout the city. To a lesser extent, the various specialized work areas in the plant, such as registered mail and priority post, where one or two workers isolated from the main floor work in semi-autonomous conditions, were also preferred positions. All these jobs physically separate workers from the shop floor, generate a competitiveness among workers for such positions based on the seniority system and the internal market, and separate workers based on changed work relations (Edwards, 1979; Burawoy, 1979).

At the same time that the struggle over technological change was occurring, new workers came in to work the coding and sorting machines, and to fill out the ranks of manual sorters in city and forward sections. The result of these developments was that a once relatively homogeneous workforce was now divided not only by type and nature of work, with related differences in forms of supervision and potential for control, but also by history of the experience of control and struggle. Laidlaw and Curtis (1986), in a national historical analysis of inside

workers' struggles and the role of the state, argue that after the labour difficulties of 1965, postal management [5] began hiring large numbers of younger workers hoping they would "prove more docile" than workers on staff. Their analysis suggests that these new workers went through a period of manual work that included the experience of work control and shop floor solidarity prior to the introduction of mechanization in the mid-1970s. This experience prepared them to struggle against the new coding machinery when it was introduced.

I would argue that the creation of a relatively new, post-mechanization, workforce has had the opposite effect. Table 5-1, page 94, shows that only 12 workers employed previous to 1970 are still on staff and there is a median employment date of 1977 for all the 176 workers. [6] Moreover, the 50 most senior employees do not work in the mechanized area. Of the twenty-seven full-time coders, only four were hired previous to 1976 with the remainder

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See Chapter 2 for a summary.

6

In discussions with union members and officials it became apparent that the large number of workers who have remained on the job for greater than five years is atypical when compared to larger Canadian centers such as Toronto or Vancouver. The relative longevity of St. John's workers is, in a sense, contradictory given the quick turnover rate in many "alienating" work settings such as the car industry. Most workers who commented on this felt people stayed at work in St. John's because of the unavailability of alternative employment which could offer comparable remuneration.

employed between 1976 and 1981. As well, all 25 part-time employees have to perform coding duties and were hired after 1980.

Table 5-1:   CUPW Seniority Table as of January 1987

year hired	total	male	female	coders
pre-1970	12	12	0	0
1970-72	8	8	0	0
1973-75	51	33	18	5
1976-78	27	20	7	8
1979-81	51	38	13	13

* The majority of workers in this grouping are part-time
  employees and are required to code on an as-need basis.

[7]

Some more senior workers do work the coding desk, but not necessarily because they prefer the mechanized section. As one senior employee explained, she worked coding because she was able to use her seniority in the more "junior" section to gain a better shift than was available in the manual sections where many workers are more senior than she is.

7
  The earliest hiring date being 1974.

The three major areas of inside work: coding, city manual, and forward manual, have their unique characteristics. Through transfers, many of those who most resisted automation ended up in the forward section. Though there is no clear explanation among workers of why this is so, there is a general feeling that employees who identified with one another tended to move to a common work area.[8] In the plant today the forward section is known as the "militant" section and includes many who refuse to acknowledge management's control of the work floor. As one person in city noted, "there are people in the forward area who'll file a grievance if a supervisor even looks like they're going to say something to them."

> When I went there first the people on the machines were more aggressive and pro-union but most have transferred to other sections because they hated the mech section. The people there now are more tame, maybe because the years of tension and hostility have worn them down.

The institutionalized grievance procedure, as reflected in the previous comment, has become a primary method of resistance and expression of anti-management

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8
Whether management encouraged this as a containment strategy was not investigated but it is interesting to note that during my research the forward section, which was located between city and coding, was physically switched with the city section. Management told the union this was an efficiency measure designed to optimize the flow of mail in the plant. Union officials and a number of workers felt it was also meant to isolate the coding and forward sections from one another.

feelings. Workers in the coding section say they file fewer grievances compared to the manual sections and also view the grievance procedure less as a tactical weapon than workers in the forward section. For instance, 65 percent of respondents in the forward section said they often file grievances and many times do so to try and fight back against management incursions. Only 22 percent of coders submit grievances for this reason while 67 percent file grievances only occasionally.

A second indicator of difference in attitude among work sections is union involvement. Table 5-2 shows workers in the forward section are more involved (64 percent) in the union than either city (40 percent) or coding (11 percent) workers and that city workers are more involved than workers in the mechanized section.

Another key reflection of the attitude of coders as a group is the fact that there has been no shop steward representing their section for nearly two years. The union has repeatedly tried to get someone to take the position and has stewards from other sections doing double coverage. Coders have resisted volunteering for stewardships on the grounds of the demands and problems of the work positions or, in a few cases, the perception that a shop steward was not needed.

Divisions among older and younger workers and between work sections have real affects. While such divisions may not completely undermine the unity of the workforce, they

Table 5-2: Cross-tabulation of Work Section
by Union Involvement

Work Section	Active In Union	Not Active In Union	Total (Percent)
Forward	7	4	11 (33.3)
City	4	6	10 (30.3)
Coding	1	6	9 (27.3)
Other	3	0	3 (9.1)
Total (percent)	15 (45.5)	18 (54.5)	33 (100.0)

Statistic	Value	Approximate Significance
Phi	.53564	.02367 *1
Cramer's V	.53564	.02367 *1

*1 Pearson chi-square probability

go weaken the ability of workers as a whole to fight
management incursions. An older worker illustrated this
particularly well in explaining why he is no longer active
as a union official:

We [older workers] fought for the rights we have

in the collective agreement and they [management] are walking all over them and taking them away from us now. Most of the people working here now don't know what it is to really fight for your rights but they expect the union to protect them. They're going to learn the hard way that the collective agreement can be pulled out from under them.

5.2.1 Employment Status

Official job categories of part-time, full-time and casual worker also serve to divide the workforce on the shop floor.[9] CUPW represents both part-time and full-time workers but while full-time workers receive full benefits, part-timers are guaranteed only 20 hours a week and do not receive pension benefits. Three part-timers expressed resentment toward the union and full-time workers because of the virtual freeze on full-time positions in the local. These workers felt the union should be doing more for them in terms of opening up full-time positions. Moreover, they felt that full-time workers were taking advantage of staff shortages in taking as much overtime as they could. In fact, full-time workers have experienced an increase in available overtime in recent years. Part-time workers suggest that if full-timers would be willing to refuse some overtime the corporation would be forced to promote some of the part-timers to full-time status.

These bureaucratic job categories foster competition

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[9] Casual workers are discussed in some detail in chapter six and therefore are not dealt with here.

and resentment between sectors of the work force. Local management is making it clear that part-timers cannot expect any quick change in status and is thereby fostering a hardening of the divisions. As part-time worker respondents have pointed out, their task designations used to be fluid and varied due to the transitory nature of the positions. Recently, however, there has been a movement toward a set of more fixed tasks and rotations for part-timers. This indicates the entrenchment of the individuals' positions and at the same time more clearly separates part-time from full-time employees.

5.3 Technology and Control

The lack of tradition of struggle and shop floor control among newer workers is reinforced by the technical control of the automated section. While working at the coding desks themselves, workers are isolated both by the fact that they remain at their individual stations, intent upon the movement of each piece of mail, and by the high noise levels surrounding them. Theoretically, coders have some influence on the pace of their work, in that each letter must pass before them in single file with the machine waiting for the coder to punch the keys for the piece of mail before dropping in the next. In practice, however, two pieces of mail are visible, one above the other, to each coder at any moment and the coder enters the code for the lower piece while reading the upper piece

in preparation for coding it. By this method, a
continuous flow of mail can be maintained. Moreover,
coding standards expressed in pieces of mail per unit time
must be maintained and while individual work measurement
is illegal under the terms of the collective agreement,
each coding machine is computer monitored and controlled
so that individual statistics are readily available.[11]

Coders do agree they have very little independence or
control of their work but a common response is not to
resist but to become absorbed in it, thus also ignoring
the problems of the shop floor. While the use of
radio/tape headsets, ("walkmans") is generally popular
throughout the plant, coders, in particular, say they use
them to isolate themselves:

> When you're coding and listening to music you
> don't have to hear the talk about the job or feel
> the tension in the air. The machine is feeding
> you letters and you slip into "automatic", doing
> the work without really realizing it. That way
> you get your shift done, maintain your standard
> and don't have to worry about all the hassles.

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[10]
Machine pacing is supplemented with a high degree of
direct supervision.

[11]
Individual work measurement was a major issue in the
last CUPW - Canada Post negotiations with management
wanting it reinstated as a productivity measure. It is
also a major source of perceived "harassment." Several
workers pointed to instances where measurement protections
have been circumvented. For instance, individual manual
workers have been assigned sorting duties as the only
person in a work group. In these cases they say the
supervisor was meticulous in recording processing
statistics of the "work group."

Another worker:

> Its almost like the noise is a barrier isolating
> the section and I like this because it helps block
> the tension between coding and forward which goes
> back to when the machines first came in.

Workers in the manual sections tend to view coding
work as the most supervised, monotonous, and stressful
work in the plant. One worker in the city section called
them "a different class" in reference to what he called,
their "sit and take it" attitude. Many of the sorters
feel distinct from the rest of the plant workers and,
since the 1987 strike, identify themselves as the more
highly skilled workers, possibly contributing to increased
tensions between sections. As one worker explained:

> During the strike they couldn't just take people
> off the street to do the coding work. They could
> in forward and that hurt them because they always
> see themselves as the key workers.

This comment refers to the union reports that during
the strike, management was able to use a simplified manual
sorting technique which allowed minimally trained
replacements to do much of the sorting work. In coding,
however, replacements had not received enough training on
the machines to process at a sufficient pace or degree of
accuracy. This reflects the view among some union
officials that manual sorting is more conducive to work
control on the shop floor but mechanized sorting gives
more power to workers in a strike situation. This view,
as will be seen in Chapter six, is problematic.

While working the other major piece of mechanized equipment, the letter sorting machine, coders do not have to sit at a desk entering postal codes but must feed the machine coded mail at one end and remove sorted mail from the long line of destination slots at the other. When the mail flow is heavy, the LSM maintains a high degree of discipline upon the operators. Failure to keep the sorting slots cleared of mail brings the whole machine to a halt and an alarm sounds. When things are particularly hectic, coders will sometimes intentionally let a slot overfill to get a break, but with increased supervision and discipline this is a less common occurrence.

In the non-mechanized sections, the limited work control that exists is being undercut by increased supervision and speed-up. More important in the long term, however, is that discretion and autonomy is being further minimized through job deskilling based on such changes as a new "color-coding" technology. One of the common sentiments expressed by manual workers concerning the control of their work was that they always knew the various procedures and the best way to get things done. If, for instance, particular containers of mail needed to be processed to keep them on schedule workers selected them over others for first processing. In late 1987, however, the post office introduced a system of color coding the mail which was aimed at improving the efficiency of movement through the system. Incoming mail

receives a particular color code indicating the day it
arrives and, depending on the type of mail, the maximum
time it should be in the plant. The system is national so
that, whether local or out-of-province, the particular
color tag a container of mail has should determine the
priority for processing it. In practice, many workers are
angered by the system and complain that it is too complex
and they receive no training in it. More importantly,
however, the knowledge of routings and types of mail is no
longer of importance in the execution of manual work.
Sorters are now compelled by formal rules, enforced by
monitoring, to process according to color code. This
simplification reduces management dependence on its
skilled workers and facilitates the movement of mail by
inexperienced or untrained labour such as casual workers.

