

**“Outside Agitators and Ungrateful Kids”: The Making of the Working Class in  
Rural Newfoundland**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 1971 Burgeo strike was a central moment in the development of working-class consciousness in Newfoundland. Combining archival sources with the author's own field interviews, this thesis illustrates how the development of industrial production during the two and a half decades after the Second World War generated a corresponding shift in the society and culture of rural Newfoundland. The resulting narrative demonstrates a model of class formation in the "industrial villages" of outport Newfoundland.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

CBC – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

DN – *The Daily News*

ET – *The Evening Telegram*

NFFAWU – Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union



Figure 0.1.0 – Burgeo, 1971. *Union Forum*

## INTRODUCTION

*The first step in community organization is community disorganization. The disruption of the present organization is the first step toward community organization. Present arrangements must be disorganized if they are to be displaced by new patterns that provide opportunities for citizen's participation. All change means disorganization of the old and organization of the new.*

- Saul Alinsky (1971: 116).

### **0.1.0. – Introduction**

Centered across the front page of the July 15th, 1971 edition of St. John's daily newspaper *The Evening Telegram* was a picture of Newfoundland's newest political actors. "Never again will we beg," read one of the homemade placards being held up by the men picketing the Burgeo fish processing plant. "On strike for freedom" was written across another. "Get off your knees. It feels good." "All we ask for are our rights. Our lawful rights to have a union." "Give us the respect we deserve." In the process of being united over the previous twenty-five years as a store shopping, corporately employed and factory-working proletariat, so too had the people of rural Newfoundland come to recognize themselves as part of an international working class. For every protest, revolt, strike and election unfolding across the island in 1971 that found its rationale in the story of the striking Burgeo workers, so too were they in the process of forming their own

distinct working-class politics.

What the 1971 strike represented, then, was the struggle to establish an effective political organization representative of the rural outport working class. While politics in Newfoundland had previously been shaped by provincial Premier Joseph Smallwood's overt use of political patronage, the corresponding formation of a rural proletariat interconnected by the industrial bourgeoisie's very own civil services, coastal boat networks and frozen cod industries had nevertheless produced a fundamental transformation in the outport people's work and employment relationships. To the thousands of people whose villages had been closed down through government-mandated resettlement programs and who were now making their living working in rural factories, on draggers two-hundred kilometers offshore or through seasonal cross-continental migration, their relationship to their fellow co-workers and employers had become depersonalized, undifferentiated, contractually mediated and defined by the necessity of earning a wage. When plant owners Spencer and Margaret Lake family blatantly and derogatorily refused to recognize the worker's union vote in Burgeo because it threatened the power of their own personal patronage, it illustrated the way in which employment relations in rural Newfoundland continued to be circumscribed within a series of legal and paternalistic mechanisms that reproduced their inequality in relation to the standards of 'mainland' Canada. By identifying and overthrowing these institutions in Burgeo, the striking workers highlighted the way in which what had once been seen as individual or local circumstances were manifestations of a broader system of exploitation, politics and policy which united them across the island.

What made the transformation associated with the 1971 Burgeo strike significant,

then, was the way in which it expressed the experience of the wider outport working class. With the livelihood of the outports having undergone a dramatic shift over the past twenty-five years towards a dependency on cash incomes and store-bought consumer goods, so too had there been a steady disintegration of the society and culture which surrounded the old artisanal and craft activities of the village-based family fishery. With Sears and Eaton's catalogues, brand-name supermarkets, social assistance cheques, postal delivery services and mandated school attendance, the ideas of status and stature derived from North American consumer culture began to saturate into the ways that people related to each other. Expressed by the new idealized notions of humanistic self-development then preached by the flood of new school teachers, business elites, returning migrant workers and personalities heard over the AM-FM radio waves, a whole new range of stigmas, uncertainties, hopes and anxieties that previously held no importance in the lives of those who grew up in village society emerged. The 1971 strike in Burgeo, as it will be shown, represented an apogee in the process whereby the men and women of outport Newfoundland came to re-orient and re-adapt their understanding of themselves around the social relationships associated with industrial production, mass consumption and the associated forms of private property. By organizing themselves in relation to the political restrictions which the Lake family placed around their participation in civic and workplace affairs, the striking workers formed a consciousness based upon the social and political institutions which united them as a class. No longer would the portrayal of them as being just 'fisherfolk,' 'outporters' or 'Newfoundlanders' be something used derogatorily or with the political motivation of denying them the ability to act. Rather, by valorizing this very same language, they organized themselves around their occupations

as factory workers, fishers and North American consumers in demanding the same state-sanctioned rights, employer obligations and recognized protections which these positions accorded them as ‘professionals,’ ‘tradespeople’ and ultimately, as ‘citizens.’

### **0.2.0. – THEORY: The ‘character’ of class struggle**

What gives the 1971 strike in Burgeo its theoretical significance, then, is the way in which it exemplifies a model of working class formation. In both the study of ‘class’ as an objective material formation in capitalist society, as well as the corresponding process in which it forms as a socio-cultural, subjective or ‘self-conscious’ entity, the argument that society and social change can be understood as rooted in class struggle originates in the work of observers who first began to theorize the transformations associated with the Industrial Revolution (Engels: 1844; Marx & Engels 2000 [1848]). While the societal dynamic between a capital-owning bourgeoisie and a propertyless, labouring proletariat has been the essential feature of capitalist society, the process whereby small ‘peasant’ producers and other non-industrial populations have struggled against proletarianization or attempted to organize themselves in relation to ‘capital’ has never been a universal process (Thompson: 1966; Hobsbawm: 1962). Indeed, the mere fact that an individual or group of individuals comes to hold an objective structural position in relation to the ‘means of production’ does not impart on them a universally-defined ‘industrial’ or ‘working-class’ consciousness (see Chakrabarty: 1989 for how far this argument can be taken). Instead, the blend of pre-existing social solidarities derived from ongoing relationships between proletarianized populations and small non-industrial owners, the continuing availability and the different shape of common-property resources or

‘subsistence’ activities as well as the different forms that the capitalist state can take towards fulfilling its mandate of establishing the sanctity of private property and the conditions necessary for capitalist accumulation all shape the particular form of class struggle and the corresponding society and culture (see Scott 1972a; 1972b; 1975 for attempts at a typology; Mintz 1973; Sider 1986). In other words, the ‘character’ of class struggle is shaped as much by capital’s incessant drive to ever-expand its control over the shape and scope of human social relationships as it is by the ability of the working class to build alternatives based on the valorization of its own interests.

What gives shape to society and culture, then, is the struggle which surrounds productive and consumption activities. While capitalism emerged in human history through the process of transforming human labour into a commodity, so too did this process produce the corresponding struggle against it (see Cleaver: 1979). Whether it is the struggle of non-industrial people to maintain ownership over their own tools and access to common property resources against dispossession (Linebaugh & Rediker: 2000), the battles of the newly dispossessed over the shape and length of the working day (Heron & Story ed. 1986) or the attempts of common people to re-appropriate the products of their labour at a fair price (Thompson: 1993), the ability of human labour to rebel at each and every point in the process of capital formation creates a continual spiral of political struggle (Bell & Cleaver: 1982; Dyer-Witheford: 1999). While the very concepts of ‘growth’ and ‘accumulation,’ then, are the capitalists’ attempt at ever-expanding the scale of the social relationships necessary for reproducing their own control over human labour, so too can they be understood as the continually expanding struggle of the working class.

What shapes the ‘character’ of this struggle is the way in which the process of commodification is articulated and made political. While capital continually attempts to expand and reproduce its control over human labour by fragmenting working class struggle through legal distinctions and state-enforced oppressions that manage and administer its time and increase its ownership over its sources of consumption, it is in relation to these very same legal, political and ‘civil’ dynamics that human labour again organizes, articulates and builds a platform dedicated to advancing its own interests. Whether the fight for a shorter working-day, minimum wage laws or access to clean air, food, water and adequate shelter is expressed through claims to ‘dignity,’ ‘equality,’ ‘citizenship’ or ‘justice,’ it is by struggling against the very same laws, regulations, social mores, constitutions or standards which the bourgeoisie use to codify and reproduce its rule in which the proletariat begins to mobilize its own working-class politics (Marx & Engels 2000[1848]; Thompson 1967). As people come to identify the institutions and the politicians which are responsible for their circumstances, so too do they become factors which unite the working class in their struggle against capitalism. Whether or not it produces the struggle which ultimately overthrows the system of private property or whether it simply achieves a series of legislative reforms, it is through these struggles in which law, norms and the entirety of society and culture are changed.

### **0.3.0. – METHODOLOGY: Historical Ethnography**

What thus shapes the ‘character’ of class struggle, then, is the way in which people express, understand and organize within the relationships that they find themselves. There is little doubt that the most significant historical legacy of the 1971



strike was the way in which the striking Burgeo workers captured the attention of the media with their particular portrayal of the power dynamics which shaped the society and culture of rural Newfoundland. Throughout the period from November 1970 – March 1972 in which there were major events unfolding both daily newspapers *The Evening Telegram* and *The Daily News*, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) as well as several independent media outlets maintained continuous coverage. As the strike dragged into the fall of 1971, an industrial mediator recorded testimonials and wrote a report, politicians discussed the strike's legislative implications in the provincial legislature, employees for the Lake Company kept records, and working people themselves created folklore documents. Yet the narrative which is captured by these sources is primarily one which documents the overt public conflicts and the dominant messaging which was by-in-large a perspective motivated by the union spokespeople. While this has led to a historiographical interpretation which often conflates the organizational history of the Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union (NFFAWU) with that of the formation of the wider outport working class,<sup>1</sup> the relative silence in the available sources from those segments of the proletariat who did not happen to support the union's bid in Burgeo nevertheless illustrates a larger point about the making of the working class in rural Newfoundland.<sup>2</sup> It was precisely in the rupture with the industrial outport's relatively localized and 'quiescent' political history that made the striking workers' overtly vocal and confrontational attention-grabbing tactics significant. For if they were

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<sup>1</sup> The very slogan, "it started in Burgeo" and the use of imagery in accounts such as Gwyn (1973) where Burgeo and the summer of 1971 represent a 'dam bursting' and the subsequent flood of popular political participation often leads to an interpretation in which the category of 'labour history' or even the history of the 'working-class' in Newfoundland is conflated with the emergence of the NFFAWU as an organization, or more so, with the ideologies of the organization itself (see Hobsbawm 1984 on how these confluences have influenced the writing of 'labour' history).

<sup>2</sup> See Chakrabarty (1989) on how silence within or even absolute absence of sources in certain circumstances can be illustrative of the character of particular class relationships.

to capture the attention of the bourgeoisie, disorganize the power structure of their town and re-organize it in a way that allowed for new organizational mechanisms responsive to their own occupational interests, then they literally had to make their own ‘scene.’ The fact that those in Burgeo who opposed the union remain relatively absent from the available written sources illustrates exactly the history of exclusion that the workers were striking against. It was the confident, militant attitude and the new willingness of regular people to stand in protest, sign their name to petitions and talk to reporters over what they believed to be their unfair treatment that served as both the inspiration for other groups across the island as well as the basis of the new working class presence in Newfoundland’s politics and ‘civil’ society.

What this shift in the ‘characteristic’ expression of class struggle represented was the way in which the social relationships of rural Newfoundland had been transformed over the past two decades through the process of industrialization and urbanization. What the fieldwork aspect of this research<sup>3</sup> provided was not only interviews with participants who had lived through this transformation but also a two-month stay over the summer of 2012 participating in and observing daily life on the southwest coast. While the memory of the strike has been shaped by the union slogans, stock phrases and the various published accounts that have circulated for the past forty-five years, what held some of the greatest potential value were the small anecdotal stories that people told about their lives.<sup>4</sup> While this ‘participant observation’ has not provided the large block quotes that the interviews have, it has nevertheless provided much of the descriptive imagery which

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<sup>3</sup> Field interviews were conducted by the author in St. John’s and Burgeo over the summer of 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See Paul Thompson (1989) on how ‘popularized’ history comes to shape people’s memories over time and the resulting value of seemingly mundane anecdotal accounts.

illustrates how class is inscribed in the neighbourhood layout, the height of one's ceiling and in the everyday expressions that people use to make sense of their own world. In understanding the 'character' of class struggle as it is made by people's own articulations, understandings and expressions of their social world, it is through nothing other than the ethnographic immersion in which one is immersed within these very articulations, understandings and expressions of the social world.