As a whole, manual sorters do express a feeling of
control or independence in their work more often than
coders, though no group of workers expresses it to a high
degree. For instance, 56 percent of respondents from the
forward section felt they had very little control over
their work while only 18 percent of the same group said
they had a great deal of control. Among coders, 78
percent said they had very little control and no
respondent in this group felt they had a great deal of
control. In addition, sorters report, almost unanimously,
that any independence or control in the job is slipping
away through such innovations as color coding.

5.4 Supervision, Speed-up and Work Measurement

Work place conflict is now largely shaped by the demands of a conservative government which, through its requirements for a deficit free Postal Corporation, is encouraging management to succeed in its attempts to raise the productivity of the Corporation. Changes in management practices, which reflect this pressure, range from increased monitoring of breaks, telephone and bathroom usage to the enforcement of rigid policies on security, sick leave, supervision and speed-up.

Having pushed back the frontier of control on the shop floor, the stage has been set for management to assert its prerogative and attempt to consolidate control of the shop floor. Management may not have any "legitimacy" in the eyes of workers, but during this particular conjuncture of the development of the firm, of technology, and of struggle, anything but the simplest acquiescence of workers based on the cash nexus, contra Cressey and MacInnes (1981), may be all that management requires. For instance, Gallie (1978) found that despite the high levels of conflict and withdrawal of consent among French workers in his study of continuous process technology and worker militance, the French firm was able to remain as economically productive as the British comparison company which had a much more stable labour-management relationship. In the case of Canada Post, the pressure to eliminate the deficit and become a

profit generating business may be the overriding concern of management, compelling them to restructure work and work relations and disregard concerns with employee consent.

Workers talk of attempts to speed up their work through the combined effects of increased supervision and increased and enforced productivity quotas. Generally, they do not usually find the occasional increase in the pace of manual sorting work too fast. However, there is consensus that the increased supervision often allows them little breathing space and often when one task is finished a supervisor is always there to assign another. Several workers suggested that the speed-ups do not affect all sorters equally, especially those who are more than capable of maintaining increased rates. But it does cause problems within work groups because as all workers attest, each manual sorter has their own pace. Individual work measurement is not allowed under the collective agreement but group output can be monitored. Therefore, slower sorters come under increased pressure to step up their output or other workers are pressured to step up their rate to assist the group. Nearly seventy-three percent of inside workers described the supervision as becoming very

close and restrictive during the last five years.   In

general, most of these workers view the supervision as

attempts at intimidation.   Many workers say they try to

escape the pressure by simply going to the bathroom or

using the telephone, though the one telephone that was on

the shop floor and available to workers was removed to a

locked office.   Workers say there is a new pattern in

which supervisors now go through the section making notes

and measurements every fifteen minutes and as often as not

pick somebody out for particular attention and

continuously monitor them.

> Its not that you can't usually keep up with the
> pace of sorting. Once you're trained in and at it
> a while it becomes a routine - though everyone has
> their own pace and its difficult to change that.
> But you might have one off day in a week when you
> aren't feeling well or just not yourself and then
> they're down on you because suddenly you aren't
> working.

Another worker:

> It used to be you could sort for a while and then

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Supervision, speed-up and the like are not consistent.
All workers say it can vary from supervisor to supervisor
and section to section and especially from shift to shift.
Night workers and those who have come off the night shift
report lowered levels of supervision and production
expectations during the night. Some workers say this is
because there are no upper management people in the
building during this time while others attribute it to the
nature of working late nights. Two night workers I talked
with moved to that shift simply because they wanted to
escape the pressure and hostility they felt on the shop
floor during day and evening shifts.

take a breather, look around and say something to
your buddy. Now they don't want you talking and
they not only count how many times you've been to
the bathroom but how long you're in there. In
forward they have even tried going man-woman-man-
woman in the sorting cases to keep regular friends
apart.[13]

A third worker:

What's so unfair about all this supervision now is
that it doesn't matter how good you've been
working - what matters is how you're working at
the moment. I had a run-in with a supervisor last
week because I had been working the whole shift
and got everything done then walked over and
started talking to my buddy. I was there about a
minute at most and this supervisor comes running
over getting angry. I shouted back at him, "Where
have you been for the last three hours when I was
working," and that was it - he tells me he's
writing up a letter of discipline.

Among a minority of workers the attempts at speed-up
have little or no effect. It is seen as an attempt to
push employees beyond a reasonable rate of output and
individuals and groups simply refuse to work faster than
their established pace. A handful of manual workers
expressed the view that if left alone the work would get
done more efficiently as most supervisors do not know as
much as the general workers about what needs to be done.
These workers said they simply slow down if they feel they
are being harassed.

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[13]
Though unintended, this is an interesting comment
on relations among male and female workers in the
plant. The observation that "regular friends" are of
the same sex reflects the potential for hierarchical
divisions along gender lines.

The uneven effects of attempts at speed-up are evident in workers' attitudes toward the inception of productivity boards on which each shift's or section's output is posted. Within some shifts and sections the boards serve their purpose as a competitive spur with workers attempting to outdo previous shifts. Rates for such groups often top 100 percent of set standards. Among other workers, particularly in the forward section, the boards are objects of derision or are seen as demeaning with their posted comments such as "great shift" or "thanks..." being offered as praise for productivity. Such methods anger many workers who see the corporation as continually tightening up the plant and treading on workers' rights in the process.

Most workers see the increased surveillance by management as challenging their notion of fairness. Most supervision has come to be seen as harassment, outside the bounds of the formal terms of the collective agreement and the informal rules of the shop floor. As one worker put it:

> There's no independence in this work now — they
> are constantly checking on you and timing you even
> though they are not supposed to. You don't feel
> you are being tolerated like a human being. No
> one likes being watched that much - there's less
> time for talking, less time for going to the
> bathroom, less time for anything but working hard.
> Its like one floor super said to us: "We're run
> like a company now and its going to get worse."

5.5 Management And Control

Consolidation of managerial control of the shop floor has, in large part, been a result of mechanization, an internal job market and the hiring and assignment pattern, all of which are affected by collective bargaining rights won by CUPW. The latter, bureaucratic features of the firm belong to the employment relationship and historically have been functional at Canada Post as "non-coercive" control. However, neither these features nor the bureaucratic rules of the work place are now serving to integrate workers into the firm or to routinize work and disembody control. Rather, management, through an explicit adherence to the formal regulations, is "working to rule" and turning previously established patterns of shop floor relations against workers. Management is able to force through its objectives by using various regulations to its maximum advantage. In doing so the potentially coercive nature of bureaucratic organization is made clear. This is illustrated in two particular strategies postal management is said to be utilizing to further its efficiency goals.

5.5.1 "They Smile and Say Grieve It"

The continued reduction of worker control on the mail floor has led them, within the context of institutionalized conflict, to rely heavily on the grievance procedure as a means of gaining protection.

Workers in the plant have come to view the grievance procedure as a weapon against management. When management steps up pressure on workers, an increase in the number of grievances provides a means to fight back, if only because of the time it takes management and workers to do the administrative work. As one shop steward noted, he files at least four grievances a week and often many more. Grievances cover such things as supervisor harassment, failure to observe the terms of the collective agreement in work assignment, discipline, health and safety, and overtime. Among inside workers, nearly half said they regularly file grievances as a means of fighting management incursions. Most of these workers say that the grievance procedure is the "only defense" they have against management pressure, a further reflection of loss of shop floor power. A CUPW local executive member argued that the union feels compelled to bring to grievance any complaint brought to shop stewards because it is their experience that to ignore a situation or to work it out informally, encourages management to keep repeating the offense. This reflects the degree of mistrust and hostility between management and the workforce. A growing phenomenon on the shop floor, however, has been the perception among workers and the union of an increased willingness by management to force grievances to be filed.

Plant management is seen to consistently ignore the terms of the collective agreement and to let the workers

and union grieve if they wish. Both CUPW and LCUC executive members point to this pattern in recent years, with the unions being put in the precarious position of potentially having to pay large sums for the grievances. Both unions say there is a conscious policy on the part of Canada Post to force grievances. This serves at least two purposes. Fourteen workers and the union reported a "smile and grieve it" pattern in which supervisors test the limits of the collective agreement in such areas as the direction of work, assignment of tasks, discipline, sick leave, and health and safety. When workers complain directly the supervisor simply "smiles and says 'grieve it'". Both workers and union executive members perceive this as a deliberate strategy on the part of management to harass workers and assert management's shop floor prerogative.

The apparent strategy of grievance pressure has also placed an enormous financial burden on CUPW. With the move to coverage under the Canadian Labour Code in 1981, regulations covering grievance procedures required that both parties split the cost of any grievances that reach the arbitration stage. Because of the financial burden of the arbitrations which CUPW has been involved in, they recorded their first budget deficit in 1988/89, contrary to their constitution.

5.5.2 Inside Workers and Sick Leave Harassment

One of the chief problems workers identify is management's sick leave monitoring program. The program was initiated as part of a National Attendance Strategy in 1983 and workers agree that since the mid-1980s there has been a steady escalation in enforcement to the point that two-thirds of the workers I interviewed perceived it as outright harassment of employees aimed at cutting the company's costs through a reduction in absenteeism and at providing workers with a lesson on management's authority. One-third of the workers reported having been directly affected by the program in a way they felt was harassment.

The monitoring program was devised to reduce absenteeism in the Corporation. In 1984 CUPW workers nationally were absent sixteen days on average, LCUC workers were absent seventeen days. This contrasts with about 7.5 days for workers in transportation, utilities and communications sectors, slightly less than six days in the commercial sector, 8.5 days for public administration employees and six days for all other sections of the economy (Marchment, et.al., 1985: 30). In the Atlantic region, which includes St. John's, CUPW workers were absent about 14 days per year and LCUC workers about 15 compared to an industrial average for the region of between six and seven days (Marchment, et.al.,1985: 32). Workers feel the program is especially unjust in that there is either an implicit presumption that absenteeism

levels have no basis in the actual health conditions of employees or an attempt by management to ignore health problems and push employees beyond an acceptable limit. [14]

The sick leave monitoring program involves an escalating series of management reactions to employee absenteeism. For instance, after an absence the time clock card of an employee may be removed to the supervisor's office where it must be claimed by the worker. At an informal level, that person may then be counseled by the supervisor. Subsequent stages of the program can involve 90-day monitoring of sick leave, involvement of a Corporation appointed physician, and, ultimately, dismissal under clause 10.1 of the collective agreement covering inability to perform duties.

Most workers agree that the monitoring program is causing undue pressure on the total workforce. Most also agree that the program is working because many people are becoming intimidated. National statistics for 1986-87 confirm this in that the Corporate absentee rate had dropped to its lowest point in a decade. Workers are showing up for work when they should not be there for health reasons because they do not want to face the possible repercussions that they have seen other workers

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The study of stress among Edmonton postal workers by Northcott and Lowe (1986) lends strong support to the argument that the high absentee levels among all postal workers is the result of the deleterious working conditions at Canada Post.

15

go through.   Typical among workers affected is the
employee who reported being placed on a monitoring program
for taking 11.5 days in the previous year despite having
several months of accumulated sick leave.

> I've got a couple of months built up over the
> years and last year I had 11.5 days off. They sent
> me a letter and brought me into a meeting and
> accused me of abusing. Then they sent me a letter
> putting me on 90 day monitoring with disciplinary
> action if I missed any more days.

Another worker:

> It's always in the back of your mind - you always
> think twice about taking a day off even if you
> feel a little sick. If you have a day off one
> week then you worry next week that you'll be sick
> again and end up getting a letter on your file.
> Its harassment in the sense that I was honestly
> injured in a sports accident last year and they
> started counselling me on it. It's like you can't
> have a life outside working for the post office.

A third worker:

> My friend has been so uptight about this thing
> that she had to have a week off for illness last

15

    In fact, the federal arbitrator determining the
settlement of the 1987 CUPW strike defended the claims of
workers that management's tactics amounted to harassment.
A ruling was made that workers were not to be "importuned"
(persistently challenged) for the legitimate use of sick
leave. The collective agreement allows ten days per year
casual sick leave. Since the arbitration, however, the
problem has reportedly worsened. The union is attempting
shop floor unification through one of its popular button
campaigns. The buttons read "Don't Importune Me" and
while it may appear to outsiders to be trivial, the
campaign, like other informal acts of resistance, can act
to bolster solidarity.

year and she took it as annual leave instead. She was afraid of getting a letter on her file and getting called in and hassled.

Inside workers' sense of justice is further offended by what they see as an inconsistency in the application of the monitoring program. Virtually all workers interviewed said that the application of the sick leave program, in particular, and the application of rules and disciplinary practices, in general, are completely inconsistent. Individual workers are often selected for attention by management or supervisors and are subjected to rigorous enforcement of regulations. Thus workers who, over a period of time, have come to participate in informal interpretations of work rules covering such things as break times, clocking in or out, or use of casual leave days, are suddenly confronted with warnings or discipline. In some instances, this tightening up serves to intimidate an employee while in other cases it may provoke a worker into breaking rules which then legitimizes disciplinary action.

The perceived constant trampling on the collective agreement since the early 1980s and the sense among workers that management is wrenching control from them at all costs have led to a broad sense of unfairness among workers in the plant. As a whole, inside workers identify these problems as being aggravated by the move to Crown corporation status and the election of a Progressive Conservative federal government with the subsequent

installment of Don Landers as corporate president. There is no idealized past for workers at the post office but a clear change in management attitude is evident to them since the early 1980s.

5.6 How The Workers View Management

The analysis thus far reflects the changing conditions and experience of work. However, the seeming lack of shop floor resistance among many workers does not mean there is any acceptance of these conditions or of management's program. The character of the worker-management relationship, as expressed in the attitude of workers to management, can be made more concrete by examining specific dimensions. These include the perception of management's interests, the view of cooperation between workers and management, and the desire for promotion.

Twenty-six workers, or 83 percent of those interviewed in CUPW, expressed the opinion that management's main concern was productivity and turning a profit and that this was the primary reason for the perceived assault on workers. Moreover, the majority of these workers felt that this management aim had not been of paramount importance in the work relationship until the state employer established the post office as a Crown corporation and called for the removal of the deficit. Prior to this, most workers say, there could be a sense of

reasonableness between management and workers and there was some motivation to work:

> This used to be a place where you could take some pride in your work. They (management) used to be at least a little bit concerned about you or at least we were in a position to make them. We felt that what really mattered was that we were providing a service. Now there's no reason to get the job done. Everyone in here is just a number now and all they want you for is to keep working, keep the productivity up and the fact that you're a human being doesn't matter. In fact all that matters is their mech section. That's their baby and they are going to make it work and the rest of us have to keep up.

Desire for promotion also reflects workers' attitude toward the employment relationship and management's position. Of all inside workers, sixteen indicated they would not seek promotion because of the "hassles" involved in the job. These "hassles" were defined as being caught between the contradictory demands and pressures of management and workers, and having to lose seniority and the benefits it entails. Ten workers did not wish promotion for ideological reasons. They would not involve themselves in the actions of management against workers. Only seven said they would accept promotion. Four of these latter workers said they would accept promotion only if they were free of present management pressures and could use their experience to improve conditions.

The final dimension, degree of cooperation between management and workers, reflects the general attitude of workers that the relationship between themselves and the

Corporation is one of mutual antagonism. Virtually all workers see themselves in direct opposition to management and Canada Post.

5.7 Conclusion

Resistance in the work place is not extinct in the St. John's plant, but with the atomization of the workforce through technological change it has become extremely individualized and therefore containable. Growing Corporate demands for productivity and efficiency improvements have led management to take advantage of having the upper hand on the shop floor. In large part this has been done by turning the bureaucratic aspects of worker-management relations and work organization against the workforce.

Management has both a sweet and a sour approach to individual workers. In some instances, workers who refuse to toe the line manage to intimidate supervisors and are therefore given more leeway or are indulged. This reinforces frictions among workers as many employees resent the fact that some individuals "don't put up with any crap but often get away with it." More commonly talked about, however, are the attempts to provoke recalcitrant workers through constant surveillance and exact adherence to work rules. Workers who fail to submit to management's program are said to be singled out often for discipline as a containment measure and as an example to everyone else.

As speed-up continues through close supervision, altering and tightening of rules, and changes in job design, individuals will face a breaking point where the pace of the machinery and the conditions of the work environment are no longer tolerated without challenge. But the critical point here is whether that breakthrough becomes collective or remains at the individual level. The relative powerlessness of workers in the plant at present undermines their ability to resist collectively. But as the analysis in the next chapter on privatization and job security will suggest, the unique nature of the post office as a state agency facilitates the development of particular attitudes and expressions of resistance outside the confines of the work place itself which could act as a catalyst for the emergence of more collective action.

Chapter 6

JOB SECURITY AND THE EMPLOYMENT

RELATIONSHIP: RESISTANCE AS

POLITICAL STRUGGLE

In this chapter I analyze two key features of the employment relationship - job security and casualization of the workforce. These occur in the context of further technological change and attempts by the Corporation to privatize various aspects of postal service. I argue that resistance to management incursions among inside workers can extend beyond the place of production to the political and public sphere. The political action or behavior of inside workers can be interpreted as acts of resistance, aimed at altering shop floor conditions, but of overriding importance, preserving the terms of the employment relationship and the existence of jobs themselves. I suggest that this form of resistance, though it may not be unique to, is more likely to develop in, the state employment sector and is a reflection, in part, of the decreasing shop floor power of inside workers.

Inside workers' behavior toward the ruling party is partly a reflection of the political ideology of the CUPW. The union acts as a "lens" among workers in the St. John's

mail plant focussing their attention on government as employer. This is made salient by the work situation and the direct links between worker and state. While workers understand the distancing of the post office from government with the move to Crown Corporation status, they fully appreciate that policy decisions affecting them directly are shaped by the government. This is made even clearer to workers by the changes in corporate policy and in top management personnel following the election of different ruling parties, and by the actions of the state in unilaterally legislating an end to the 1987 CUPW strike.

This chapter is also an attempt to extend the notion of resistance and the frontier of control beyond the shop floor. I argue that management attempts to undermine the job security protections of inside workers are not only aimed at enabling cuts in the labour force to be made but also at creating an increased dependence of workers on the Corporation and thus strengthening management's control through the employment relationship.

6.1 Job Security

The erosion of the job security protections in CUPW's collective agreement, through various privatization schemes and technological innovations will mean a "threat" of across the board job losses. If such changes come to pass, most workers believe that major lay-offs will ensue.

Employment vulnerability will be used as a lever to force rollbacks in other areas of the collective agreement covering such issues as productivity, casualization and labour flexibility. Thus, job security protections are seen as the key to preserving the overall employment relationship.

CUPW job-security protections are extensive and certainly stand in the way of the labour "flexibility" which management requires to realize its corporate goals (Canada Post Corporation, 1987: 10). Among the key protections are a no-layoff clause for workers on staff prior to 1985. The clause, appendix "T" of the collective agreement, provides for no lay-off and no forced relocation of employees where the changes are within the control of Canada Post. Where labour surpluses are beyond the control of the Corporation, employees may be required to relocate to another post only if it is within forty kilometers of the original place of employment. Other important clauses cover the introduction of technological change (Article 29), provisions for employment and retraining in case of such change, a cap on the number of part-time employees nationally, and controls on the use of casuals. As one CUPW worker explained:

> We have a lot of protection right now but we know the corporation is not going to stop until that changes. We are just waiting to hear what the

arbitration says about the 40 kilometer clause
because if that goes this place will be
gutted...We don't know what's going to happen down
the road but we all figure that one way or another
they are going to eventually get what they want.
The letter carriers don't have the security we do,
and I figure that's where we are headed, if not in
this contract then sooner or later.

6.2 Privatization And Job Security

The dynamics involved in pressure for changes to the
employment relationship involve, in large part,
technological change and privatization on the one hand,
and potential job loss and a trend toward casualization on
the other. The retail side of postal services has been
the main target of attempts at privatization. For inside
workers, this threatens the approximately 4,000 employees
with wicket duties. The elimination of these positions
has a number of indirect, but important impacts as well.
Wicket positions are considered the best jobs in CUPW
locals and the primary means of escaping mail processing
work in the postal plants. Tightening up of potential
movement through the elimination of wicket positions also
means that fewer part-time workers can move into full-time
jobs. It also reduces the opportunity for night workers
to obtain day shift positions. This process has already

1
This is a reference to the 1987 strike over job
security and the arbitration process which was put
into place by a unilateral decision of the government
as part of back-to-work legislation.

had its effects on workers in St. John's, where 27
positions out of 200 have been lost from the bargaining
unit between 1982 and 1986 (CUPW, 1987b). With the forty
kilometer clause in effect, even localized redeployment
has not been as important a phenomenon as it has in some
mainland centers,[2] simply because of the relatively few
urban settlements in Newfoundland. However, there has been
forced movement from Mt. Pearl facilities to St. John's
which are under different union locals. This movement has
begun to illustrate the problems redeployment can create
as it has meant the loss of better shifts and work
assignments. For virtually all workers, this is typical
of the way they foresee the future of postal employment:

> What they want is a whole lot fewer of us in here
> working a whole lot harder for less pay and
> working when they want us to, doing what they want
> us to.

The November 1986 Corporate Plan Review shows that
734 urban post offices across Canada are to be closed as
privatization proceeds (Hannant, 1988: 4). Twenty of
these offices were to be closed in 1987/88, 87 in 1988/89,
108 in 1989/90, 98 in 1990/91, 88 in 1991/92, 153 in
1992/93, 120 in 1993/94, 30 in 1994/95 and 30 in 1995/96.

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[2] For example, in Montreal technological change is to
result in the removal of all mechanized and manual
sortation from one of the areas' smaller plants because
the work is to be concentrated in a single larger
facility.