While it is through these everyday expressions that we can see patterns emerge in the way that people articulate and organize their work and society, it is also within these very same patterns where one sees the fault lines of working class fragmentation. With only a relatively short two-month stay, the process of conducting formal interviews certainly acted to preclude the ability to achieve the same level of public integration associated with undertaking an extended ethnographic project (Castledon et al: 2012). Combined with lists of specific questions directly asking about a series of events that had generated bitter personal and family divisions, the ability to gather data on how personal relationships were affected was often met with great reluctance. While many viewpoints concerning the strike and the union's legacy thus remain hidden, it was nevertheless within the very awkwardness of many of these conversations that patterns emerged concerning how the strike forged new relationships. While some names were easily referred at the end of each interview, the mention of others received blank stares or explanations of why their perspective would not be 'useful.' It was also seen in the obvious swagger of the old union people or the obvious derision towards "all that Cashin stuff" which others displayed. It is above all else the fact that nearly four decades later these divisions still carry an effect that provides an illustration of the way in which

working class movements are broken by their institutionalization within bourgeois organizations. The family names of people who currently hold certain jobs and local positions all represent the way in which the alliances made during the strike have been reproduced up until today through their institutionalization within the union bureaucracy, municipal governments and other forms of bourgeois social organization. The divisions and alliances in Burgeo that remain evident today are a testament to the political ‘settlement’ struck with the bourgeoisie to end a revolution where a working class movement which perhaps has the makings of an ever-widening coalition of the proletariat again fragments into an array of class factions and political ‘parties.’

#### **0.4.0. – LITERATURE: The Particularities of the Newfoundland Experience**

What shapes the perhaps all-too-simplistic analogy of a ‘working class’ coming to ‘maturity’ over a period of historical struggle, then, is Newfoundland’s particular social history. With a society and culture based around the productive labours of the independent household, the dependency on the consumer goods received in exchange with the travelling merchant firms had long hindered the development and creation of a politically active working class (Sider 1986; 1989; Little: 1990).<sup>5</sup> While capital’s moves to transform the state and set in motion the factors to unite a factory-working proletariat can be discerned from the 1940s onwards, the consolidation of administrative and political power after Confederation in 1949 within a personality cult centered around provincial premier ‘Joey’ Smallwood was used to reinforce the political fragmentation of the working class (see Paine n.d for the dynamics of this ‘mastery’). In the remote boat-

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<sup>5</sup> See an interesting account by Linda Little (1990) on how even the militant ‘class consciousness’ witnessed during of the sealer’s strike over the winter of 1832 did not translate back over into the cod-fishing season of the very next spring.

access-only outports like those of the southwest coast where Burgeo is located, the ability of the large capitalists to first contribute to the formation of a propertyless proletariat through their support of the village resettlement programs and then move to monopolize ownership over the channels of imported store-bought goods gave them the ability to ultimately subvert the formation of a competing capitalist class and consolidate their political power over the local ‘committees,’ ‘boards,’ ‘chambers’ and ‘associations’ which emerged with Confederation in 1949 (see Matthews: 1977 and Philbrook: 1966 for an analysis of the range of class formations that emerged). The political dimensions of class struggle between 1949 and 1971, then, were defined by the boundaries of locality and the relationship of the individual proletarian household to its local plant owner or power broker (Hattenhauer: 1970). If it was not their local politician or business owner, then it was Smallwood himself whose ability to dominate the redistribution of capital investment allowed him to present his administration as being synonymous with ‘development’, ‘progress’ and the delivery of the very material goods and services on which the expanding rural proletariat now depended.

It was these ‘personalized’ political dimensions which hindered the creation of an independent working class movement during the first two decades of Newfoundland’s industrial transformation. Enforced by the passage of a series of restrictive labour laws which reflected the larger “post-war settlement” of North American capital, state and big labour adopted after the 1946 autoworker’s strike in Windsor, Ontario car factory strike, the ruling class in Newfoundland as well was able to bureaucratize and align itself with a ‘labour movement’ which supported its productivity goals.<sup>6</sup> With a government-

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<sup>6</sup> On the “ambiguous legacy” of the ‘post-war settlement’ in Canada, see Bryan Palmer *Working-Class Experience: Re-*

monopolized association of small fishers<sup>7</sup> claiming legal jurisdiction over the island's 'fishermen' and a state doing as little as possible to facilitate the organization of the rural factory-working proletariat, the new industrial outports and even the new municipal governments were in many areas free to operate without any form of organized working class representation (Inglis: 1985; Strong: 1987). With neither 'work,' the 'wage,' or clear occupational divides providing a basis for unity within the labouring experience, the particular tie that bound working households to their social 'superiors' prevented the corresponding emergence of a clear-cut contractual relationship or forms of social organization based on the bonds of waged labour.<sup>8</sup> The more that powerful industrial families such as the Lakes in Burgeo extended their monopoly over the redistribution of surplus, the stronger their control over the reproduction of social relationships and the corresponding shape and administration of local politics.

It was, however, precisely these personalized dynamics which gave the working class formation of rural Newfoundland its 'character.' While capital had been able to fragment working class struggle through legal and paternalistic favouritism, the formation of a factory-working, store-shopping industrial working class interconnected

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*Thinking the History of Canadian Labour 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992); Heron and Storey ed. *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1986). On the development of labour legislation after the 1959 I.W.A. strike and its effect on working-class formation in Newfoundland see Lembcke and Tattum *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (USA: Harbour Publishing Co 1984); Greg Davis *Caught up in All the Excitement: Labour Legislation in the Aftermath of the IWA strike* (Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland: Honour's Thesis 2007); Barbara Neis *From Cod Block to Fish Food: The Crisis and Restructuring in the Newfoundland Fishing Industry 1968-1986* (Ph.D Thesis University of Toronto 1988).

<sup>7</sup> The Newfoundland Federation of Fishermen

<sup>8</sup> The persistence of an "occupational pluralism" or "dualism" among rural Newfoundlanders noted by observers of the 1960s, as much as it was used to criticize the unemployment created by Smallwood government's dogmatic attempts at facilitating a 'transition' to industrial society, can also be taken to attest to the suspicion, hostility, or plainly an overall pragmatic orientation towards industrial capitalism and the utility of full time waged-labour as a strategy for household income. See Ottar Brox *Newfoundland Fishermen in the Age of Dualism* (St. John's: ISER Books 1972). At best, the persistence of a migratory and 'occupationally plural' labour force that migrated between the outport villages and industrial 'growth' centers made for poor to non-existent labour organizing efforts. See Peter Neary's (1973) description of Bell Island iron ore mine workers.

through a seasonal and migratory work that took them along the entire eastern seaboard and into the Great Lakes had nevertheless produced a corresponding transformation in the relationship between capital and labour (Inglis: 1985; Wright: 2001). As people began to stand in an undifferentiated, de-personalized and instrumental wage-based relationship to the owners of capital, so too did the ‘personalized’ patronage politics through which the capitalist had reproduced their authority become perceived as increasingly unjust. As this rural proletariat began to find a language and an analogy of their experience with the struggle of the wider U.S. civil rights movement, so too did the many isolated and disconnected industrial outports begin to identify the politics, politicians and legal institutions which united their experience (see MacDonald: 1980). As we shall see, it was again the image of the ‘fisherman’ – or perhaps for many how far they had left fishing behind – that began to animate their expression of struggle.

#### **0.5.0. – Outline of the Chapters**

It was out of this particular political dynamic in which the class forces that met in Burgeo emerged. Beginning with a description of the village-based family fishery, chapter one illustrates how the re-investment of capital into industrial production beginning in the 1940s initiated a revolution in the ‘means of production’ of outport Newfoundland. The chapter develops a portrayal of the resulting ‘industrial village’ – a site of industrial production and consumption undergoing a change which was expressed in the corresponding transformation of the way that people related to each other, organized their time, and met their households needs across generations. It argues that the ‘rising tide of expectations,’ a phrase often evoked to describe the experience of decline

and decay proliferating throughout the outports during these two decades – while often attributed as being a revolutionary and causal force in itself – was in fact a reflection of the way that the outport proletariat was in a process of re-adapting itself within the new patterns of work and consumption. Chapter two focuses in specifically on the case of Burgeo and the southwest coast. Drawing on archival sources and interviews conducted in 2012, chapter two argues that the Lake family's ability to monopolize the investment of capital and the redistribution of surplus allowed them to prevent or 'stagnate' the formation of the capitalist class that was emerging in outports elsewhere in Newfoundland. With no available alternatives to working for the Lake family or buying goods at their stores, the chapter illustrates how class struggle on the southwest coast during the 1950s and 1960s remained circumscribed within the boundaries of a 'paternal' relationship. Where there existed no ability to re-invest capital in channels outside of those which the Lake family commanded, neither did there emerge the corresponding development of autonomous working class organizations, 'competitive' politics, or any of the institutions or social devices associated with bourgeois 'civil' society.

If accumulation in the 'industrial village' was characterized by a political dynamic which prevented the formation of working class organization, then it was on the basis of this very same political dynamic that the outport proletariat again mobilized. Taking the Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union's (NFFAWU) 1970-1 campaign to establish collective bargaining rights for 'fishermen' as its focal point, chapter three illustrates the way in which the small fishing-boat owning class was mobilized around a popular movement for the recognition of the rights and privileges associated with a trade. By identifying the laws and mechanisms which had been used to



reproduce their exclusion from politics, the decision-making process and their inequality in relation to the ‘tradespeople’ of mainland Canada, the chapter shows how the campaign began to epitomize the process whereby the outports were beginning to understand the way in which their occupational interests went beyond their localized individual relationship to the plant owners and towards issues which united them across the island as a class. It was a movement, as will be shown, which took the standards of the Canadian welfare state and the ‘organized’ working class existing elsewhere and made it work for the particularities of the Newfoundland fisherfolk as well.

What drew the wider outport proletariat behind this movement, however, was the 1971 strike in Burgeo. Drawing on first-hand accounts of the strike, chapter four shows how the changing material composition of class struggle over the 1950s and 1960s had resulted in the formation of a rural outport working class. Chapter five builds on this transformation by illustrating how this movement to systematically disorganize and re-organize their town around the new union bureaucracy was reproduced in outports across the island. Drawing on accounts which show union leaders Richard Cashin, Father Desmond McGrath and others using the media to portray the wider political implications of the strike, the chapter argues that the extrapolation of the power relations portrayed during the strike in Burgeo onto the larger societal and political regime of Newfoundland epitomized the process whereby the outport proletariat came to organize a working class presence within the ‘civil’ society and politics of the island’s bourgeoisie. While it was by aligning themselves with the NFFAWU that the proletariat came to form an organization dedicated to advancing its class interest, the chapter illustrates how it was this very same alliance which again circumscribed the radical extent of reform. The

families and friends torn apart during the strike in Burgeo, then, are a microcosm of the wider 'settlement' which took place at the time period where the new 'neo-national' bourgeoisie of the 1970s established its regime.

#### **0.6.0. CONCLUSION – The Burgeo Strike and the Making of the Working Class in Rural Newfoundland**

What gave the 1971 strike in Burgeo its significance, then, was the way in which it achieved the recognition and institutionalization of the interests of the working class within civil and political society. Even as the 'transition' from the village-based family fishery over the past twenty-five years had resulted in the formation of a rural proletarian class existing across the outports, the monopoly that Smallwood and the large industrialists held over the distribution of capital investment allowed them to prevent the formation of autonomous working class organizations. By overthrowing Spencer and Margaret Lake in 1971 on the isolated southwest coast of Newfoundland, as regal as they were, the struggle of the striking workers provided an unparalleled example for people across the island of how this type of paternal authority and favouritism has been used to fragment working class struggle and reproduce their inequality in relation to the wider North American working class. With the union's help, they could organize across the occupational divides of the outports and institutionalize their movement within the language of 'civil' politics.

What gave character to this movement, however, was the way in which it was expressed by the people of Newfoundland themselves. The language of 'youthful rebellion' characteristic of the 1960s and the civil rights movement, more than just the

boisterous and excited voices of the young was fundamentally a reflection of the struggle against the very laws and ‘paternalistic’ institutions which the bourgeoisie used to exclude the entire working class from participation in civic and workplace administration. While it had once been by accepting these laws and regulations which had been part of the package that promised to ‘update’ and facilitate the outport’s access to the new North American consumer world, it had become through these very same ‘municipal’ governments, local development ‘boards,’ town ‘committees’ and trade ‘unions’ which they had to organize around to articulate a political voice. It was above all else the contradiction between the world that Smallwood had promised to provide them with the stroke of his pen in 1949 and the world that they continued to experience in the outport that drove the proletariat of rural Newfoundland to ultimately dismantle their society and organize it anew. For if they were to attain the same level of dignity, the sophistication and all the ‘progress’ which they knew had been achieved elsewhere in North America, then it would be by nothing else than taking their human ability to work, produce and labour away from their employers and use it towards building a world in their own image. “Eating raw slabs of bologna, or a tin of sardines,” the *Alternate Press* reported from the Burgeo picket line in July of 1971, “the day’s progress of the strike is accounted and every new event, no matter how minute, is scrutinized and reviewed” (AP 1971). It is to the thousands of men and women of rural Newfoundland who scrutinized their own society throughout the 1950s and 1960s and who nevertheless remain nameless in the history books whose struggle we can glimpse through the few names that emerged in Burgeo in 1971. This thesis is, as the union-friendly bumper stickers that emerged in the summer of 1971 stated, the story of the struggle for the society and the middle-class

standard of living which “started in Burgeo.”