In 1987, there were over 1900 privately contracted subpost
offices nationwide and nine in St. John's, but in the 1985
collective agreement the Corporation has been prohibited
from expanding the number of "subs". Instead, Canada Post
has increased the amount of subcontracted work done in
already existing sub-offices. In early 1987 postal
management began to extend hours of service in subpost
offices and this coincided with a reduction of hours in
many postal stations, including the eventual elimination
of Saturday retail services. The union estimates that the
larger subpost offices alone have been responsible for the
demise of 600-1,000 positions. In St. John's, the Harvey
Rd. Postal Station was closed in 1986 and in 1988 the
Water St. East office was closed. The public now uses
privately operated subpost offices in the areas. In St.
John's as well, "super-sub" (as they are labelled) status
is to be extended to a key sub-post office in the central,
Churchill Park, business district. The extended services
of this office will include lock-box facilities and
priority post services.

In March 1987, the first postal "franchise" opened at
a Shoppers Drug Mart in Willowdale, Ontario. The
franchise was to take over the business of a Corporation
postal station located in the same mall and, like subpost
offices, would not be manned by Corporation employees
unionized under CUPW (CUPW, 1987b: 9). The CUPW brought,
and is bringing, each franchise opening to grievance. In

September 1987, the Canada Labour Relations Board ruled
that in the case of the Willowdale franchise, the owner
was required to honour the union contracts and pay
employees union wages. The board ruled that Canada Post
had sold part of its business by establishing the
franchise and thereby gave the union the ability to claim
successor rights on the new employees. However, the
ruling applied to the particular franchise only, so
individual arbitration will be required for each grievance
over new franchises.

Despite the union success in fighting the franchise
program, the Corporation has pressed on with its plans.
Canada Post states that its retail counter objective is to
"...develop an efficient, modernized, fully-rationalized
network of retail outlets..." over a ten year period.
This is to be achieved through a number of programs
including turning over retail postal outlets to the
private sector "wherever possible" and, in rural areas, to
take advantage of natural opportunities, such as
retirements or lease expiries to establish alternate
retail and other services (Canada Post Corporation, 1987:
18). While St. John's workers were expecting franchises
in this area, it was only subsequent to worker interviews
for this study that the St. John's union Local was
officially informed that the city's first franchised
postal outlet was to open in 1989. Local officials say
there is a national pattern of a Post Office closure when

a franchise opens and there is concern that the Water St. West Station, located in the old Post Office building in downtown St. John's will be phased out of existence. As with other retail service reductions, this would mean a further loss of counter positions and more movement back into the mail processing plant.

6.3 Expanded Technological Change and Job Security

The introduction of the "National Sortation Strategy" in 1986 involves a major reorganization of the work process to maximize the use of mechanized processing and reduce the need for manual sorting of mail. The strategy involves the concentration of mail processing in major mechanized plants to the point that machine processed mail destined for dependent offices will be sorted down to letter carrier walks by the LSM in the major plant (CUPW, 1987b: 11). For instance, mail destined for letter carrier walks throughout Newfoundland is now sorted to the specific letter carrier at the Kenmount Rd. facility in St. John's. Previously, mail routed to particular communities would be manually sorted to delivery routes at the local Post Office.

It is now technically possible for the St. John's plant to be bypassed as well, with machine processed mail being handled at a regional plant in Halifax. The Halifax center, which possesses new optical character reader technology, is being used to process some mail for other

Atlantic Canada urban centers at present, including those as distant as Moncton and St. John, New Brunswick. Opinion among St. John's workers and the union is that due to problems of transportation to and from the Island a complete phase-out of the Kenmount Rd. plant is unlikely but major cuts in smaller provincial centers are probable as more of the detailed processing functions take place in St. John's.

This new organizational strategy is said by the Corporation to form the basis for the most comprehensive set of changes to mail processing since mechanization was introduced. The key to these changes is the trend toward centralization as it is within this context that enhanced use of technology is possible.

Soon after the beginning of its automation program the Post Office brought in optical character readers (OCRs) which were able to read properly printed postal codes and prepare envelopes for machine sorting without the use of human coders. In the spring of 1937, the Corporation began testing a new generation of optical character readers which have the potential to read several lines of an address as well as a postal code and cross-check the two. The goal is to establish a high-speed OCR-LSM complex with the ability to scan typed, printed or handwritten addresses and codes. This technology displaces coding functions as well as the clearing and feeding functions of the letter sorting

machine. Under this new system, a piece of mail is scanned and sorted down to its exact postal walk breakdown without human intervention. This will drastically reduce the number of coders and manual sorters presently needed since the machine, with its enhanced reading capability, will be able to handle much of the mail which cannot be processed using the current mechanized methods (CUPW, 1987b: 12).

Pre-Coding of envelopes is another strategy the Corporation has recently introduced which poses a potential threat to jobs. The Pre-Code program is intended to vastly increase the capacity of the optical character readers. Under this system, either the machine readable bar code is pre-printed on return envelopes, as in the case of bill payments and the like, or is penciled in on a sticker or grid on the outside of any envelope. With the pre-code, OCRs do not have to read a printed postal code but can directly scan the machine readable bar code equivalent, thus reducing the number of errors in coded mail and increasing the amount of mail which OCRs can handle.

Other strategies introduced to minimize worker handling of mail include incentives to private business to prepare their mail to Canada Post machine processing specifications. For instance, when a general first class rate increase of 13 cents was announced in 1982, two special corporate first class rates were also set: a 24

cent rate for 20,000 identical items meeting set standards and a 21 cent rate for 1,000 identical items pre-sorted by the company. This program has since been expanded with a variety of incentives for mail which by-passes labour intensive sorting. Incentives have also been developed for second and third class mail (particularly for large volumes of mail which have been pre-sorted by the use of computerized mailing lists which print labels according to postal code). While CUPW has had little success in ascertaining management's estimates of jobs lost due to the inception of first class incentives, the union was informed that second and third class incentives would eliminate 723 CUPW jobs between 1982-85 and an undetermined number since that time (CUPW, 1987b: 13-16).

6.4 Casualization Of Jobs And The Employment Relationship

There are divergent analyses of the privatization process at Canada Post. It appears that, at present, privatization of retail services is the main goal of the corporation but divestment of mail processing functions cannot be ruled out. For instance, the final sorting of parcels in the market around Oshawa, Bowmanville and Port Hope, Ontario has now been contracted out (CUPW, 1988). Moreover, the 1985 government-appointed Marchement committee, which investigated the productivity of Canada Post, suggested a number of options which included both full and partial privatization. A likely scenario is that

full privatization will not occur because of the economic
problems of servicing rural areas, but more importantly
due to resistance from the private sector itself. On the
one hand, private business pressure has been in large part
responsible for limiting Canada Post's involvement in
profitable communication areas such as electronic mail and
courier service. CUPW argues that business pressure on
government prevented a planned expansion into electronic
mail processing in 1985 when a proposal was on the table
to establish twenty-five electronic mail outlets across
the country. On the other hand, the business community is
unlikely to want to face the possibility of being held to
ransom by a monopolistic or oligopolistic private service
(Gandall, 1987). Whichever level of privatization the
corporation pursues, an integral part of the process is
the reduction of the permanent, full-time labour force
through the increasing substitution of casual and
part-time workers within a decreasing number of full-time
positions.

The use of casual workers by the post office has
historically been one of the outstanding focal points for
industrial conflict. With the demands from the
corporation for an increasingly flexible labour force this
issue has gained an increased importance for inside
workers. Casuals are called in on an as-need basis when
volumes of mail justify extra workers. Prior to the
arbitrated settlement of the 1987-88 dispute between CUPW

and Canada Post, the collective agreement required that management attempt to offer overtime to all eligible CUPW workers, whether on the shop floor for a shift or not, before calling in casuals. Workers on shift would receive pay at time-and-a-half while others would receive double-time. Two-thirds of the workers I talked with believed that management was unfairly bringing in casuals through the use of such tactics as stockpiling mail until the use of casuals could be justified. The union Local recognizes this as a problem for its members and has submitted a series of grievances. While most workers blame management for the use of casuals they also express disgruntlement with the union for not doing something about it, particularly since they assume that many casuals were part of the "scab" labour force used by the Post Office in the 1987 strike:

> What pisses us off is that the corporation wants to make us all casual workers so they can bring us in to work and send us home when they feel like it - according to the volumes (of mail). We see more and more casuals in the plant now and nothing gets done about it. They keep building up mail, even when we know it could be cleared, until they decide to bring in the casuals and some of them were the ones that took our jobs last year. You can tell sometimes because when a new one goes on the coding machine for the first time he doesn't even have to ask how to turn it on and set it up even though the machinery they learn on is different than the stuff on the floor.

CUPW argues that the excessive use of casual labour and overtime at Canada Post has resulted in reduced opportunities for regular employment and higher labour

costs. During 1986, 3.9 million casual and overtime hours were worked in the national CUPW bargaining unit. This represented a potential of 2,382 regular full-time positions. During this same period there was an actual reduction in staffing of some 600 full-time CUPW positions (CUPW, 1987b: 19).

Since the conclusion of worker interviews the Cosette arbitration decision on the collective agreement ruled that management need only offer overtime to workers on shift at the time of a decision to bring in casuals. This, according to the union, has resulted in a surge in the use of casuals as the cost factor is now greatly reduced. Off-shift workers no longer have to be called in at double-overtime. Moreover, individual casual workers are now being called in on Saturdays when, for the first time, there is no regular shift working. The union feels this is an experiment in bringing in casuals as an independent work force.

Over the years, there has been an ongoing debate within the union and between the union and Canada Post, over the representation of casual workers. Some senior workers indicated that if the Corporation gains the increased use of casuals, as it turns out they have, and if the union incorporates the casual work force, then they will likely give up their full-time jobs and become casuals. These are workers who are financially secure or able to take early retirement, or who have become fed-up

with the work situation in the plant. Their seniority will allow them virtually first call to work while, on the other hand, they will have the flexibility to choose when they want to work or not. For junior and part-time workers, this strategy is an encouragement for the casualization of the work force which undermines their own financial and job security.

The process of undermining full-time positions makes use of part-time work as well. Nationally, between 1984 and 1986, the number of full-time positions in CUPW dropped 3.1 per cent while the number of part-time positions increased by 12.1 per cent.[3] The national pattern is reproduced in St. John's where the number of full-time positions is virtually frozen. Hence, as full-timers leave jobs the proportion of part-time workers creeps upward. This trend is occurring despite contract stipulations to the contrary. Management's conscious utilization of this strategy is reflected in its roll-back proposals in the last set of negotiations which included elimination of the obligation to maximize use of full-time employees, elimination of the cap on the number of part-time employees, and elimination of the maximum and

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[3] This still represented an overall decrease in staff as the ratio of full-timers to part-timers remains quite high.

[4]

minimum hours of part-timers.   This set of contract
stripping proposals is expected to remain a part of the
Corporate negotiating plan, and union officials argue that
the constant whittling away of the bargaining unit will
eventually provide management with the levers it needs to
rush through its agenda.