For 80 per cent of humanity the Middle Ages ended suddenly in the 1950s; or perhaps better still, they were *felt* to end in the 1960s. ...The most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us off for ever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry. For since the Neolithic era most human beings had lived off the land and its livestock or harvested the sea as fishers.

- E.J. Hobsbawm (1994: 288-9).

### **1.1.0. – Introduction**

By the late 1960s, the signs of modernity were everywhere. “Not only did Confederation force Newfoundland labour to modify its concept of genuine skill,” Rolf Hattenhauer wrote in his 1970 *Brief Labour History of Newfoundland*, “but it also created a change and updating of attitudes towards employers and the employment relationship.” As student-led rebellions circulating the Atlantic world found their way to St. John’s, working class strikes in the southern United States sent shock-waves of inspiration to even the most isolated outposts, and something akin to the Civil Rights movement had morphed into an island-wide wave of public protest that threatened the legitimacy of even Joseph R. Smallwood’s two-decade reign as provincial Premier, it was Newfoundland’s rapid transformation away from the old ‘peasant’ society that struck commentators of the

time period most vividly. “In short,” Hattenhauer continued, “many Newfoundland workmen are no longer the docile, even subservient individuals which they had been for so many decades in the past” (1970: 32). Through the reincorporation of rural Newfoundland’s labour and resources into the globally-integrated market of North American industrial production after 1945, a process was initiated in which the once independent fishing households of the outports had been dispossessed and made into a factory-working and store-buying proletariat. Two decades later, these same Newfoundlanders, often through having ripped up the foundations of their own homes and resettled in the new industrial villages, were now re-organizing, re-adapting, re-uniting and through their own initiative had begun a struggle to carve out a space for themselves within the new patterns of work, society and culture which the industrial bourgeoisie confronted them with.

The society and culture in which they now struggled bore little resemblance to the one in which they had come from. “Newfoundland in 1949,” as S.J.R. Noel wrote in 1971,

in spite of the many forces of change and modernization introduced during the war, was still very much a ‘traditional’ society. The bulk of the people still lived in tiny isolated outports where their way of life was not essentially different from that led by their forefathers. The fishery, with its antiquated technology and financial structure, remained their basic source of livelihood; such amenities as motor roads and hydro-electric power were practically unknown; while in their homes a simple nineteenth century world of large patriarchal families, Victorian manners and morals, oil lamps and wood stoves, remained anachronistically alive. The outports were still tightly knit communities, bound together by the homogeneity of their economic life, by extended patterns of kinship, by inherited customs and folkways (Noel 1971: 262).

For those whose lives continued to be rooted in the seasonal round of pre-industrial productive activities, it was not only the mail-order catalogues, the post-offices, the

coastal-boat delivery routes, the social welfare services, cash incomes and above all the waged work and store-bought consumption that was different, but the new social relationships associated with each. For if they were to achieve the ‘modern’ standard of living associated with the idealized ‘affluent societies’, then they would have to organize themselves to vote, sign their name to petitions, protest, pressure and claim space for themselves in the ‘civil’ society and politics of the bourgeoisie.

Yet as much as the new patterns of work and consumption were being adopted by the people of the outports, these developments also had a social effect that was much less easily measurable. For those who were drawn into the new ways of making a living, the ‘price’ to be paid for this new way of life was a complete re-organization of how people related to the natural world and to each other. The society and culture rooted in the new industrial and urban workplaces, in stark contrast to that which surrounded the old village-based family fishery, was defined not by its stability and continuity over the generations, but by its demand for continual innovation, restructuring and progress. It was a period of transformation in which for every factory that was built and waged job that was offered, so too was there a corresponding withering of the activities that had sustained the village household. For every store-bought commodity and social assistance check received, so too was there a corresponding loss of another skill, tool, and need for subsistence production. And with the introduction of competitive politics – ‘democracy’ – and the emergence within the outports of a class of entrepreneurs, local politicians, clerks and civil servants whose representative organizations held the links to St. John’s, Ottawa and the market centers on which they now relied, so too was their control over their time and the formation of their productive relationships subsumed within the

administration of institutions outside of their control. “Industrialism, however, will rob them of the autonomy they have enjoyed,” Tom Philbrook wrote in the 1966 conclusion to the first ethnographic survey of rural Newfoundland published by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER). “It will provide them with economic security through following rules and regulations of a given job, but in exchange they will lose personal control of their time. The need for self-discipline, as a factor of economic success, will diminish” (Philbrook 1966: 182). The process of rural industrialization, occurring on the backs of a generation of outport Newfoundlanders, came with the corresponding prerequisite of first discrediting and then the destruction of both the pre-industrial mode of production and the society and culture that surrounded it. For every village that resettled, for every stage that was abandoned and washed away by the sea and for every family member whose whereabouts were lost track of in the subsequent migration, it was a way of life that was not directly taken from them, but one in which the burden to make the decision to uproot and ultimately leave it behind was forcibly placed on each individual themselves.

### **1.2.0. – THEORY: Society and the Industrial Revolution**

From the time of the initial Industrial Revolution to today, there is perhaps one guiding conceptual red thread that is particularly useful for understanding the social and cultural experience associated with the transformation of rural Newfoundland during the second half of the 20th century. This concept derives as much from the dismay of those who first witnessed the factory system of northern England in the mid-19th century to the horror expressed at the new urban spaces and human degradation which sprawled



alongside them. It also draws on the lament expressed as the bourgeois ideals of utilitarian self-interest and egotistical calculation broke down and rendered redundant the old feudal and familial work relationships and the often violent process of expropriation and the criminalization of the newly dispossessed 'masses' which it justified. And perhaps most significantly it was seen in the way in which working and common people united in what were hitherto novel political forms in moving towards staking new claims in a society that no longer recognized their customary rights (Engels: 1844). Wherever its focus lay, what bound these observations together was the sense that in the transformation from the customary, pre-capitalist village society to the industrial, urban and modern society was for the majority of the people who underwent it an experience of catastrophic decline.

What defined this transformation was the transfer of ownership over the 'means of production' from the labouring to the capitalist class. While the old craft and artisanal workers of pre-bourgeois societies owned the tools and access to the raw resources on which they produced the goods which they sold and consumed, the formation of capitalist society was dependant on creating a propertyless working class who were forced to sell their labour power in exchange for the money necessary to gain access to their own livelihood. "The capitalist class, through its monopoly over the means of producing the necessities of life, forces the rest of society to work for it in order to live – thus to become a working class," Harry Cleaver and Peter Bell have explained.

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This relationship was established through the process of “primitive” (original) accumulation through which owners of labor power came to confront owners of capital, means of production, and means of subsistence in the market place. The sale of labor capacity for money, which is in turn exchanged for the means of consumption, reveals that at the core of the class relation is the imposition of work and the form of that imposition is exchange (1982: 20)

While this process of transforming human labour into a commodity depended upon a process of clearing peasantry from their property and fragmenting their struggle through geographical relocations, the introduction of labour-replacing machines and enforcing state-regulations regarding how they spend their time and how they accessed their food and subsistence resources, so too has it generated a corresponding struggle in which the working class recomposes itself towards contesting and subverting the capitalist’s control. Whether one labels this story as ‘modernity’, ‘development,’ ‘progress,’ or simply as ‘history,’ the development of capitalist society and of all social and societal change is at one and the same time nothing other than the development of class struggle.

What gives conscious expression to this struggle, however, is the corresponding society and culture upon which work is organized. While holding ownership over one’s productive tools allowed for one to shape their own work schedules and form their own social relationships, alongside the transfer of ownership over these tools to the capitalist was also the transfer over their administration. “Every state has its own functionaries,” Antonio Gramsci noted of the emergence of the new ‘civil’ services, government bureaucracies and interconnected web of state administrations on which the bourgeoisie depend to regulate and control the shape of human labour. And “one of the functions of the state is to raise the mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes” (quoted in Overton 1979: 237). It was a

transformation that produced the ‘malaise’ of modernity as the old society and culture on which people had organized their relationship to one another were now redundant. “The fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be determined in terms of efficiency or “cost-benefit” analysis,” Charles Taylor suggested, “and the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipse by the demands to maximize output” (Taylor 2001: 5). While the appeal to ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ emerged as powerful new cultural claims contesting the extent to which capital could commodify one’s labour and access to their means of livelihood, it was a relationship that nevertheless operated against the dull compulsion of having to return everyday to sell one’s labour at the market. “The individual is gradually torn loose from the old personal, security networks,” Sidney Mintz wrote “and eventually may come to see himself alone and to think of his fate as most comprehensible in terms of his own acts” (1960: 261 in 1974:310). With the capitalist state reproducing the sanctity of ‘contract’ and ‘private property,’ the crux defining the new society became the exchange of labour power for a wage payment. Along with this was the birth of the modern individual, who having been ‘freed’ from their own ownership over the means of their own livelihood and the corresponding familial work relationships initiated a new stage in the evolution of human history in which people began to struggle and recognize their interests as aligning around their position as either ‘capitalist’ or ‘labourer.’

### **1.3.0. – LITERATURE: Industry, Capital, Ideology and the making of the “New Commercial Fish Monarchies”**

There is perhaps too little appreciation of the way in which the defining

experience of rural Newfoundland in the mid-twentieth century is rooted in a pattern of proletarian class formation. It is well known that the island of Newfoundland, as the newest province of Canada after its confederation in 1949, and like many of the decolonizing nations in Africa and south-east Asia drawn into the war economy, turned to industrial development as a pretence to enhancing human well-being (Ferguson: 1999; Gwyn: 1973; Noel: 1971; Cadigan: 2009). It is known that what financed this transformation were government-sponsored schemes of industrial development that put the city of Boston and the idea of the American dream on the map of every outport Newfoundlander (Overton: 2001). It is known as well that the provincial state was transformed under the political leadership of Joseph R. Smallwood to enforce new ideas of private property under the pretense of social improvement (Wright: 2001). It is known as well that just as capital investment brought factories and trawler fleets to the outports, so too were the outport people brought to the new industrial villages through a series of state-initiated resettlement programs (Matthews: 1977). Put together, it was a history in which capital and labour were mobilized at an unprecedented scale towards the construction of an entirely new society and culture based around the operation of steel-hulled draggers, concrete-walled fish processing factories and the daily consumption of imported store-bought goods. Old boats were left for scrap or relegated to 'sport,' old houses were either abandoned or uprooted altogether and floated to the new trawler and factory ports and electric refrigerators replaced root cellars. And with each moment spent in the new post and welfare offices, grocery stores, or on a dragger 200-kilometers offshore, so too was the old society and culture which bound people together in the whole range of activities associated with the reproduction of the pre-industrial fishing household

lost for the occupationally-specific labels of ‘draggerman’, plantworker, shopkeeper, student, teacher, clerk, secretary, relief recipient and the others associated with the ‘complex’ or ‘plural’ modern society.

The more difficult aspect of this transformation to identify, however, is the way in which the changing ownership over the means of production during this time was experienced. The most comprehensive ethnographic surveys of outport Newfoundland from the time period present an image of a population undergoing a dramatic transition from a ‘pre-modern’ to ‘modern’ economy understood as two distinct and largely incompatible social and cultural systems (Brox: 1972, Chiaramonte 1970; Nemec: 1972; Philbrook: 1966; Szwed: 1966; Wadel: 1969; 1973). Writing in the late 1960s after nearly twenty years of economic ‘master plans’ and grandiose mega-projects delivered from Smallwood’s office had firmly established both the ills and benefits of an industrial and urban society, these authors began to document the outport population’s experience of class formation. “Although a majority of the resettled population might be better off economically and socially,” Norwegian author Cato Wadel wrote in one of the surveys, “it is highly probable that a large minority of the population will be worse off.”

This is partly due to the fact that the possibilities for self-employment (notably fishing) and for various kinds of subsistence production are restricted in the reception centers. The locatees thus become more dependent on the availability of wage work, largely unskilled, which is constantly decreasing. The jobs that are created have a tendency to be more and more specialized, and this means fewer relocates qualify for them (1973: 14).

It was not only this process of class formation and the generation of economic inequality that these authors captured, but also its social experience. “It is obvious that isolation, in the sense that people have to commute to urban centers to work away for long periods, will tend to erode the outport people’s autonomy or self-sufficiency with regards to

values as well,” Ottar Brox wrote. “The direction of people’s aspirations is bound to be influenced by continuous participation in an urban, hierarchically organized economy and rural people will increasingly tend to perceive their supervisors and other middle class personnel with whom they interact, as models. This results in looking upon the degenerating economic and social life in the outport, which now becomes a city dependant peripheral slum, with less and less enthusiasm” (Brox 1972: 65-66). From within their somewhat covert analyses characteristic of anthropologists at the time period, using analogies of economic ‘realms’, ‘spheres’ and the ‘barriers’ of ‘conversion’ between them, these authors began to capture a side of the industrial transformation that – while being touted by politician and industrialist alike as the key to producing a rising standard of living – had nevertheless produced the corresponding experience of social dislocation.