6.5 Workers And Political Struggle

With the "frontier of control" on the shop floor
being pushed back by management, employees find themselves
relatively powerless to defend the integrity of their jobs
at this level.   Casualization of their positions and
outright job loss loom as the issues workers are most
concerned with.   A growing sense of job insecurity is
present among all workers though to a lesser degree among
older employees. Though the seniority system mediates and
tends to individualize the problem of job security, there
is a sense of long term doubt even among the more senior
workers. As one of them expressed it:

> I have about half the Local ahead of me [on the
> seniority list] so for the time being I'm okay.
> But in the long run I'm not so sure anymore.   I

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[4]
The union won a victory, if only temporary, when these
proposals were not accepted in the Cosette arbitration
that ended the 1988 contract dispute. In fact the, cap on
part-time positions was lowered from 4,500 to 4,200 which
meant the corporation had too many part-time workers on
staff and was supposed to convert about 150 to full-time
positions.

may be around in a few years but if they are
allowed to keep cutting and doing it on our backs
I really don't think I'll want to be here.

For reasons explained in the previous chapter, there
is an increased powerlessness among workers on the shop
floor. This powerlessness compounds the problem for
workers trying to defend the terms of the employment
relationship defined in the collective agreement. The
sense of powerlessness among workers, reinforced by the
perceived oppressive action of the state in legislating an
end to the 1987 strike, provides the basis upon which the
union has been able to focus workers' attention upon the
government-as-employer and begin to press home the need
for political action.

Inside workers clearly understand that, while they
may be directly employed by a Crown Corporation, it is the
government of the day that determines their employment
relationship and conditions. Every worker I talked with
was clear that the government had a major say in the
postal corporation's policies concerning workers. In fact,
80 percent of them viewed the elected government as the
determining factor in post office policies which directly
impact on their jobs. There is a general feeling that
when the post office was declared a Crown Corporation the
Liberal government of the day and its appointed Corporate
president were willing, for whatever reasons, to adopt a
more cooperative approach to the postal workers and union.
Workers contrast this more co-operative approach of the

previous Liberal regime, with the direction the
Corporation has taken since the 1984 election of a
Progressive Conservative government and the subsequent
appointment of a new corporate president.

It was clear that a number of workers felt that the
back to work legislation of October 1987 was, at least
partly, welcomed. The inside workers had gone on strike
well aware that back to work legislation was a strong
possibility and some members expressed the feeling that
without the legislation the dispute was going to become
protracted and increasingly bitter, particularly because
of the use of scab labour. At the same time, these and
other workers were angry with the Mulroney government for
unilaterally undermining a remaining lever against
management incursions:

> We know who called the shots during the strike
> because even before it started the minister had
> the legislation in his back pocket just waiting
> for the right moment. The government runs the
> post office and they were able to pull the rug out
> from under us just like that. Now we sit in at
> work waiting for someone else [Andre Cosette, the
> federally appointed arbitrator] to decide whether
> we're going to have jobs tomorrow and we can't
> seem to do much about it. Everyone in there knows
> that if the arbitration goes against our job
> security the Corporation will have half of us out
> the door or moved God knows where on the mainland.

The relationship between inside postal workers and
the state is illustrated by the reported changes in
political allegiance. Twenty-one (64%) workers reported
supporting, through their federal vote, the New Democratic

party, one the Liberal party, four no party, and six were ambiguous but anti-Progressive Conservative. No inside worker said they would vote for a Progressive Conservative M.P. though a number reported they had in the previous election. What is most important for the argument however, is that of the twenty-one NDP supporters, 13 shifted their vote to that party during the last five years. Nearly all of these workers felt that their decision was directly, though not necessarily totally, related to their job. Most workers felt it was, first, the potential loss of job security "at the hands of a P.C. government" which moved them toward the N.D.P., and second, the changed conditions of work itself. As one explained:

> I voted for Mulroney the first time around but I'll never vote P.C. again. There's no doubt in my mind or with the people I'm working with that Landers [Postal Corporation president appointed about one year after P.C. government was formed], was br ught in by the government to do a job on us. T ey'd like to get rid of us and the union.

> The ha rassment and the chance that a lot of us won't l e working for the post office down the road filter down to the fact that I may be working for some cc rporation management but we all know who pulls t e strings.

Johnst n (1980) conceptualizes the state agency as a sphere of wc rk and struggle distinct from the private capital sect r in at least two ways. The public sphere is characterize by the presence of an overtly political influence nd the absence of the pure capitalist

characteristics of exchange-value production and the market imperative. The level of conflict and labour control is seen as no different in public or private sectors but the expression of struggle in the two sectors is significantly different in that, in the pure capitalist sector labour struggle is economic while in the pure public sector industrial struggle is political.

There is, however, an extensive "spectrum" of enterprise organizations which lie between these pure forms. This leaves ambiguous the effect of this particular dynamic on the form of action certain workers might be expected to undertake. In the case of Canada Post, the move to Crown Corporation status and the legislated requirement for non-deficit operations may be interpreted as a shift in the enterprise toward the private sector end of Johnston's spectrum. But the perception among workers and union that, despite the arms-length nature of the relationship between Crown Corporation and government, the political agenda of a neo-conservative ruling party is being played out politicizes the employment relationship.

Johnston argues that in the purely public sphere the questions of control of work and working conditions cannot be contested in the context of the capitalist firm which is dependent on the continued circulation of capital for its existence. Rather, to achieve power to defend their interests workers must challenge questions of public

policy, development, finance and management. That is, they must generate political power and use it as a strategic lever.

Workers' perception of the "assault" on their jobs is given shape by activities of the national union. CUPW has moved its struggle over job security into the public and political sphere, involving workers in several campaigns which underline the importance of resistance at this level. The most important program the union has undertaken is its own $2 million "Struggle '88" anti-privatization campaign. It also participated in the the Canadian Labour Congress' past attempt to target selected "anti-labour" Members of Parliament for defeat in the 1988 federal election, and supports the "Rural Dignity" movement aimed at preserving rural post offices in the face of actual and planned closures.

"Struggle '88" involved workers in a number of public, political activities including boycott and petition campaigns against sub-post offices, supported by information picketing at targeted outlets; involvement of other labour and support groups in "adopting" a sub-post office for regular picketing; various sticker, pamphlet and button campaigns aimed at increasing member and public awareness of the issue; and political education programs within the union analyzing the problems confronting workers.

The union analyses, disseminated to workers in

regular communiques, illustrates the extent of the union education efforts. For instance, a series of bulletins leading up to the 1988 Federal election examined the position of all three political parties on issues of importance to postal workers. Analysis of the privatization issue pointed out that since coming to power the PC government of Brian Mulroney had sold twelve Crown Corporations to

> "friends in the private sector... often at bargain basement prices, without any consideration for the environment, for safety standards, for levels of service or for the waste of taxpayers money" (CUPW, 1988).

The Liberals, it is suggested, were the group who first began pushing privatization policies when they held power. On the other hand, the New Democrats

> oppose privatization and believe that public policy can help create an economy with high employment, low inflation and advanced public services (CUPW, 1988).

In the St. John's area, the tactics devised for the "Struggle '88" program were put into effect with varied degrees of success, including the closing of one subpost office in the area. Although in many instances the impact of the program has been very successful at the regional and national level, the union has noted that the degree of inside worker mobilization in St. John's was not as great as in many other centers. There are a number of possible explanations for this, including the likely impact of the

high level of alienation and worker fragmentation on the shop floor. Intimidation may also have played a key role in a smaller plant, such as the Kenmount Rd. facility where workers are more financially tied to their post office jobs.[5] Since 1987, all employees of Canada Post have received official notices that they will be disciplined, and possibly fired, if they engage in activities considered damaging to the corporation. This includes public criticism of policies, programs and corporate employees. While CUPW has successfully grieved this tactic, the effect is not lost on workers. During a union organized information picket of a subpost office in the Churchill Park area of St. John's, which I attended, members of Canada Post's Security and Investigations division arrived to observe the demonstration. Workers on the picket said they would be expecting retaliation in the form of disciplinary letters or suspensions, though none were forthcoming.

6.6 Conclusion

If St. John's inside workers have developed a relatively united political consciousness, it must also be said that this does not necessarily reflect a broader

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[5]
In many of the larger, mainland processing centers, job turnover is extremely high, largely due to the relatively greater availability of unskilled and semiskilled jobs in the regions.

sense of class consciousness. While a number of workers expressed concern for the condition of working people in general, particularly in relation to what were construed as anti-worker policies of the government, the main focus of formal political behavior was the narrower issue of their own work and work place. Resentment toward the government-as-employer and a feeling of inability or powerlessness to control what is happening play a major role in the emergence of this political attitude.

Moreover, there is no indication of workers being taken up by the political aspects of struggle. No workers interviewed, except for a particularly active and committed union leader, indicated that they had any involvement in political activities such as campaign support and the like. While the respondents in this study expressed anger toward the government, there was also resignation to their situation. Several workers made it clear that they actually felt their vote in an election would be ineffectual as it would "be lost among all the other votes of people who aren't in our situation and probably think all that's happening is a good thing anyway."

The individualistic feature of the vote underlies the point that for workers in a particular industrial struggle. "voting" as an act of resistance, cannot succeed unless it becomes linked to broader problems involving large masses of the segmented and divided working

population. Even then, the ideological dimensions of power must be surmounted to alter the status quo. As such, voting in itself may help to diffuse any movement toward a remobilization of militancy among St. John's workers (Wells, 1984: 482). Even as the pressures on workers grow, as a result of continued attempts at undermining job security and work conditions through privatization and casualization, voting is still seen as ineffectual. As postal management attempts to tighten virtually all aspects of shop floor control, workers have little compensation except for the existence of jobs themselves. The growing squeeze on the terms of the employment relationship undermines even this dimension and may therefore serve as the focal point for a renewed united front among the workforce.

Chapter 7

COUNTERPOINT: THE LETTER CARRIERS

Since the mid-1960s, inside workers at the post
office have gained a reputation as some of the most
"militant" workers in the private and state sectors. On
the one hand, the labour process of these workers has been
under constant pressure, primarily due to efforts at
technological change. The struggles of inside workers to
maintain the integrity of their work has, in large part,
contributed to this perception of militancy. On the other
hand, the process of technological change, understood in
its broad sense, has enabled postal management to
undermine the ability of workers to resist incursions into
work organization.

The letter carriers, who are the second largest group
of workers at Canada Post, are an apparent contrast to
CUPW members. Since an initial period of visible struggle
along with the inside workers, during the rise of the
unions in the mid-1960s, the carriers have, at least until
recently, been able to maintain a generally stable labour
process characterized by an absence of overt struggle over
control. In fact, during the nineteen years prior to the
1987 strike, the LCUC has staged only three days of

rotating strikes. This is not to suggest that day to day conflict has been absent from the relationship between letter carriers and management but that, unlike the inside workers, there has been no attempt by management to launch a comprehensive assault on the frontier of control.

I argue in this chapter that the design of letter carrier work, shaped by struggle up to the early 1970s, has contributed to a certain stability in the worker-management relationship. Unlike inside workers and others engaged in factory-like work, where labour is "collective," the letter carriers' work is individualized and semi-autonomous. By this I mean that carriers experience their work as self-directed with a great deal of independence. This can be interpreted in terms of the working out of the problem of control in a situation where "factory" methods do not apply.

The nature of the work process among inside workers and letter carriers is inherently distinct and this establishes the basis for unique sets of working conditions. It is not surprising to find major differences in work characteristics, like job satisfaction, between such groups. However, these divergent work forms mediate the strategies which management may utilize in achieving productivity or other goals through restructuring. The different work organization also conditions the reactions of workers to attempted changes in their work. The positive experience

of work among letter carriers is a result of the establishment of a more "favorable" set of control features rooted in the nature of the design of work. This in turn has facilitated, among the letter carriers, the development of consent to the labour process and management's role which is demonstrated by the changes in workers' attitudes and experiences since Canada Post has begun to seek large scale and comprehensive efficiency improvements in the mail delivery sector through the restructuring of work.

7.1 The Letter Carriers And Control

The unique nature of the work of the letter carrier has made it resistant to intensification of work effort through supervision or technological change. [1] Moreover, the design of the job has made it of much less importance than inside work for management to assert coercive control over the labour force.

In the early 1970s, with the growth of a more labour conscious unionism that had resulted in a number of pressures for wage and work improvements, the inability of management to closely supervise the carriers led to the introduction of a highly structured work measurement

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[1] Although the recent introduction of the supermailbox should be understood as a new technology displacing the work of the carrier in much the same way as mechanization would.

system. On paper, the carrier's job is an incredible example of time and motion study in the scientific management vein and is worth elaborating on. Under the formal definitions of the system (LCUC Collective Agreement) an "element" is a logical segment of a job cycle that is easily timed (e.g. a stride) with easily distinguished beginnings and endings, which can be compared with similar elements in other jobs in order to construct predetermined times for an operation. "Elemental time values" are predetermined times established through engineering methods to allocate the proper time necessary to perform one "element." Finally, a "standard" is the sum total of all elements and allowances necessary for an average employee to complete a particular operation.

Each carrier's route is structured to total the 480 minutes of elemental time values making up an eight hour work day. Periodic route evaluations and restructuring occur to make adjustments to routes which have increased or decreased work loads. Thus the number of routes can increase or decrease.

This system of work organization has, since its beginning, given management an effective means of control through a strategy of semi-autonomous work relations. In practice, the highly rule ordered carrier job has been based on a mutually recognized breaking of these rules. This practice is predicated on the "finite" nature of each

carrier's daily work. When all assigned mail is delivered
the carrier is able to book-off and is still paid for the
full day since, using the time allocation system, he has
performed the agreed equivalent of a full day's work.
This particular aspect of the job design is virtually
unique among Canada Post employees in being linked to an
incentive pay scheme (Marchment, et.al, 1985: 40). While
measured walks are assigned on the assumption that workers
follow the time and motion rules precisely, it is common
for carriers to take available shortcuts on their walks:
criss-crossing streets, which is technically not allowed
nor accounted for in a route structure; using lawns
instead of walkways, as may be informally worked out
between a carrier and his customers over time; and taking
whatever measures the carrier desires on a particular day
to shorten the route. This also involves the practice of
combining "AM and PM sessions." The day's mail for a
carrier is stored in security boxes strategically located
along his route. When a carrier is in a particular hurry
he may push his pace and deliver all or part of his
afternoon allotment of mail during the morning. Among
carriers interviewed, there was unanimity that these are
accepted practices founded on informal understandings
about the rules of work.

This system has consistently allowed workers to
finish their day's work with time to spare, particularly

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in the summer when walking conditions are much easier.
During the winter, of course, working conditions are
generally hazardous, shortened work hours are much rarer,
and personal overtime becomes a regular occurrence. This
informal incentive system is epitomized by the
"roadrunners" in the St. John's Local. "Roadrunners" are
those carriers who fellow workers identify as having an
overriding compulsion to finish work as quickly as
possible. While most carriers recognize a little of this
compulsion in themselves, they also realize that it is
often the roadrunners who develop chronic injuries from
the job and end up leaving their positions on disability
or some other negotiated arrangement. As one carrier
explains:

> There's a bit of roadrunner in everyone - it's
> just the nature of the work. Since you know you
> have only so much mail to do and then you're
> finished for the day. But for some it only shows
> when they have something particular to do and they
> want to get off early. The real roadrunners are
> the guys who have a one track mind that says to
> get the mail bag emptied no matter what. Some of
> these guys will jump hedges and practically run on
> their route to finish early. The more sensible
> guys try to work at an even pace all the time and
> if they finish early, especially in the summer,
> well that's fine but if they don't it doesn't bug
> them.

Throughout the 1970s this particular work arrangement

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Personal walk overtime in the summer is rare though
overtime is still available from doing route work for
absentee carriers.

formed the basis for a stable relationship between management and letter carriers. There has, of course, been limited conflict with management efforts to alter work allocations in their favour and union attempts to strengthen their position. However, the informally negotiated system has generated, as one union official put it, "a general complacency among the membership with regard to our relationship with management." Industrial struggle over working conditions has remained, in large part, at the formal, national union and management levels. According to the local executive, both LCUC and the Post Office have spent millions of dollars on engineering studies in an institutionalized conflict to establish appropriate time values for each component of a carrier's duties.

Other aspects of the nature of the carriers' work also serve as a means of labour control. While the work is semi-autonomous, its individualized nature means that even though direct monitoring does not necessarily occur, supervisors are well aware of the performance of each worker because there is a finite amount of mail to deliver each day. There is, according to carriers, sporadic surveillance by supervisors who may spot check a worker on their route, but this usually occurs when there have been foul-ups such as customer complaints about service. One carrier commented that:

As long as you are doing your job you aren't

hassled and most of us want to get the job done anyway. But its very obvious to a supervisor who is and who isn't working because, after all, its just you on your route with a certain amount of mail to take care of.

A third aspect of the nature of the work which has contributed to management's maintenance of a status quo is based on the fact that carriers have traditionally experienced their work in a positive way. Unlike the situation of inside workers, there have been relatively few incursions by management to undermine their job satisfaction. They have, therefore, maintained a strong sense of the job as a "positive service to the public", with whom they come in contact each day. This dynamic should not be underestimated from the viewpoint of the potential for control by management. Virtually all carriers interviewed differentiated their work on the basis of in-office and on the street time. The two to two-and-one-half hours spent in the office each day preparing mail for delivery and performing administrative tasks was generally seen as the more "onerous" part of the job. Generally there were few complaints about supervision,[3] , and some in-office time is valued in that it provides the opportunity to socialize with fellow workers. But for carriers, with the exception of periods

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[3] As might be expected, carriers whose office is in the Kenmount Rd. mail plant express a greater problem with supervision than those in the independent office in the downtown area of the city.

of inclement weather, the general drive is to get the mail ready and get on the street, not simply to get the work over more quickly, but because this is the enjoyable part of the job. As two carriers put it:

> Once you're on the street no one bothers you. You are expected to have a certain amount of responsibility and handle things yourself. There are few jobs or none, not in Newfoundland anyway, where you can have those things without much education.

> We see ourselves as providing a service to the public and we take pride in that... What I like most about the work is getting out and meeting people. After you've been on a route for a while you get to know the customers and the ones to avoid. For the most part though, you can stop and have a chat with whoever you're delivering mail to because they appreciate you and for us it makes the work like a duty you want to do.

This sense of duty, noted by others (e.g. Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986) writing on inside workers in the pre-automation era, has persisted among letter carriers because of the relative stability of the labour force. In St. John's at least, the letter carriers group has remained an extremely close-knit, male union. In contrast, the inside labour force, split by internal work divisions as a result of automation, has become a heterogeneous union based on the management sponsored influx of women, part-time and casual workers into a once male-dominated unit. At the time interviews were conducted for this study, there was only one female letter carrier on staff and while women have occasionally worked

in the St. John's carrier division in the past, there has been no alteration of the traditional social organization of the bargaining unit (Table 7-1).

Table 7-1:   LCUC Seniority Table as of April 1987

year hired	total	male	female
1959-1963	3	3	0
1964-1968	5	5	0
1969-1973	19	19	0
1974-1978	39	39	0
1979-1983	7	7	0
1984-1988	8	6	1
Total	80	79	1

In fact, there is evidence that there is a great deal of "auto-selection" for letter carrier work based on the perceived conditions and physical prerequisites for the job. Many carriers began postal employment with brief stints as inside workers but quickly transferred to outside work (at a time when this could still be done) because of the appeal of the type of outdoor labour involved and a rejection of the inside workers' conditions.   Inside workers went to work at the post office almost unanimously because of the wages and security.   While carriers were as likely to say wages and security were undeniably important, the chance to have

such benefits within the context of an outdoor, physically active job, with some autonomy, was what attracted them to the work:

> At the time the money and security of the post office was an important thing but for me the letter carrier job was particularly appealing because it was steady work but outdoors. Its a job where you can stay in shape and enjoy being out and around. While a lot of people might envy the freedom we have there's not many who could hack the work year round – lugging forty pounds of mail around means you have to be in pretty good shape and build-up your strength.

Over 90 per cent of the carriers interviewed considered the St. John's local an extremely cohesive group with a high degree of socialization outside work. As well, there is a very high level of union involvement among interviewed workers with over 60 per cent having served in some official capacity and all but two workers regularly attending union functions. This cohesiveness may have served the letter carriers well in the 1987 strike in which there was a great sense of solidarity. On the other hand, there is some suggestion in this close knit male group, that relationships reinforce a patriarchal system which, in the past has served the needs of the Corporation. Unfortunately, interviews for this study did not focus in this area so I discuss the following more on incidental and suggestive data. Cockburn (1986) provides some useful insight in her analysis of the print trades in Britain. She argues that the historically, all-male, print unions were structured

along hierarchical, patriarchal lines that reinforced self-policing, authoritarian relationships. Moreover, the exclusively male area of work provided a basis, along with skill, for the establishment of a self-reinforcing elite. Among letter carriers this sense has reinforced an identification with both the union and the job.

> There is one woman working here now but there are
> quite a few up on the mainland. It doesn't matter
> to me that a woman is doing the work - anyone
> capable should be allowed to. But the one thing
> that we've always had, I guess because its always
> been men doing the work, is a certain atmosphere
> like we all belong to the same club or something.
> You come in for the morning and its a bunch of
> guys there together who have known each other for
> years and everyone carries on like you'd expect...
> We do a lot of things together on a regular basis,
> parties and a lot of organized sports and it gives
> the guys a sense of identity.

The data for this study does not allow an adequate exploration of this dimension. However, there is a history of ex-military servicemen in the Post Office ranks and the establishment of a regimented order based on it (Laidlaw and Curtis, 1986; Davidson and Deverell, 1978). It is not surprising that the preservation of an exclusively male unit would help maintain an attachment to work through reinforcing the patriarchal relationships of the military and the aura of "masculinity" reflected in the two previous quotations.

During the past several years, as management has attempted productivity improvements at all levels of Canada Post, there has been a heightened attention given

to the work of the letter carriers. As with the inside
workers, the chief attack on carriers has been aimed at
loosening the employment relationship through undermining
job security and, to a much lesser degree than the inside
workers, casualizing the work force. But there have also
been attempts, if comparatively limited, to increase
productivity levels through intensification of effort and
discipline. For instance, carriers, like the inside
workers, have come under the pressure of the Corporation's
"attendance management program." The program has proven
successful for management in increasing efficiency through
a reduction in absenteeism. However, along with other
efforts to alter the traditional relationship with
carriers this perceived attack jeopardizes the stability
of the relationship, expressed in workers' recognition of
management's legitimacy. Interestingly, while a number of
carriers perceived the pressures to curb absenteeism as
harassment, which none-the-less was effective, a grievance
arbitration in the spring of 1988 which ruled that
management's tactics were illegal, was followed, according
to workers, by a relenting in the approach taken by
management. This is in juxtaposition to the situation of
inside workers. Following the Cosette contract
arbitration, which included a ruling against management's
tactics, the union Local reported no change at all in
management's approach. This difference may be the result
of a conscious management strategy to deal with two groups

of workers with divergent degrees of integration into the Corporation and radically different relationships to management.