#### **1.4.0. – Burgeo, the southwest coast and the standards of living debate**

It was this process of class formation in which the ‘progress’ of Newfoundland’s mid-twentieth century history can be measured. Burgeo, or more precisely the string of fishing villages located along the southwest coast of the island that eventually re-settled around the major fish plant towns of Gaultois, Ramea and Burgeo had a long cosmopolitan history as an international hub for the banking schooner industry as well as the small-boat inshore fishery (Kendall: 1991). Beginning during the Second World War and intensifying in the two decades afterwards, the year-round ice-free harbours of the south and southwest coast of the island were targeted by capital investments directed towards the construction of an offshore frozen fish industry. Backed by the state’s

financing, the conditions were created for the emergence of a class of industrialists from within the ranks of the old salt-fish merchants whose potential for a near-absolute authority over employment and the import of consumer goods were ominously labelled by Smallwood's first Minister of Fisheries W.J. Keough as the "new commercial fish monarchies" (Wright 2001: 85). Capital investment began to flow into the outports, first during the 1940s to meet the European war market's demand for protein and then to the 'victorious' U.S. market that 'boomed' after the war. Lying visibly above the water today, preserved in years of blubber effluent from the nearby onshore plant are the remains of the first fish freezing operation in Burgeo – and one of the earliest in outport Newfoundland's industrial history. One Burgeo elder recalls that

Well initially, the plant in Burgeo was a floating plant called the Netherton. The Netherton was a floating plant that used brine for freezing rather than the birds-eye plate freezers but rather used a brine vat to freeze. And it was used in Labrador for salmon. And when this – the evolution of the frozen fish industry – we moved it down to – Arthur [Monroe] moved it down to Burgeo and that was the beginning. The first shipments of frozen fish was out of the Netherton in Burgeo. Well what happened unfortunately was that on Bonfire night, of all nights in Burgeo, the vessel burnt, and two people were killed, actually. They actually jumped into that vat, that brine vat, to save their lives, that's what happened, and they died. But where that plant was located, right onshore, the following year the plant was built, the new plant was built.

"This proved successful," an anonymous author in *Decks Awash* wrote in an issue dedicated to the history of the coast, "and a new frozen fish filleting plant was built and was said to be one of the finest and largest in the province at the time. Working at full capacity it could produce 40,000 pounds of frozen fish a day. This produced many jobs and the population of Burgeo, which had declined further to 750 in 1945, rose once more to 891 by 1951" (1984: 8). This was the beginning of a particular version of history, one which encompasses much of the southwest coast and all of Newfoundland, in which the narrative of history – from Burgeo's budding demographics to the growth of industry and

the corresponding ‘modern’ social and political institutions – begins to align with industrial and urban development.

On one side of this history, industrial development was seen as optimistically related to an associated societal improvement and rising standard of living. “In Burgeo at that time there was great enthusiasm,” the FPL employee remembers today. “These were in the very early days. And the Burgeo people saw their community, well you know, there is only three on the south coast that was being developed in the transition from the salt fishery to the fresh fishery. So in Isle-aux-Mort, and in Burgeo and in Burin I found that all three places, you know, to be full of enthusiastic people who worked hard and were ready to be trained, ready to be brought into the industry and so on. And over the next many, many years I never saw any change.” It was a history that promoted the social relationships associated with industrial and urban development as being synonymous with societal improvement. From this perspective, the direction of history could be aligned with the model of bourgeois political economy in vogue at the time. Its ‘progress’ could be measured by its convergence with, or divergence from the so-called universal stages of economic growth. At the social level, it could be measured by how successfully each individual had adopted ideals of self-development and become an entrepreneur.

Underneath this ‘success’ story was a pessimistic perspective which related the growth of industry directly to the corresponding process of dispossession and the growth of a rural proletariat. For the thousands of people who populated the small villages located in every fjord and inlet cut into the thousand-foot-high sheer rock wall spanning the southwest coast from Burgeo eastward, the combination by both men and women of incorporating seasonal waged labour outside the outport with other small-scale



subsistence activities would begin to change after an often-cited October 1952 telephone call between capitalist Arthur Munroe of Fisheries Products Limited and distributors in the U.S. sparked an initiative towards building a frozen cod-block industry that intended to put breaded fish-sticks into the new electric freezers of every American family. The Smallwood state was thereafter compelled to enter into new areas of public policy as it moved to destroy NAFEL (the marketing agency for the inshore salt-cod fishery), began to enclose the subsistence commons and in 1953 initiate the first of the resettlement programs that led to the eventual abandonment of the majority of the coastline (Neis: 1988a). Dozens of villages on the southwest coast closed over the next 15 years, some of the largest containing nearly seven hundred people as the eastward seasonal migration along the coast shifted towards permanent resettlement. "All too many of the new residents, who had been forced or deluded into abandoning comfortable and well-built houses in the now deserted outports, were reduced to living in unsightly shacks," Farley Mowat observed in his impressions from Burgeo in the mid-1960s,

These proliferated until they produced the first true fruits of centralization ... the Sou' West Coast's first slum. ... The Eastern end of Grandy Island turned into a waste-land of rusting cans, broken bottles, spilled garbage and human sewage. The surrounding waters were further defiled by the vast volume of effluvia from the fish plant which discharged all its wastes and offal directly into Short Reach. Much of the shoreline was befouled by a belt of black sticky muck several inches thick and six to ten feet broad which, particularly at low tide, stank to high heaven (Mowat 1973: 29).

This was the other side of the 'enthusiasm' and 'success' of North American industry and the rising standard of living associated with the 'baby-boom' generation after the Second World War. It was a 'growth' at one end that was intimately linked to a corresponding growth at the other of a proletarian workforce and an isolated industrial 'periphery' in the Northwest Atlantic ocean whose new existence and plight were then sold back to them by

industrialist and politician alike as the necessary preconditions for their own progress into ‘modernity.’

#### **1.5.0. – The resilience of the village household**

The ‘transition’ to modernity can thus be understood as the political process whereby the productive labours of the independent village household are broken down, commodified and re-integrated into waged work and capitalist production. In outport Newfoundland – like other similar ‘peasant’ societies – the family acted as both a small artisanal workshop that employed its own labour in the entire range of activities required to harvest and manufacture a dried saltfish product for exchange with merchant-firms as well as their own consumption. The division of labour within the household was gendered and aged, with men, older sons and uncles gathered around the seasonal repair of fishing gear and the harvesting of fish with women and small children forming a ‘shore crowd’ that split and dried fish into a commodity for exchange as well as the gardening, the making of clothing and most of the other items needed for consumption. These activities generated a society that was reproduced by yearly custom as sons married and started their own household, boat crews were broken down and re-composed by cultural ritual and a series of reciprocal contracts established the relationship between households. It was what many would call a ‘one-class society’ in which a semi-feudal relationship with the travelling merchant firms and a state government dedicated to reinforcing dependency on the goods received in exchange with the merchants produced a village economy ‘from above’ that had no means to accumulate the surplus or generate internal class difference and where various social levelling mechanisms ‘from below’

ensured a redistribution of wealth between households (Sider: 1979; 1980; 1989; 2003; Chiaramonte: 1970; Neis: 1988a). From the time of the village fishery's inception in the early 1800s when the merchant firms moved from using European seasonal servant-labourers to a family-based settler economy, it produced a society and culture that changed little in its internal composition for the next one-hundred and fifty years even as it spread to eventually surround the island's six thousand kilometers of coastline with over one thousand individual settlements.

The entry of waged labour and cash incomes, beginning primarily with U.S. capital investment directed into the construction of military bases during the Second World War and the extension of Canadian federal transfer payments after Confederation in 1949 were incorporated into the strategies of the village household as only one among several income-generating activities. From the perspective of the outport household, the mix was designed to – if anything – reinforce the viability of the independent household. It was a process of 'adaptation' rather than strictly a 'transition' as the early observers noted, as

outporters often participate in both sectors, in the sense of residing in the outport and making forays into the urban sector. Some of these forays are indeed made without leaving the outports, but are effected by visiting the local post office or the welfare office to collect various transfer payment (Wadel 1969: 2).

The re-investment of capital in urban development in the outports had created the “age of dualism” as the early ethnographers – and indeed government and industrial planners believed – in which a pre-industrial village economy existed alongside an upstart and emergent industrial capitalist economy. The people in the outports were seen to be able to pass seamlessly between them, combining the new goods, wages, and cash incomes with

the traditional subsistence activities of the ‘peasant’ household. With Unemployment Insurance introduced in 1957, men were able to continue to pursue ‘part-time’ fish harvesting from small boats within 12-15 kilometers of the shore line with ‘part-time’ plant work as well as many of the income-generating subsistence household activities. “Instead of furthering the urbanization and mobilization of the labour force, the professed goal,” Brox noted in reference to one of the many examples of this ‘dualism’, “public money had been used to help rural people protect their independence, economic adaptation, and culture in general” (1972: 56-7). Where one’s ownership over a means of production – boats and garden plots – remained, so too did a society and culture in which the kin and family relationships continue to be functionally useful to generating income and the reproduction of the village household.

In both their productive activities and their corresponding social relationships, it was this ‘reluctance’ to engage in entrepreneurial activities beyond that which was required for their own reproduction that formed the basic strategy of the early households of outport Newfoundland. For the women as well, the opportunity to earn a cash wage was not necessarily seen as giving up the independence derived from pursuing multiple household income generating activities, but was rather an opportunity for adding an additional activity to the mix. “Women not willing to help their husbands in making fish, have shown to be willing to work on the ‘plant’ for relatively low wages,” Wadel noted.

There are at least two reasons for this; first, they get ready cash directly to themselves; secondly, they will qualify for unemployment insurance. The women are not dependent on this income for making a living but their earnings will be a welcome additional income to the household. Moreover, the women are prepared to be mobilized at irregular intervals, which is of great importance to the plant operator, when the supply of fish is irregular, and the timing of certain operations is dependent upon weather conditions (Wadel 1969: 91).

As Wadel illustrates here and Neis has shown as well, the ‘persistence’ of the peasant household’s ability to cover a portion of its own consumption costs while the plants lay idle was a crucial aspect of maintaining the economic viability of the early forms of industrial production in outport Newfoundland (Neis 1988a: Chp 4).<sup>9</sup> The ability to combine multiple income-generating activities within the same household, along with the historically poor prices paid for fish and wages led to a ‘dual’ or ‘plural’ occupational structure in which the men and women of the outport began to define their relationship to waged work and store-bought consumption. “The new urban and industrial man may be slow in appearing,” Peter Neary suggested in his analysis of the migratory Bell Island miners whose lives bordered between industrial work and the ‘peasant’ activities of the surrounding Conception Bay villages (1973: 126). From the perspective of the outport household, it was simply more profitable to their own ‘standard of living’ by maintaining their multiple ‘peasant’ occupations.

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<sup>9</sup> This, in fact, defines the ‘proto-industrial’ form of production as outlined by Hans Medick (1976).



Figure 1.1.0 – The Netherton (Author’s Photo)

### **1.6.0. – The atrophy of the village household**

For Smallwood and his office of public planning alike, it was precisely these ‘conversion barriers’ between a people whose social and cultural organization was geared towards no more than their own household’s simple reproduction and an industrial mode of production geared towards continual accumulation that drove the direction of politics and policy during the two and a half decades from the mid-1940s onwards. With each claim by the new industrialists of a ‘labour shortage’ impeding their ability to expand, so too did the state move to reshape the outport’s social relationships around waged work. Resettlement had a simple logic, as a Dr. D.F. Rowe portrayed in *The Atlantic Advocate* in 1967.

## MODERNITY

There is today a shortage of labour in our deep sea fleet; there is today a shortage of labour in a number of our fish plants; there is today a shortage of fishermen who are trained in the operation of larger boats and modern equipment; there is today a shortage of skilled labourers in some of the industrial areas of Newfoundland and Labrador. There are today many thousands of men in small isolated place who could fill these needs provided they and their families were where they could take advantage of training and subsequent employment now available.

“The logical solution,” he continued, “is to help the wives and families to go where they can be near the husband’s source of employment” (1967: 76). The scattered and independent family units of the village fishery came up against a means of production and consumption that required centralization and collectivization. “The implication” of this, Brox explained, was that it was “only through the incorporation of the inshore fishermen into modern, hierarchically organized commercial units could productivity be sufficiently increased to pay for the services and consumer goods that are taken for granted by North American households in the 1960s” (1972: 54). It was a political program that modelled itself around a society and culture which justified the expansion of capital’s ownership over the means of production. Men were to be torn from both their customary fishing grounds and the agnatic-kin with whom they fished while women were to be dispossessed of their access to subsistence activities and the ‘crowds’ which surrounded them. Within Smallwood’s call to either “develop or perish” was an image of the ‘modern’ industrial household. The men engaged in steady waged work; the ‘wives and families’ as part time waged labourers and more importantly as new unwaged household labourers.

Where the dilemma of modernizing rural Newfoundland had initially been solved by bringing industrial development and cash incomes to the outports, the problem of expanding this society was solved by bringing people to the ‘growth centers.’ What

stands out most vividly about the resettlement programs – initiated by Acts in 1953 and 1965 – was not the way in which they benefitted the large industrialists at the expense of the outporters’ self-sufficiency, nor the way in which the Smallwood state was able to align these policies within what could be considered the ‘public interest.’ Rather, it is how the enormous transfer in ownership over the ‘means of production’ that occurred during this time led to a corresponding social and cultural shift that led many people themselves to make the decision to ultimately tear up their own roots and leave. It was a “paradox” that emerged within the contradiction between the optimistic narrative which associated industrial and urban development with societal improvement and the social experience of proletarianization which this process entailed. “Paradoxically,” Noel wrote in 1971, “while the widespread introduction of motor cars has made the outports less isolated, it has also tended to erode the old patterns of community life which in the past made the isolation bearable” (1971: 272). It was an “isolation” that must thus be understood socially rather than geographically. “In a certain sense,” Brox argued,

the spatially distant outports on the south coast may be the least isolated because it has the least ties with the urban centers. This may sound like a paradox, but it makes sense. A self-sufficient outport *becomes* isolated if people have to start going out of that settlement to earn money, for shopping, schools, local government, age-mates, and so on (1972: 65-66).

Even as the net of social security achieved in Confederation now guaranteed a basic material welfare that was absent in the past, the process of industrialization and urban growth was often experienced as a decline. It is “the irony of modernization,” Ralph Matthews suggested in reference to an outport community he studied, that “at the very time when life in Small Harbour can at last be said to have a modicum of comfort and ease, many of her residents are tempted to abandon the community” (1977: 45). As the



outport people were united within an industrial mode of production that brought mass production and consumption to their doorsteps, so too did the social and cultural criteria around which they measured their wellbeing begin to align with the values derived from the urban and industrial society. “The new method is a multi-staged process,” Farley Mowat wrote in a 1967 article that sparked the ire and a slew of critical responses from his more optimistic contemporaries. “It is begun by unsettling the mind and distressing the spirit by proclaiming both the real and the supposed advantages of modern living – good communications, medical services, schooling, economic opportunity, better chances for the young; and the less valid seductions of the admass society in all its coloured TV aureole. These things are then denied the people one wishes to dispossess, except in token form, enough to whet their appetites” (Mowat 1967: 50). The more that one becomes reliant on the new workplaces and the new consumption patterns to meet their basic livelihood, the more that the income generated from the old ‘peasant’ activities becomes seen as insufficient. And the more that their daily lives and routines come to be defined by these new workplaces, the more that the old society and culture begins to atrophy. Thus as the material basis from the village household began to drop out, it produced a corresponding social and cultural shift. It was ‘the rising tide of expectations’ as observers came to call it. While often described as a revolutionary force in itself, it was merely the social expression of an incipient proletariat who were in the process of re-adapting and re-organizing their society and culture to match the objectively new economic conditions.

It was this process of dispossession that fuelled the ‘growth’ and ‘success’ of industrial development in Burgeo throughout the 1950s and 1960s. “Along the Sou’ West

Coast ‘moving fever’ implanted and cultured by the Smallwood men, soon began to take effect,” Mowat later observed. “One by one the outports sickened and died. Even in the Burgeo archipelago, where everyone already lived within a four mile radius of everyone else, the fever raged with such fury that in a few years all the off-lying communities had moved to Grandy Island” (Mowat 1972: 28). This was the ‘enthusiasm’ which the people and households of the southwest coast were said to have expressed as they encountered industrial capitalism as a newly dispossessed proletariat. “The people who moved here from the smaller communities,” recounted one person during the strike in 1971,

thought Burgeo was a paradise with all these services, and didn’t complain much about the working conditions.” Heat, light, sewage and even its 12 miles of dirt roads offered new hope for those who had none of these things previously (Mulrooney: 1971).

The more that people were drawn away from the outports, the more that waged work and store bought consumption began to play a central role in meeting their basic material needs. “For a lot of people just having a steady income and employment was something they were content with,” one Burgeo elder recalls now. “Many of them, especially many of the inshore fishermen were coming from a different place from along the coast and were leaving a life they had no means of going back to and no education to be able to move into anything else.” The longer that the acquired skills and equipment required for subsistence and small artisanal commodity production sat rotting in the old outports, the more that waged work became necessary. And with each bout of unemployment – the first occurring with an overproduction ‘crisis’ in 1954-5 that left the Burgeo plant idled and eventually sold to brothers Spencer and Harold Lake – would there also be a corresponding growth from within the class of independent producers of a group who began to show up at the company gates as available ‘hands.’

### 1.7.0. – The “industrial village” of outport Newfoundland: Class

At the bottom of the new division of labour in the industrial village of rural Newfoundland stood a dispossessed labouring poor. The majority of those who formed this group had resettled from elsewhere and in the process had lost their ownership over productive tools and customary common property. “Most of my growing up and my later growing up he was on the draggers,” one Burgeo elder recalls now of his father’s occupation.

That was considered the poor man’s, the everyman, the poor man’s work, and my father and mother never encouraged to go that way, to be a fisherman. But it was something that you had to do if you had nothing else, and you were staying. If you were going to stay in Burgeo, there wasn’t much to do, only work on the fish plant or go on a dragger, or have your own private fishing, small boat fishing, there wasn’t much else to do – a few stores or something like that, but nothing else.

Being often very materially poor in a new world of affluence and dependent on an employment that now fluctuated with markets outside of their control, they turned to the local merchant, politician, or industrialist who promised to buffer them from a downturn in the new economy. It was a political strategy mastered by Smallwood himself, who was able to use the geographical isolation of the outports to strengthen his monopoly over the import of the household’s basic material needs and appeal to the pretence that the new urban and industrial world was best mediated by reference to the familial character of their relationship. “Smallwoodism,” Anthony Cohen wrote, “was neither ideology nor partisan doctrine: it was a movement of the low-income, traditionally deprived, and largely Protestant rural working class, which tied the mythic values of traditional social organization to those of material radicalism. It was a patronal populism in which Smallwood contrived to make himself appear as the only legitimate leader of

Newfoundland, and then use his legitimacy as a valued and scarce resource to create and maintain his power” (Cohen 1975: 25). All along the coasts local power holders were elected to the new town councils and administrative positions by a segment of the proletariat to whom they appealed through a personalized credit-and-debt relationship with which they were all familiar. “It is natural for the traditional community leaders to dominate a community council, particularly during its early years. The merchants are often the only ones with the necessary education, administrative skills and experience to undertake many administrative activities. Moreover, they are probably the only persons with networks to outside governmental agencies” (Matthews 1977: 68). In navigating the new objective conditions and economic structures of the industrial semi-urban village, many turned to the face-to-face relationships with the ‘merchant-behind-the-hardware-store-counter’ to meet their basic needs. “The peasants turned to those who had always aided them,” Sydel Silverman wrote of the Italian village’s incorporation into the national bureaucracy (1965: 180). Through monopolizing connections to the outside world, these class dynamics again generated a patronage politics and quasi-monopolistic ‘industrial village’ in which the merchants-turned-mayors attempted to claim exclusive authority over the administration of the outport people.

Many of the dispossessed may have had a relative who, while beginning to pursue factory work, continued to own a boat and hence a small independent fishing business. While ownership over these productive tools allowed many to “fish to eat” (Sinclair 1984), the direction in these years – through each re-occurring ‘overproduction’ crises that left the plants idle; through each technological innovation in fishing equipment that increased the required initial capital investment; for each net or gear not-so suspiciously

destroyed overnight as the factory trawlers began to ravage the coast; and for each wave of migrants that flooded into an ever shrinking customary fishing ground – was first the commodification of, and then the continual and often incredible de-valuing of the fisher's labour. In fact, in the transition to the industrial mode of production, the small boat inshore fishery can be best thought of as a slightly 'better off' proletariat, one whose ability to mix social welfare benefits with part-time waged work and an additional productive tool of subsistence and small production allowed them to accumulate at a less than petty amount. "Graduating from a self-employed outport fishermen into a small local entrepreneur is, for all practical purposes, a non-existent career opportunity in Newfoundland," Brox noted (1972: 75). Yet it was also from within this group – while most began to merge with the dispossessed – that there emerged an indigenous, accumulating, commercial-fishing petite bourgeoisie. "Home production," Philbrook noted, "was inconsistent with technological innovations. Each of these innovations, while bringing a degree of assurance to the fishing crews, involved more capital investment and this in turn made it necessary for the men to spend more time on their fishing operations and less time on their gardens" (1966: 73). It was those that had the gasoline engines, fibreglassed boats, diesel generators and electric lights or the shelves of their kitchens stocked with rubber boots and canned goods for sale that would be the first to send their children to school outside the village, who would return home as 'skilled' tradesmen. This was the 'skipper' too – the emergent capitalist owner of the commercial fishing boat – who with each new capital investment required for fishing began to stand in greater and greater contrast to a once agnatic-kin based crew-turned-waged sharemen.

And sleeping next to these skippers were skippers of another gender. While the

productive labour of women, organized in the village as garden crews and ‘shore crowds’ was being increasingly drawn under the supervision of the capitalist, they nevertheless formed enough reproductive power to not only cook and clean for the first generation of male factory workers, but also invest in, operate and capitalize on the first kitchen-front merchandising operations, co-operative buying schemes, local fundraising events and artisanal cottage-industries. While the industrialization of rural Newfoundland saw the corresponding withering of the ‘crowds’ generated in women’s pre-industrial productive activities, it was nevertheless these same women, spread beyond the village through exogamous marriage, whose organization as gossip groups, card-playing circles, quilting crowds, potluck networks and other ‘voluntary’ associations would be the basis on which the first councils, boards, committees, chambers, associations, and trade union meetings that the ‘new politics’ of the modern world were organized (Porter: 1986). The first among the first generation of outport Newfoundlanders to be proletarianized, it would be the women too who were the first to adopt the tools and organizational forms of the bourgeoisie. For many of these southwest coast women, their particular political style would be forged from watching and learning from Marie Penny – and later daughter Margaret – the heiress of Ramea – and their long history of aristocratic privilege (Mowat 1983).

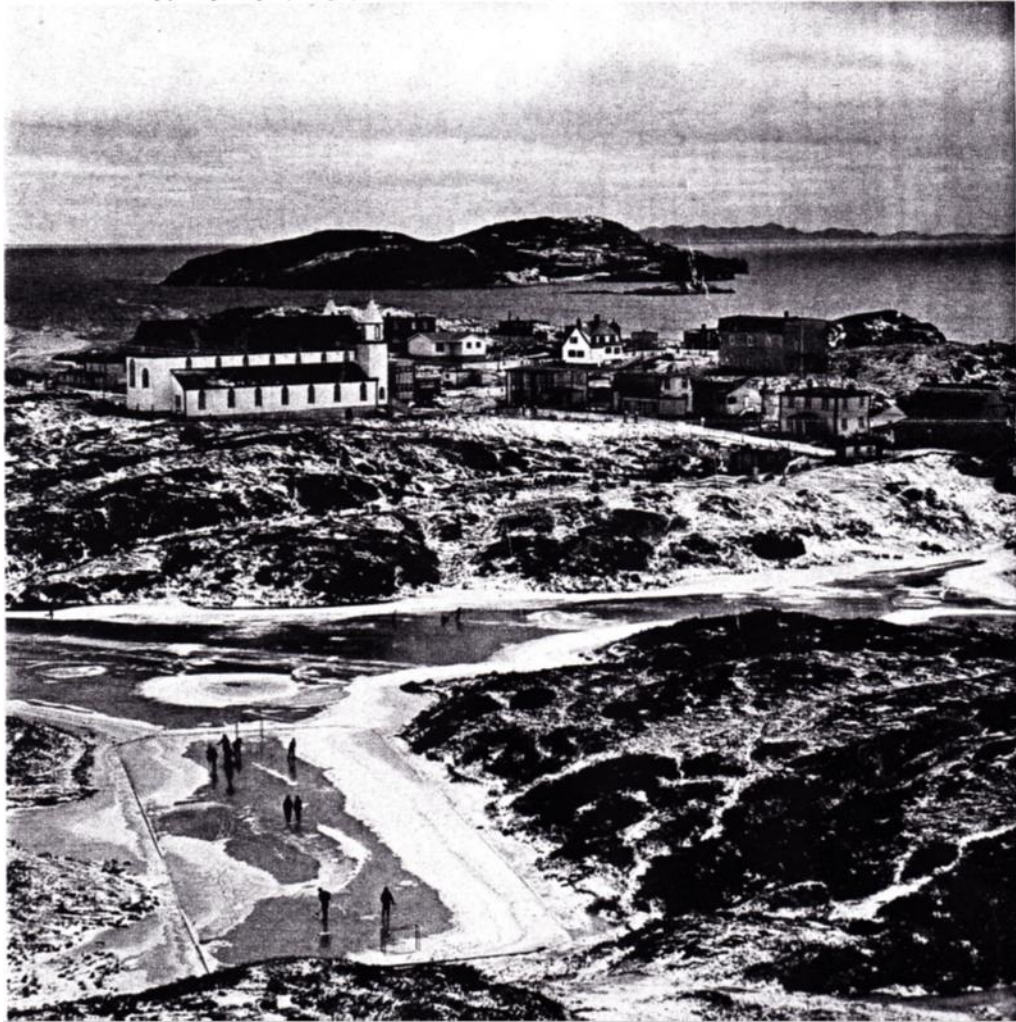


Figure 1.2.0. – Burgeo, circa 1966. *The Atlantic Advocate*

While an indigenous middle-class began to form slowly from within the households who owned a fishing boat or a small shop, there was also a second segment of the ‘middle-class’: those that came from away. This group was largely composed of the civil servants and small independent entrepreneurs, who, while varying greatly in their potential for capital investment, began to form a class with its own ideologies and political organization. “There has emerged in the communities a consciousness of common interest among some businessmen – particularly among those whose commercial careers are directly attributable to the changes which followed from