7.2 Job Security

The work of letter carriers has been resistant to the introduction of new technologies aimed at intensifying effort or displacing labour. But the inception of the urban group mailbox,[4] constitutes a potential long term threat to job security. While the introduction and expansion in the use of the now familiar super mailbox will not have an immediate impact on the security of letter carriers, a number of workers and the union view it with concern as a problem down the road. Postal policy, at present, is to preserve carrier service in areas already receiving it but to provide the neighborhood group boxes in all new areas (Canada Post Corporation, 1987). There is concern, however, that as the supermailbox service expands and becomes a normal part of the public's service expectation,[5] Canada Post may begin to push backward into areas now covered by carrier delivery. But,

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[4] The "super mailbox," is essentially an extension and elaboration of the rural mailbox service, instituted in 1951, consisting of the green coloured group lock boxes commonly seen on the roadside of rural areas.

[5] During the next three years, according to Postal Corporation projections, 500,000 points of call will be added to the national service.

in general, most workers view the introduction of urban group boxes not so much as an attack on their personal security but as a long range curtailment of positions. This particular technological change is not perceived as an assault on jobs nearly so much as the recent attempts by management to alter work rules to produce cuts in the number of routes.

Management, particularly during the negotiations leading to the 1987 LCUC national strike, has attempted to cut down the number of carrier walks by eliminating time allocations for travel to and from carrier depots at the lunch break;[6] by having carriers use their own vehicles instead of slower public transportation in travelling to their routes; and by making cuts in paid wash-up time. This has resulted in a "work to rule" campaign with union efforts to force management to enforce its own rules. The union has begun to police its members strictly to follow their routes to the letter and has been pressing management to follow its rules against such practices as combining morning and afternoon sessions. The union's argument is that increasing mail volumes will not show-up in walk restructurings because the "roadrunner" attitude among members ensures the mail gets done within the regular work day. There is a fear that management's

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Lunches, it was proposed, would be taken at convenient locations along delivery routes.

encouragement of the informal ignoring of work rules will provide ammunition with which to pressure the union for detrimental changes in route structures.

The removal of lunchtime travel, public transit time, and cuts in wash-up time from the time allocations of workers would, according to the union, have meant the potential loss of 2,000 jobs nationally and three or more locally. Moreover, the average carrier would have thirty more points of call per day added to his route.

> I see this job as becoming obsolete a little bit at a time. I won't lose my own job because I have some seniority but there will be fewer and fewer of us down the road.

> It used to be you felt you always had a job in here. Now wages are no longer an issue at all — its jobs.

Of equal concern to a number of carriers was the sense that their work was slowly going to become more and more like that of the inside workers whose jobs they see as the antithesis of theirs in nature. One of the major sources of attachment to their work is the fact, pointed out previously, that there is a finite amount of mail to move each day and postal policy has always been to clear it on a daily basis. On normal volume days that might mean finishing up early if a carrier wished, while on particularly heavy days it meant putting in overtime. This practice is wrapped-up in both the work incentive of the carrier's job and also in the sense of duty to the job.

> We know each day there's a certain amount of mail to deliver. We prepare it and get it out and knowing that this amount is the day's work and doing it gives you a sense of completeness and satisfaction. That, I think is the key to everything about this job — you have a sense of having done something each day...With the clerks [inside workers] its totally different — it doesn't matter how much work they do in a day because there's always more there. They may as well be sorting the same letter over and over in terms of the satisfaction you can get out of their work.

Since productivity pressures have begun penetrating carrier work, some employees see a trend developing toward just this type of devaluation. For instance, occasions are reported where, with the tightening of available overtime, a supervisor will instruct a carrier to take higher priority mail on a high volume day and leave other mails stockpiled for next day delivery. The fear is that stepped-up pressures to curtail route restructurings and increase workloads,[7] will lead to day-to-day speed-up to insure the circulation of a "continuous flow" of mail. As this becomes a motivating factor in management's control of labour, there will likely be a further undermining of the stable labour relationship that had existed. Unlike inside workers, it is the sense of being on the edge of a potential upheaval in their labour process that leaves carriers with a growing sense of unease and insecurity.

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[7] As indicated by the Postal Corporation Five-Year Plan (1987) and the 1987 LCUC contract conflict.

7.3 Workers, Management and the State

The June 1987 strike by letter carriers looms in
their consciousness to a much greater degree than that of
the inside workers as reflected in interviews with both
groups of workers. Both strikes involved the use of scab
labour, a particular focus of anger among all workers, not
only because it was seen as the usurping of jobs, but
because workers viewed the corporation's use of such a
labour force as a premeditated picket line provocation.
But for letter carriers it seems that the strike created a
dramatic fracture in their long history of labour peace
and apparent shop floor consent based on an equilibrium in
the worker-management relationship. Because of the
carriers' sense of "disillusionment" with, and antagonism
toward, postal management, discussions with them about
more general changes in the relationship were difficult.
But perhaps the clearest indication of the impact of the
"rationalization" of postal work on the relationship
between letter carriers and management lies in their
ambivalence toward their present situation.

Unlike inside workers who, in a sense, have been
"under assault" since the early 1970s, carriers as a whole
use as a reference point the perceived "status quo" of
just a few years ago. In a real way there is an
"idealized past" for carriers to relate to. Over half the
carriers I talked with felt that until the last several
years, with the initiation of a serious deficit cutting

drive, but most particularly since the 1987 strike, management and letter carriers were able to cooperate at both the union and shop floor levels. If there was conflict, there was also a great deal of perceived common interest, particularly because of the understanding that there was a shared goal in providing a public service. This cooperation was seen to be a reflection of the nature of the union — its willingness to be "flexible and pragmatic" in dealing with management - as much or more than due to the Corporation. Moreover, most of the carriers interviewed were, unlike inside workers, quite ambiguous about their understanding of their changing relationship with management.

As with the inside workers, the majority of carriers felt that there had developed a distinct opposition between themselves and postal management, (though not supervisors). However, the identification of an opposition of interests centered on the animosity of the 1987 strike. While it is clear that the strike is a reflection of the emerging struggle between carriers and management, what is more significant is the underlying sentiment of most carriers I talked with. There was a clear desire among the majority of workers to see a movement back to the previous, more stable, relationship of a few years ago. With some notable exceptions, carriers wanted to avoid further confrontation with management in the uncertain hope that work relations might

"settle back down" to the historical pattern. As one
worker commented:

> We do not want to do anything that might
> antagonize management. The union is doing the
> looking out for us and that has always been the
> way that things went smoothly. Most of us don't
> have any time for management now since the strike
> but if we can get back to doing our work without a
> lot of hassles from above then we'll be content.

It is apparent that letter carriers have not yet come
under the same level of assault as inside workers, though
there have, during the past five years, been significant
attempts to "rationalize" their labour and jobs. The
impact of this on carriers' understanding of their
relationship to the state, is, as with the inside workers,
mediated by and reflected in the ideological leanings of
the union and its level of involvement in the political
education of workers.

The LCUC participates formally in, and supports,
pro-labour political struggles and the New Democratic
Party, but unlike the CUPW, this is in large part
expressed through its participation in the Canadian Labour
Congress rather than its own internally organized
programs. As one union official described the LCUC:

> Unlike the CUPW which is a political union, our
> union is service-oriented. Our real concerns are
> for our members and we don't get directly involved
> in a lot of the political things the CUPW does.
> Our political voice is the Canadian Labour
> Congress which we provide a lot of support for.

This orientation is illustrated directly by the

nature of information distributed to the membership. As
noted previously, the CUPW provides continuous analysis of
all information sent to its Locals and the union perceives
this to be a critical point in its functioning. On the
other hand, virtually all LCUC information to members
comes in the form of uninterpreted and unanalyzed
technical bulletins which do not fulfill an educative
function.

In the light of these divergences, it is not
surprising that the carriers' political understanding is,
as a whole, less unified and less based on an antagonistic
stance toward the ruling party. Of all carriers
interviewed five have adopted a pro-NDP stance within the
past five years, four are longterm NDP supporters, two are
Progressive Conservative party supporters, two support the
Liberal party, six do not support any party and expressed
no sense of who they would prefer to take power, and only
one carrier was ambiguous in terms of party support but
consciously anti-PC. While the letter carriers do view
the government as having the dominant influence in the
policies of Canada Post they, as a whole, have not yet
been put in a position or condition of struggle in which a
connection between degradation of work and the
state-as-employer becomes salient.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

I have attempted, in this thesis, to undertake an
analysis that has both an empirical and theoretical
aspect. On the first score, I wanted to document the
changing work experience of a group of state employees
under the hand of a widely disseminated ideology of
economic necessity. Public sector workers have been
generally viewed as among the more secure and well paid
Canadian workers, buffered from "the market" by strong
unions and the employment policies of the state. It has
become clear, however, that if that ever was the case,
recent developments in the economic and political spheres
have been swinging the balance of class forces away from
workers. Underlying this have been growing pressures on
the state to alter legal forms such as union and
collective bargaining legislation and certain welfare
programs (Panitch, 1987: 136) which have emerged from
class accommodation and struggle.

The focus on production relations in the literature
has meant that insufficient attention is given to factors
in the broader economy and in the role of the state in
underwriting the changes in work that are taking place at

Canada Post. Within the context of the general economy, the changes in work at Canada Post reflect a trend in Canada, and in the western economies generally, toward an increasing degree of casual, part-time and shift work. This is aimed at the generation of a more "flexible" labour force designed to meet the needs of productivity and changing market conditions.

> The much noted growth in part-time jobs and the employment of casual labour is not just a matter of workers ta..ing what they can get in the context of current labour market conditions. It is at the same time a matter of capital's own search for flexibility, and hence reflects the way demand for labour is being restructured (Panitch, 1987: 137).

Not only has the state been central in implementing the policies now affecting work in the post office but the government has increasingly broadened its powers of intervention in collective bargaining in both public and private sectors (Panitch and Swartz, 1988: 15). In the case of the CUPW, workers were legislated back to work during strikes in 1978 and 1987, the same year that Crown Corporation railway workers were legislated back during a strike over the same types of security and work rules issues over which inside workers struck. As well, Crown agency workers, along with other public employees, were legally barred from striking, for two years beginning in June 1982 with the implementation of Bill C-124. Moreover, the back to work legislation of 1987 affects inside workers until mid-1989, during which period any

union official breaking the terms of the legislation will
be barred not only from postal employment for five years
but from holding any union office for the same time. This
sort of policy has prompted Panitch and Swartz (1988) to
observe that while the Trudeau Liberal government's
anti-labour policies were primarily aimed at countering
wage militancy during a period of double-digit inflation,
the Mulroney government's main concern has been to "attune
the state more directly, and much more fundamentally, to
the broader business agenda of the 1980s." In terms of
labour rights,

> the Mulroney Government directed the attack, above
> all, against those workers under federal
> jurisdiction who were most immediately affected by
> privatization and deregulation, and more
> generally, by the capitalist restructuring of
> industry in both public and private corporations
> (Panitch and Swartz, 1988: 68).