Confederation,” Cohen wrote (1975: 29). Burgeo’s incorporation as a municipality in 1950 and the establishment throughout these decades of a town council, a Chamber of Commerce, a regional development board, the Lion’s Club and Burgeo’s own premier petite bourgeoisie organization ‘The Sou’ West Club’ are all evidence that a middle-class and their corresponding social and political institutions were in formation. Independent of the old merchant-turned-industrial employer, they established their political legitimacy by drawing on a bourgeois ideology that portrayed the new objective economic structures as best managed through faceless business principles (Cohen: 1975). Appealing to the ‘better off’ fragment of the proletariat – themselves an embryonic bourgeoisie – they began to supplant the ‘traditional’ society and culture of the village household with a myth of individual entrepreneurial achievement that matched the social relations of production required by the industrial and urban world. “The petites bourgeoisie is swarming with innovators,” James Overton wrote of this class’ emergence and effect on the society and culture of the outports. “It invents ideologies, and inspires, supports and implements practically all schools, trends, and movements. In great measure it determines what people think, what is considered good and what is worth stirring for. A supplanting class, it is continually striving to become” (1979: 237). Barricaded behind the secretaries and receptionists of their office and bureaucracy walls, they invented the “community” to which they claimed everyone belonged to, and in the process, gave it an “interest.” As exclusive holders of the ‘rational’ business principles derived from an order that only they had experience with, they used their knowledge of contracts, political organization and practiced signatures to open new channels of capital investment into the outport. For every new job or position that this opened up, so too did they begin to reshape the



outporter's time and social relationship around the regimes which would expand their class' authority.



Figure 1.3.0. – The Burgeo archipelago (Author's photo).

### **1.8.0. – The “industrial village” of rural Newfoundland: Society**

The shifting material basis around which people were organizing themselves to make a living thus produced a corresponding shift in the social and cultural criteria on which people organized their relationships. For a people whose household's autonomy and independence led them to be unaccustomed to a politics speaking on behalf of either themselves and especially others, the introduction by the Smallwood administration of a requirement for 'bona-fied' local representation for everything from the application and

receipt of municipal grants to public services placed the new bourgeoisie, rather than the proletariat, in a 'mediating' position. "It is apparent that two factors of the "new ways" are already disturbing," John Szwed noted in a 1966 ISER ethnography,

the increasing economic and social distance between men has combined with newly instituted "democratic" processes to disrupt the traditional uses of information flow and face-work as defences against dissension (1966: 106).

Alongside the incipient formation of class was thus the corresponding introduction of new administrative and other political units derived from outside the outport. "Both administration and electoral politics created new political units that did not generally coincide with the kindred or with the traditional village," James Scott noted in his analysis of the industrial transformation of south-east Asia (1972a: 103). It was a transition period in which the new objective economic conditions of industrial capitalism created new relationships which found no compatibility with the relationships derived from the village mode of production. With each new council and committee established by municipal and provincial government, so too was the outporter's own administration over the labour process and the redistribution of resources drawn further out of their control.

It was through these politics in which the process of class formation in the industrial village of rural Newfoundland was expressed. "Ordinariness," Anthony Cohen wrote,

was locally expressed in the epithet of the ‘good man,’ applied to those who manifested the diffuse criteria of values on which status was based in traditional community life – neighbourliness; providing well for one’s family; being honest and hardworking; possessing traditional skills or being fairly self-sufficient in such matters as building a house, gathering fuel, fishing and hunting; reticence; and displaying awareness of one’s place in the world by deferring to authority and those in (legitimately) superior positions. It was precisely the hitherto unquestioned integrity of this identity which was challenged by the materialistic ethic which underpinned the rise of the new middle class, and which was expressed in the culturally alien value which informed the presentation styles of the [petites bourgeoisie]. Those fundamental values in accordance with which identity had previously been organized were no longer taken for granted. Now their integrity had to be reaffirmed through their competitive juxtaposition with new values and identities. Worse, not only had they to confront differing values, but they were also repunged by them (Cohen 1977: 130).

The ‘reluctance’ towards entrepreneurial activity characteristic of pre-capitalist societies, the mechanisms of social levelling which ensured a basic material equality, and the reproduction of the ‘social relations of production’ through culture and custom were drawn into a ‘mode of production’ whose new workplaces, consumption patterns and political institutions rejected them. “In all cases, the new entrepreneurs have violated more basic trusts: they have ignored the public imagery of equality. In doing so they have altered the basis upon which their social relations might be created and maintained, and threatened the roots of community as they have traditionally existed” (Szwed 1966: 166). The traits learned as part of growing up in village society, once the measure of survival, prosperity, success, and one’s ‘standard of living’ were now squeezed out as ‘non-marketable’ or ‘redundant’ and replaced by those associated with market society. The labours of the skilled hunter or fisher, gardener or weaver and all those on which village society and culture had been based now had to survive in their new life as a commodity. Where fluctuating world markets de-valued and ultimately made this labour redundant, it disappeared.

The overall result was that the criteria of class derived from the industrial mode of production began to seep into the social and cultural determinants around which people began to relate with one another. To the hundreds of newcomers who flooded into the industrial villages, distinctions based on class, derived from one's level of education, their job status, their welfare status all came to slowly displace the characteristics derived from village society. It was a process that resulted in an emergent "conflict," Wadel wrote, one that

results in a lowering of the collective standard of living in the community. Unemployment affects not only those who become unemployed but it also makes community life unpleasant and problematic for those who work. Men who were previously workmates and/or friends find they cannot talk to each other the way they used to do; former workmates begin avoiding; many men find they can no longer take part in public interaction and use public spaces; and aggressive arguments and "double-talk" increase. All these changes are relevant to the concept, standard of living, although they are not included in the ways standard of living is currently measured in the welfare state (Wadel 1973: 112).

Into the void created by the disintegration of the village mode of production and the society and culture which surrounded it emerged a new society corresponding to the changing social relations of production. "Cyril knew better than I that his father would be redundant in Baleena," Claire Mowat wrote in fictional reference to Burgeo, "His wife would be lonely, and he himself would spend the rest of his life working for Baleena Frozen Fish Products. Yet he believed that his children, by some arcane process called education, would be transported into a brave new world of perpetual school teachers and electric lights" (Mowat 1983: 130). The revolution of the material circumstances of outport Newfoundland was thus matched by a revolution within the societal ideals around which people organized themselves. "Modern men and women," Marshall Berman suggested elsewhere, "must learn to yearn for change: not merely to be open to changes

in their personal and social lives, but positively to demand them, actively seek them out, carry them through. They must learn not to long nostalgically for the “fixed, fast-frozen relationships” or the real or fantasized past, but to delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forwards to future developments in their conditions of life and their relationships with fellow men. ... The humanistic idea of self-development grows out of the emerging reality of bourgeois economic development” (1988: 95-96). The desire for education which emerged during this time, with its possibility for continual refinement, was the social and cultural expression of the structures of bourgeois economic development which themselves demanded continual refinement, revolution and restructuring.

Years later, in 1975, after the strike in Burgeo had run its course, after Smallwood had been voted from office, and when what had happened in rural Newfoundland during the 1950s and 1960s begun to be reflected upon in the midst of the ‘small is beautiful’ revival, a young man from Burgeo wrote his impressions of the social and cultural transformation that he had witnessed in his lifetime in an undergraduate class assignment while at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. “A lot of the tradition and custom is fading from the people and their way of life,” he wrote.

Today people drink liquor instead of spruce beer, they watch TV instead of “yarn”, they go to the store for vegetables instead of to the garden. Most of the outports are taking on the more civilized life style. People associate outport life with a peasant society, this doesn’t appeal to most of us.<sup>10</sup>

The people themselves had come to believe, as A.B. Perlin, then editor of *The Daily*

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Albert Vatcher “Growing up in a typical NFLD Outport Community – Burgeo” Class Assignment submitted November 21<sup>st</sup> 1975 Department of Folklore, MUN. MUNFLA Accession Number 76-186

*News* wrote, that the only “alternative to migration is stagnation” (1967: 81). In the process, the individualization of what had been a collective life was complete.

### **1.9.0. – CONCLUSION: Class and Society**

The passing of control over the work process from the independent labourer to the capitalist during the post-Confederation period was matched by the passing of control over the social relations of production to the capitalists and their administrative institutions. The process of accumulation and dispossession in these decades created a number of different groups of people, all of whom having been born into a one-class society were slow, understandably, to recognize themselves as part of such. Nevertheless, as industrialists emerged within the outports, so too did a rural proletariat. Often having resettled and been stripped of their small peasant ownership, this group had no other choice but to sell their labour to the owner’s factory lines and steel hulled-trawlers in return for access to the means of their livelihood. As civil servants and fishermen likewise began to stock the shelves of their homes with ordinate displays of canned goods and brand-name clothing brought in on the coastal boats and some fishermen became ‘successful’ skippers on government-issued long-liner subsidies, so too did we have the emergence of their clients or ‘employees’ whose meagre paychecks could only pay off last week’s debt and whose wooden boats only grew weaker with each year’s ice. For the fishing households who continued to own their own boats, to hold onto this means of production meant to compete with the steel-hulled draggers and factory freezer trawlers who they watched rip up their small nets over what had become by the mid-1960s a declining resource. And the licence, the quota, the ‘modern’ system which would to them only be the giving up of their customary fishing grounds to the stranger next door with

the bigger boat, would by 1967 be coming into official legal existence.

Yet overtop of these class relationships were understandings of status and position derived from what was essentially a pre-industrial past. Many of these new rural municipalities still existed on a face-to-face basis where one's biography, personality and daily interaction continued to define the relationship which people held with one another. Skills in craftsmanship and subsistence work continued to be valued, and the distinction between "respectable" and "unrespectable" derived from a world of work much older than the factory line continued to shape with whom would and would not associate. Yet as the distinctions derived from the urban world began to gain currency, it was the values of education and employment that became the primary cultural criteria around which people would associate. More and more, class distinctions began to hold a more prominent place in the way people associated with one another and how they defined their household's interests. When confronted with the circumstances of either selling their labour to the new factory owner or leaving the outport altogether, they began to re-adapt themselves, the organization of their time, and their everyday expressions and customs to the new patterns of work and society. "The fish stinks but the money's clean," they told their children as they grew older and approached their first day of work. It was a world in which the wage and monetary employment had not only become a crucial aspect of meeting one's own material needs, but also a key measure in the social and cultural ways that people formed their relationships with one another. When these wage earners would find themselves in a common interest in relation to the capitalist who employed them, they would be well on their way toward forming their own distinct working class politics. It was a story, as we shall see, that 'started in Burgeo.'

“Well working conditions were so that we didn’t know much different, until someone told us:” CAPITAL

## 2

There cannot be any capitalist production without a working class. But there can be, as Marxists have often pointed out in the recent past, capitalism that subsumes pre-capitalist relationships. Under certain conditions, the most feudal system of authority can survive at the heart of the most modern of factories. There is nothing in the logic of the market or profit that guarantees an automatic transformation of individuals into citizens.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1989: xi).

### **2.1.0. – Introduction**

There were few, if any, who could have imagined what Burgeo would look like were it not for the investments of Spencer and Margaret Lake. “The press has an excellent target here to make my father out as some feudal landlord,” Berch Lake explained to a journalist standing outside his family’s horse stable in 1971. “They expect father to come charging through the picket line with riding crop in hand swinging at the strikers” (Mulrooney 1971: 7). Berch’s return to Burgeo had come several weeks into the strike after his father’s persistent shunning of reporters had led to the company’s poor reception in the press. While the striking workers were pointing to the overwhelming arbitrariness of the Lake family’s employment as the primary reason for seeking union



representation, it was this very same position which Spencer Lake explained as demonstrating his family's legitimate standing in Burgeo. "If it weren't for the company, nothing would get done around here," Lake pleaded throughout the strike. "I run the barber shop and subsidize it because nobody else will" (Winsor 1971: 4). For those who lived in the industrial villages of the southwest coast, it was only through the Lake family in which they could transform the fish they harvested or the labour that they sold into the money which they needed to buy the subsistence on which they lived. As long as there remained no alternative economic outlets on which to meet this basic critical need, the Lake family held a power over the local residents derived not only from their position as employers, but as the owners of the means to their entire livelihood.

What allowed the Lakes to reproduce this position of power was the remoteness of the outports where they operated. For every new development since 1949 which had brought Burgeo closer to the services and standards of the Canadian welfare state and the North American consumer world, the Lake family had been able to use their wealth and close connection to Smallwood to monopolize the channels through which it was distributed. "Burgeo, by conventional terms is isolated and just as the sea is the main provider, it is the only highway," journalist Hugh Winsor wrote in his impressions in 1971.

Everyone and everything that comes to Burgeo, from Kleenex to ginger ale, must come to Burgeo over the side of the coastal boat, a fleet of motor vessels the side of overgrown trawlers. Unless you are rich enough or lucky enough to catch one of the float equipped planes that occasionally land on the factory tickle (the term given protected stretched of water between an island and the mainland) or have your own boats like Spencer Lake (Winsor 1971: 4)

It was an economic monopoly whose societal effects were expressed by the "good deal of confusion" that spread across the coast after the Lakes had been forced from town during

the strike. “People don’t know for sure what is going to happen or how much of the Lake interest will be pulled out of the town,” *The Evening Telegram* reported after speaking with town doctor Ann Calder. “She said she feels that some people have not yet fully thought out the implications of a complete pullout by Lake’s interests. ... He was the only major oil distributor in the town and it will be a “very hard winter for many people” if all the Lake interests are pulled out. She said she didn’t think the town would be able to import enough oil to carry on through the winter. In particular, she said, the hospital would be in difficulty without the oil it needs” (ET Nov 20 1971). In a world in which the coastal boats ran only intermittently, and perhaps not at all in the winter, it was through the plant owners’ chartered planes, their office telephones, and their commercial ships in which the households of Burgeo were able to access the goods and services on which they depended. Even if one wanted to appeal to Smallwood himself, it was through the Lake family’s political connections in St. John’s. Without their family’s investments, the Lakes condescendingly explained to those on the picket line and in the press, the goods, services and cash-paying jobs that people had now come to think of as necessary would still be absent from Burgeo, and by extension, much of the southwest coast of Newfoundland.

As long as the Lake family continued to monopolize the channels through which goods and services were distributed, so too did they shape the terms in which they were exchanged. Even as the outport people were being mobilized within an international division of labour that moved them across the continent and back in search of work, the Lake family was able to use the slow, piecemeal progression of rural electrification, road building and general infrastructure throughout the two decades after Confederation as a

political tool to cultivate a society and culture based around their position of ownership. It was a relationship which expressed itself as “propaganda, I would call it,” as a “Mr. Barry” noted to the House of Assembly in 1972. It was one

emanating from the employers side in the Burgeo dispute and that was that the grocery, the Laundromat, and these ancillary industries tied in with this fish plant were being operated as a charity almost. These words were not used, but the impression was given that these were being operated purely as a convenience to the people of Burgeo and at no time until tonight was I ever aware of profit which was being made on these industries. I do not think that there were too many people in Newfoundland who were aware of the amount of profit that was being made in this so-called charitable enterprise. Now I do not want to reopen old wounds and I do not want to try and prolong any rift which has developed in the community or in Newfoundland Labour Relations because of this matter but there are a number of points, and I would ask the committee to bear with me, there are a number of points arising out of this Burgeo dispute which I think are relevant for us to keep in mind, not just in this debate but in our future labour relations policies, for example, and in dealing with similar circumstances, if we are unfortunate enough to have them occur. First of all, the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out I think, put his finger quite rightly on – beyond what was the main fundamental social issue at stake in this labour dispute as far as the employees were concerned and, that is, whether they would permit what they considered a paternalistic approach to business to continue.

As long as the family was able to tie all channels of capital investment together through their own administration, they were able to continually expand the outporter's dependence on them. For the men and women who had become dependent on the Lakes, their access to the goods, services and standard of living which they provided were understood not as a right, but rather as an entitlement which could be revoked at any time.

### **2.2.0. – THEORY: Culture and the Industrial Revolution**

At the core of capitalist society and culture is class struggle. Through the historical process of one class coming to command ownership over the ‘means of production,’ so too does it generate a corresponding struggle among the propertyless

class over the extent to which their labour and all the items which its needs to live can be transformed into commodities. “Where the possibilities of avoiding capital were reduced or eliminated,” Harry Cleaver wrote in his analysis of capital,

the struggle shifted from *whether* the commodity form would be imposed to *how much* it could be imposed. In other words, the new class of workers, unable to avoid all work for capital, nevertheless fought to limit that part of their lives and energies which they had to give up in order to survive. The struggle over how long work would be became central (Cleaver 1979: 86).

Whether this struggle takes the form of a technological or scientific revolution which reduces the need for human labour, new laws or regulations which attempt to codify new arrangements of labour or the corresponding working class struggles for a minimum wage, standards of occupational health and safety or anything commonly associated with the ‘development’ or ‘progress’ of the entirety of human society, all social and societal change reflects the changing dynamic of the struggle over the extent to which human labour and the means upon which it makes a living can be commoditized.

What gives ‘expression’ to this struggle, however, is the social and cultural dynamic upon which work and consumption is organized. Even as a capital-owning bourgeoisie builds an administration in order to recruit labour, set it to work and reproduce its dominance, the negotiation over the terms of this ‘contract’ is made to be political. “In these acts,” Eric Wolf explained in his analysis of the formation of early forms of capitalist ‘management,’

owners carry out operations of a technical order (to use a phrase of Robert Redfield’s) which are still mediated through cultural forms that bear their personal stamp. They involve themselves in relations that carry affect, either positive or negative, in order to underline the dependent position of the labourer in contrast to their own status of dominance. They thus reinforce the managerial relations between the workers and themselves. This hybrid wedding of form and function also characterizes the periodic plantation ceremonies that involve the entire labor force and that serve to underline the role of the plantation owner as a

symbolic “father”, who distributes food and favor to his symbolic children (Wolf 2001: 220).

Whether labeled as ‘culture’, ‘community’, ‘consciousness’ or ‘ideology,’ class struggle and exploitation is never experienced as ‘pure’ but is rather shaped by the social and cultural ideas that are used to articulate and politicize it. “Though control and influence could be exerted by all manner of employers,” Patrick Joyce has noted of the Victorian-era factory in Northern England, “it was the paternalist employer who most successfully translated dependence into deference” (Joyce 1980: xx). It is through the shaping and reproducing of the social relationships which organize production and consumption that culture takes its shape.

If society and culture are the expressions of capitalist relationships, then it is precisely on the grounds of this very same dynamic that the working class forms its own political struggle. By engaging with management through an interpretation of their own codes and regulations, human labour is able to negotiate their access to the ‘means’ of production and the sources of their subsistence. “The workers, in turn, must seek personal relationships with the plantation owners,” Wolf continued.

They will attempt, whenever possible, to translate issues of technical order into personal or moral terms. This they do not because they are incapable of behaving in non-personal terms but because the social system of the old-style plantation forces them to adopt this manner of behaviour. The owners are the sources of their daily bread and of any improvement in their life chances. The owners are thus the only ones capable of reducing the worker’s life risks and materially raising their prospects. The workers therefore address their pleas to the owners, and the culturally sanctioned way to do this is through a ritual pantomime of dependence. ... All of these acts of dependence draw the owners into the workers’ personal debt and surround the technical relationship of masters and dependants with the threads of personalized ritual exchanges. ... this social selection furthers the maintenance of the plantation as a going concern, because it builds up in the labor force general expectations that personal contact with the owner will help ease the burdens of life (Wolf 2001: 221).

While the logic of capital continually moves to ‘grow’ its ownership over the ‘means’ on

which labour is reproduced, so too does it expand the dimensions of working class struggle. “The paternal master was responsible for those who provided him with labour,” Bryan Palmer explained in his analysis of early capitalist employment relations. “If this was believed by those who laboured, it could result in resistance and demand, as well as accommodation” (1992: 42). Whether the language on which these claims are made take the shape of ‘tradition’, ‘custom’, ‘culture’, ‘past practice,’ ‘community,’ ‘rights’ or ‘obligations,’ they form the basis upon which the bourgeoisie portrays its authority as well as that on which the proletariat begins to form its working class politics. “The wage delivered to the worker may be a pittance, but the *patao*’s obligations do not end there,” Nancy Scheper-Hughes wrote of the relationship between Latin American *patrones* relationship and their ‘following’ (1992: 111). In an older language, economic relationships are always ‘embedded’ within a cultural and societal dynamic in which human labour’s incorporation as a commodity within the capitalistic production process is both imposed and contested.

### **2.3.0. – LITERATURE: The making of the ‘Multi-plant Family Firms’<sup>11</sup>**

The enormous transfer of ownership over the means of production within the rural resource extraction areas of the world during the two decades after the Second World War generated a fundamental shift in the relationship between capital and labour. Building off the regional integration made under the pretence of the ‘war effort,’ the North American states continued their project of expansion by directing massive capital expenditures into the construction of an interconnected civil service and rural

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Neis (1988a) has provided the most comprehensive analysis of the capital-labour relationship as it emerged in the industrial villages of the 1950s and 1960s in what she calls the “multi-plant family firm” form of production.

infrastructure (Overton: 1979: 224; Heron and Storey 1986: 19; Bernstein: 2001; Hobsbawm: 1994). In Newfoundland, the project of re-arranging the coastal outpost society around a new economy based around an industrialized supply chain was undertaken by the Smallwood-dominated provincial state and a cohort of four prominent fish-merchant families whom had supported his bid for Confederation in 1949 (Gwyn: 1973). Using two decades worth of transfer payments from the Canadian Federal government, they initiated a series of household resettlement programs, re-training programs and an expanding social welfare system designed to subsidize the formation of a propertyless, corporately-employed, store-shopping rural proletariat (Wright: 2001). Aptly referred to as the “new commercial fish monarchies” by an early provincial Minister of Fisheries, they established their class control through either buying out or taking over the management of every economic opportunity on the coasts and used their connection to the state to expand their ownership over the entire range of activities needed to produce fish from harvest to U.S. distribution (see Inglis: 1985; Neis 1988a: 219). While social-welfare brought a new level of material security to the coastal household, it did so by continually expanding their dependency on industrial employment. The more that fluctuating world markets provided the pretense of initiating another ‘restructuring’ designed to expand this dependence, the more that the lives of the coastal populations became defined by their relationship to the new industrial bourgeoisie.

If it was through the breaking down of the rural artisanal fishing household and re-gearing its productive and consumer activities around mass production and consumption in which the North American capitalist class established itself in the post-

war decades, then it was precisely in relation to these circumstances that the new proletariat began to struggle. For the anthropologists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century who flocked to study the last of the ‘transitioning’ and ‘disappearing’ pre-industrial societies, it was not only the collapsing ties that bound household to mercantile elite, but also the emergence of the new forms of society and culture which accompanied bourgeois economic development. As the planetary wave of capital investment directed into the rural export zones established an interconnected system of civil service and rural infrastructure, so too did the new class of civil servants and government bureaucrats produce a corresponding “erosion of the patron-client bonds” (Scott: 1972b) or an “elimination of mediators” (Silverman: 1965) who had been able to dominate the connections in between their ‘clientele’ and the larger world markets (Hall 1974: 508). For every ‘traditional’ village ‘patron’ whose exclusive authority over the import of goods, information, and administration was broken down by the formation of a new capitalist class, so too was there a corresponding breakdown of the ‘jack-of-all-trades’ fishing household (Wadel 1969: 87; Matthews: 1977). The Newfoundland outport as well, over the two decades after the Second World War, underwent a process of dispossession and proletarian class formation modelled on the idea of the ‘plural’ or ‘complex’ industrial society. It was envisioned to be a new world in which ‘modern’ men and women would be employed by one ‘patron’, buy their goods from stores owned by another, pay taxes to another, receive their social assistance from another, be schooled by another. While the new focus on corporate ‘employment’ and imported store-bought consumption generated a corresponding transformation in the way that the outports spent their time and organized their household relationships, it was on the basis of this very



same capitalist administration that the proletariat would begin to form their working class politics. The more that life became organized around concepts of humanistic self-development, utilitarian organization and the cohesion of corporate employment, so too did one find themselves organized in political opposition to the bourgeoisie.