8.1 Technological Change and Work Place Organization

The theoretical context of this work centered on
technological change, the problem of managerial control
and conflict in the labour process. There are several
points the data in this study support. They suggest that
technological change does not occur in either a social
vacuum or in a deterministic fashion, but is shaped by a
number of factors including worker resistance and the
priorities of accumulation. More generally, the data
support the conclusion that, in the complexity of the
labour process at the level of the firm and within the

particular period of capital accumulation, the managerial approach to guaranteeing "necessary" levels of labour productivity is more varied and complex than Braverman allowed for and is strongly shaped by conflict and resistance.

In the first part of this thesis, outlining the national and historical context of workers and work in the Canadian post office, I suggested that both inside workers and letter carriers were, prior to the 1970s, on an equal footing in terms of several critical factors. This is not to suggest that both sets of workers had harmonious relations with each other or were homogenous. There were major differences and points of conflict between the two groups even prior to the 1960s (Davidson and Deverell, 1978). But there is evidence to suggest that, historically, both groups had a high degree of attachment to their work and the workplace. This was based not only on a common sense of duty and service in their jobs but also on a strong workplace culture and a stable, manual labour process.

During the mid-1960s period of growing white collar and public service unionism in Canada, both groups of workers were at the national forefront of the labour movement. There was a general militance and shared goals in terms of improvements in wages and working conditions. With the onset of formal collective bargaining and a more institutionalized labour relations program, the worker

groups radically diverged. Within the framework of opportunities created by the nature of the work itself and given the availability of alternative job designs, struggles with the employer generated differing forms and strategies of control.

The letter carriers, involved in a struggle over the notion of a "fair days work" became enmeshed in a highly prescribed, bureaucratically ordered job design which was based on Taylorist principles of time and motion engineering. The working out of conflict between inside workers and management led to a far different strategy. A program of intensive technological change led to radically redesigned jobs which were increasingly deskilled and alienating. This contributed to a reorganized work place. Moreover, these changes took place in an increasingly bureaucratically ordered corporate environment.

The change from manual to mechanized mail processing in Canada during the 1970s had a profound impact on workers in the post office and led to a number of major national strikes during that period. But this move to automation, which generated such degrees of overt resistance among the workforce, also laid the groundwork for the massive reorganization of labour taking place at Canada Post today. This reorganization of work has been based on the change to Crown Corporation status with the Post Office model and more closely to the private sector, and also the demand for financial self-sufficiency in

postal operations. Included in the "rationalization" process are strategies for privatization of services which have traditionally been performed by postal workers as well as increased efficiency levels in the remaining work through further automation and tightening of worker performance levels.

In the second part of the thesis, I examined inside workers and letter carriers in St. John's as a comparative study of "the working out" of the broader strokes painted in chapters three and four. The process of technological change begun in the 1970s, in the context of a bureaucratized work place, was a major factor in undermining the solidarity of inside workers in St. John's and thus the frontier of control on the shop floor was pushed back in management's favor. In general, my respondents demonstrated a high degree of alienation from their work. There was a sense of an increasing loss of control over the labour process and a social distancing of workers from each other. But this was not just a simple and direct outcome of the presence of a particular form of technology. Rather, it was determined by the struggle over the implementation of the technology within the context of management's goal for the change - increased productivity and efficiency. For instance, the resistance of inside workers to working mechanized equipment led management to bring in new groups of workers, both full-time and part-time. These workers were concentrated

in mechanized areas. Older workers remained in manual sorting areas or transferred out of the processing plant through the seniority system, or to peripheral areas where working conditions were superior.

With the consolidation of the first wave of technological change the social organization of work was drastically altered as was the division of labour. Many jobs were deskilled through simplification and the whittling away of worker discretion over task performance. The outcome was a situation in which management was less constrained by the power of workers to push their authority on the shop floor and, because of the process of mechanization, management was less dependent on workers' consent in the work place. Thus, with the renewed rationalization of the 1980s, workers have not been in a position to fight back as a solidary body. Management has been able, with a great deal of success, to force through a number of measures aimed at speeding up work and increasing the productivity of the workforce.

The methods utilized by management in this process have been largely coercive and are based on a strict adherence to the letter of the rules of work. Rules that were once informally renegotiated (such as bathroom breaks, talking or clocking out early) are now turned against employees. Attempts to follow old informal patterns are often countered with increased supervision and surveillance and disciplinary action.

Within the context of the employment relationship, job security is seen as a key issue in Canada Post's attempts to privatize retail service, to contract out operations work, and to implement a new wave of technological change. All these attempts are aimed at replacing much of the full-time inside labour force with much more flexible, casual and part-time workers. This process offers management a new lever to force concessions from workers relative to the employment relationship and to shop floor issues concerning work rules and productivity. The conflict over the employment relationship itself offers a potentially new rallying point for inside workers to re-establish their solidarity. To this point, however, the powerlessness of workers arising from the shop floor and from the anti-labour policies of the state has only translated into an individualized antagonism toward the government of the day, which many workers perceive as their employer and therefore responsible for current work place policies. The employment relationship dimension is critical at this time in the labour struggle at Canada Post. The outcome of conflict over privatization and casualization is not yet decided but it will largely determine the future content and nature of the labour process at the Crown corporation.

The impact on labour of technological change and coercive control strategies is made clearer by comparing disparate labour processes. The St. John's letter

carriers have maintained a fairly constant job design and, with no major attempts at reorganization or technical innovation in the labour process, have had a radically different relationship to the Corporation than the inside workers over the past fifteen years. Through a long period of struggle in the early 1970s a major set of stable work rules was established for carriers. As a result, these workers became, at least in a relative sense, much more integrated into the Canada Post hierarchy with conflict t..ding to center around the content and form of the rules themselves. As long as economic conditions permitted, the informal negotiation of these work rules allowed the persistence of a largely consent based labour process. But the limits to this arrangement are quickly being exceeded as management has launched a process of rationalizing letter carrier work and jobs on a scale similar to the longer term attack on inside workers.

8.2 Consent and Coercion

I have indicated that in comparing inside workers and letter carriers there appears to be a difference in the groups in terms of integration into the Corporation and consensus based management-labour relationships. But there is clear evidence to suggest that this is changing.

Burawoy (1979), the most notable labour process theorist working on the problem of consent, deals with the concept at two levels. The first involves the day to day

interactions of workers and management on the shop floor. Workers' participation in the informal organization, and games, within production, not the wage relationship or external factors, is said to generate a coordination of interests between management and labour. Burawoy's arguments can be criticized empirically for ignoring evidence that shop floor games are part of the attempt by workers to create space for themselves and are thus counterproductive for management (Nichols and Beynon, 1977; Thompson and Bennon, 1984). Burawoy cán also be criticized for his view of the "relative autonomy" of the work place. This allows him to ignore links between what happens in the work place and factors such as the cash nexus or the imported characteristics of workers. However, my data is also pertinent to Burawoy's second level of analysis, the generation of consent through the bureaucratic structures of the firm.

The most important part of Burawoy's argument centers on the integration of the worker into the firm through the development of internal labour markets (for the regulation of promotion, transfers, wage levels and the like) and internal states (collective bargaining and grievance procedures). Workers are contained by the processes of these institutional features and within these constraints Burawoy suggests that the choices workers make also generate consent for the capitalist labour process.

Within the labour process, the basis of consent

lies in the organization of activities as though they presented the workers with real choices, however, narrowly confined those choices might be. It is participation in choosing that generates consent (Burawoy, 1979: 27).

However, there is a limit to this argument which reveals that underlying the notion of consent there is no unity of interests but, in fact, an antagonism of interests. In approaching the labour process using a problematic of consent, Burawoy and others (e.g. Cressey and MacInnes, 1981) are "over-compensating" for the neglect of this phenomena in previous work. But in doing so, the fact that workers do understand their situation is not given recognition. Making the best of a bad job, given that it is the only job you are likely to get, does not imply an acceptance of working conditions. While consent, or at least some minimal level of acquiescence, may exist, it is clear that when the need arises, management is well able to use such devices as productivity "as sticks to beat workers with, and in certain circumstances to good effect" (Nichols, 1986: 520).

Among inside workers at Canada Post, there is evidence in my data to suggest that, as workers have come to participate in the seniority system and other mechanisms, the boundaries within which conflict may occur have been set. But under particular pressures from management, workers come up against the boundaries of these devices. For instance, my respondents were

beginning to become fully aware that the grievance procedure could not serve their needs and was in fact being used against them. Similarly, the seniority system, as a device to contain conflict and generate consent, was beginning to break down. Workers were increasingly being displaced into undesirable work positions and shifts. Thus, it was becoming clear to these workers that their interests could not be served by institutional procedures and that they were in some ways antagonistic.[1] It is when the limits of bureaucratized control are reached that the essentially coercive nature of the process is revealed.

Unlike writers such as Braverman (1974) and Edwards (1979) whose "first principle" is that the need for control arises out of the uncertainty of labour power in the production process, Burawoy argues that the problem of control must be understood in the context of the need to both obscure and secure the production of surplus value. But the concrete co-ordination of workers' and management's interests which Burawoy identifies lacks a recognition of the competitive dynamic of capitalism, which in Braverman's analysis accounts for the necessity of management, in its pursuit of profit, to confront labour and continually degrade work. To critically differentiate the two approaches may require a sensitivity

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[1] It should be noted, however, that many workers were as much frustrated and angry with the union as with management for the problems they were confronting.

to the historical, economic conditions particular to the industry, country and time period. Just as work and class relations in the state sector parallel the private sector (Carchedi, 1976), so too can the economic pressures on Canada Post be likened, in their impact on workers, to a crisis of profitability in the private sector. With such crises comes the need for management to tighten its control of the work place, that is, to ensure that its objectives vis-a-vis productivity and efficiency are met. Thus, there are particular pressures on Canada Post, originating in the state and private sector, to "confront" its workers and alter the conditions of their work. At the same time, there is both a general rolling back of the state sponsored programs that lessened labour's dependence on the firm and pressured capital to move toward a consensus based organization of the labour process (Burawoy, 1981), and a curtailing of the mechanisms internal to the firm that have constituted workers as industrial citizens (Panitch, 1988).

All this, I suggest, supports Braverman's view that, in the long run, there is a continual pressure on capital to lessen skill and worker discretion. However, this cannot be understood as a unilineal, non-problematic process as Braverman suggests. On the contrary, the uneven development of capitalism within and between sectors (Zimbalist, 1979: xv); the effects of different phases of the accumulation process; and class struggle and

worker resistance, all serve to emphasize the importance of a case by case examination of the working out of conflict and change. But "the reduction of the workers to a simple component of capital requires more than the introduction of a technology; workers' autonomous culture must be eliminated as well, including the relationships among workers, their skills, and their loyalties to one another" (Reiter, 1986: 324). In the case of St. John's postal workers the work reorganization surrounding the drive to automate and the divestment of state ownership which automation is facilitating have underwritten this process.

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