#### **2.4.0. – The Families of the Firms: Clientage**

The meeting of capital and labour on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, like much of the developing world, thus emerged from within a relationship characteristic of the feudal plantation system. Even as the expanding civil service and coastal boat service was forming alternative channels to outside markets and government financing, the new Lake family's huge capability to mobilize capital investment and their close connection to the Smallwood administration allowed them to simply monopolize this intermediary position themselves. "We did a lot for this town," recalls one person today who was close to Lake and witnessed Burgeo's transformation from outpost to industrial town.

Spencer was always in St. John's, petitioning Joey, whom he was a good personal friend of, to get services for Burgeo. ... He was dictatorial in his methods but he was a fair employer. I remember he couldn't do much about raising wages at the plant, but he did a lot for conditions in town.

Establishing themselves in 1954-5 when the coast was hit with the first major 'crisis' in the industry that left thousands of fishers with no outlet to sell their fish, the new family was able to channel federal development money intended for infrastructure and economic development through their own administration. "He also owns the five side trawlers (draggers to the trade) which supply the bulk of the fish processed in the plant," journalist Hugh Winsor noted on the extent to which this monopoly had reached by 1971. "For the men who do not work on his draggers but scour the sea in their own boats, he is the only

person to buy their fish. If they wish to buy bait, they buy it from Spencer Lake and if they need ice for their catch, it comes from Lake's plant. The fuel from their boats comes from his tanks" (Winsor 1971: 4). As Burgeo was thus becoming a 'beacon' in the 1950s and 1960s as an industrial centre where the 'promises' of the modern world were available, it was through engaging in a relationship to the Lake family in which it was made accessible.

The Lakes not only monopolized the administrative channels between Smallwood and the coast, but through their own investments created their own channels to both induce and provide for new needs. While the emerging small cash stores were dependant on the availability of goods supplied through the coastal boat service, the Lakes used the by-weekly return trip of their refrigerated cargo ship the 'Caribou Reefer' to stock Burgeo with fresh produce from New England, transition Burgeo from coal to oil-powered energy, import a herd of cattle and sheep and build a fully-functioning dairy farm to sell milk around town. It was an expanding monopoly over the means of each household's livelihood that appeared in its most strident form when they built, purportedly by petition of the townspeople, a large supermarket. "And if you spent money, it seemed as if it had to be something that he had his hands in," one local elder recalls today.

He used to have a supermarket, there was a laundromat, a barbershop. You know he owned it all. If you went and got your hair cut, some of the money went back to the Lakes.

From the 'room-and-board' charged to the crews of the offshore draggers to the basic daily food and energy needs of every household, the Lakes used their position of ownership to continually expand each household's dependence on the consumer goods

which only they had the means to provide. When a government plan failed to build sufficient housing for incoming migrants from a recently resettled village, the family “financed these homes and our people are paying them off when they can afford to do so and in amount that make it easy for them to live comfortably meanwhile” (Penny 1967: 77). By monopolizing economic opportunities on the coast – as their own merchant families had done for centuries – the Lake family actively worked to prevent the formation of a competing capitalist class. If one wanted to live in Burgeo, Ramea, or anywhere along the entire southwest coast, then one was bound to enter into some form of dependent exchange with the Lakes.

Yet by monopolizing the distribution of the coast’s basic energy and foods sources, the Lakes also incurred an obligation on themselves. “You know when Lake was in town no one ever had to worry about getting nothing,” one elder who eventually participated in the formation of the union recalls now.

If you needed coal or whatever, you’d just go up to Lake’s store and get some. It didn’t matter if you had money or not, the store would just mark it down. He paid shit wages, and he knew he was going to get it back anyways. ... You know, in the end, I raised 11 kids with Lake in town.

It was an ongoing, lopsided reciprocal relationship that was symbolized and annually reproduced every Christmas by the Lake family’s delivery of a chicken to the house of each employee, the elderly and widowed. “I’ve been with him for 18 years,” one man reported to *The Evening Telegram* after the Lakes had been forced out of town during the strike. “Good as ever you wanted to work for. Every year at Christmas he gave a donation to the old people and the widows. No one suffered. He done just as much for us as he did for his own. We made a living from Lake. Every year he built up the town and it was getting better and better. Now he has left” (ET November 20 1971). Regardless of

whether much of the family's investment was achieved by acting as a simple middleman for the Smallwood administration, the Lakes' ability to monopolize the ownership and distribution of material goods generated a situation in which they were able to seize the opportunity to demand the same debt obligations as if these resources came from nowhere else but their own 'charity' and personal generosity.<sup>12</sup> And it was through engaging, placing demands on, entertaining, giving grace to and working within the boundaries of this personalized 'charitable' relationship that labour could again stake their own countervailing claims. It was, in other words, the way in which the outporters of the early industrial village began to 'make' a world of their own.



Figure 2.1.0 – Burgeo, circa 1970. *Union Forum*

## 2.5.0. – The Firms of the Families: Employment

As purchasing imported consumer goods was becoming crucial to the outport's

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<sup>12</sup> “The social assessment of the nature of the gift is thus crucial” (Scott 1972a: 95).

livelihood, so too did the exchange of labour power for a cash-wage become an integral part of meeting their basic needs. Yet with other economic opportunities being actively prevented, it created a system in which the Lake family was able to use their ownership over the 'means of production' in a way that there was never enough work to accumulate an income that would allow anyone to become independent of their credit. "It wasn't steady work," one townsman recalls now,

it was what you would call part time work, because you were only working when the draggers came in. But that's what people lived off. Low wages and part-time work. And so if you got any money at all it was just barely, you know. So you could actually just work and work and work and end up with nothing at the end of it. A couple of dollars was all you know when you have taxes and that. So it was hardly worth your while to do that. So it was pretty flimsy stuff. But people thought that was fine, that was what everybody was doing. They knew they were poor, but everybody was poor, so what's the difference, it was normal.

To the early ISER studies the large payrolls which were kept by these firms, often totalling over 1200 people for plants whose operation required no more than 200 was taken as evidence of the high turnover rates and the 'labour shortage' problems that the companies themselves proclaimed. This evidence can also be understood as the crucial element of capital's authority and its ability to compel labour under the 'family firm' form of production. "Sure, he can save money, his own people told him that," a 'Peter Simple' wrote in *The Evening Telegram* during the strike. "He could run the filleting machine full time and lay off seven men. (There is another filleting machine on the way and that could mean the laying off of another seven men). Last winter there were five men shovelling snow off the wharf. Said Lake: 'Sure, Nature will do the work tomorrow or the next day, but there is nothing in the plant for those men to do. I could send them home, and save a couple of hours wages on each one; but hell, they have all got families to feed and clothe'" (ET Sept 8 1971). Where the capitalist's authority was over who and

who did not receive employment rather than over the minute details of production, it was akin to keeping a reserve army of labour directly on the company payroll. “Another one of ‘them’ with problems is Gordon Hare who worked on the cutting line,” the *Union Forum* reported during the strike. “Occasionally he would be asked to sail on one of the company trawlers when they found themselves short of deck hands at the last moment before sailing. But the extra money generally meant nothing because at the end of the voyage he would return to find that his job on the cutting line had been taken by someone else. He would then have to wait days and sometimes weeks before being rehired” (UF Aug 1971: 7). Work, in essence, was what Spencer Lake decided to provide.

What gave the early industrial capitalist of rural Newfoundland power, then, was their ability to define the size and shape of the coast’s labour market. By buying out any form of competition, they were able to eliminate any available economic alternatives to their employment. “Just about everybody worked on the fish plant or was connected in some way,” one elder recalls today.

Through the supermarket or through the - whatever. And that’s the way it was, that’s just the way it was. People had a respect of and a fear for Spencer Lake and they wouldn’t cross him and if they did, from what I know, from what I heard, they never got to work there again.

Bound into a system of favouritism in which one “spent a lifetime ingratiating favours” (Thompson 1974: 384), a “kind of bartering for existence” (Scheper-Hughes 1992: 111), the wage in the early industrial village of rural Newfoundland became not payment in itself, but rather a token of the ongoing relationship with the factory owner. “Before the union came in, if there was anybody in this town who wanted to work, they could work,” one townsman recalls today. “You’d go up and they would find something for you to do.

If it wasn't something on the fish plant, then it was delivering groceries around town or something like that. If you worked hard and didn't goof off, you would be okay. It was the only way to put money in our pocket." It was a relationship that, even now, is remembered by the sentiment in which employment was provided as a 'gift' to each household. "In the best years," one woman remembers today, "when the plant was working at its peak, the men didn't have to leave to work anymore, they could stay in Burgeo year round to work." The more that they became dependent on the Lakes' consumer goods, the more that the authority over the outporter's time and the formation of their social relationships came under the capitalist's control.

If it was the outport's dependence that gave the Lake family their power, then it was the ability of the household to turn elsewhere in covering a portion of its own consumption costs that again created a space for autonomy. This was the subsistence, task-oriented, state-subsidized 'peasant' activities and labour of the village household which had yet to be completely enclosed by the 'anti-poaching' laws, regulations and licensing of the capitalist state. "Instead of furthering the urbanization and mobilization of the labour force, the professed goal," Ottar Brox wrote in 1972 of the household cash subsidize and public services which had been invested into the outports since Confederation,

public money had been used to help rural people protect their independence, economic adaptation, and culture in general (1972: 56-7).

In a society in transition, before the trade unions, self-help groups and political parties developed among the proletariat to stake claims against the bourgeoisie through their own forms of 'civil' politics, it was these 'primitive' forms of disengagement that shaped the

struggle between capital and labour. “The people of the coves are not to be deprived so easily,” Mowat wrote of the moose and caribou kills that were hauled into Burgeo right past the RCMP detachment under the cover of night. And “the merchants note with disgust that for the next few weeks the housewives show remarkably little interest in purchasing salt beef or pork” (Mowat: 1968). It was a world of work that was in decline, already being regulated to ‘sport.’ Yet it is also evidence of an autonomy from capital that was nevertheless alive and in operation in the early industrial village of rural Newfoundland. Most importantly, it provided the material basis for partially turning one’s back – ‘resisting’ – the discipline imposed by the capitalist. It was this autonomy, as we shall see, that hindered an attempt by a group in Burgeo – lasting throughout the entire second half of the 1950s – to form a plantworkers’ trade union with its forms of class solidarity and social organization characteristic more of bourgeois society than peasant society. Yet it was also this autonomy, if we can delve into speculation, that was pro-active in its own defense as far back as 1942. It was then, on the annual Christmas bonfire night ritual in Burgeo, that the first factory ship came burning down to the bottom of the harbour in an act shrouded in anonymity. Left behind, preserved in full view well above the water line to this day, is the ship’s hull and stem. If we can go one step further, these remains have served as a warning – for Arthur Munroe in the 1940s to the Lakes in the 1950s and 60s to National Sea in the 1970s and 80s to Bill Barry today – and for all ye’ capitalists who have dared tried to over-appendage the village household’s time and labour to their work regimes.





Figure 2.2.0. – “It’s Freshest When Frozen” Harold Lake Fonds, Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

## 2.6.0. – The making of the patron-client society in the industrial village

For the early industrial village of rural Newfoundland, it was through these ‘familial’ appeals in which the ‘social relations of production’ were expressed. By extending their credit to over 300 kilometers of coastline, Spencer and Margaret Lake presented themselves as the personification of capital investment. “I consider it my duty,” Spencer Lake explained in 1971,

to try and keep these places going, three of them on this coast, to provide boats, to bring in fish and provide work for the people. This has been my duty and my job and I’ve done it so far pretty successfully. The people here were very happy

and peaceful as far as I know. There is complete prosperity here. No welfare and no unemployment (Winsor: 1971).

It was a portrayal of class superiority that permeated into every ‘realm’ of society and culture in Burgeo. “Even in the school,” one elder recalls today, “I remember Spencer Lake came to the school as a guest speaker and he spoke of, you know, of life and that, but he spoke down to everybody, he really did, and referred at one point to the people of Burgeo as ‘my people.’ *That*, I remember him saying. ‘I want my people’ to do this or that. You know, if you come to work for me, I want ‘my people’ to do this or that.” The outporters were, in other words, made to see, feel and continually experience their class subordination. As with other places in rural Newfoundland, Burgeo’s emergent class structure contained two ‘aristocratic’-type families: the merchants-turned-industrialists and the doctor. “Both,” according to Mowat’s observations,

were united in their determination to impose the social standards of country gentlefolk on the Burgeo background, and they competed mercilessly for top billing, using the tools of conspicuous consumption. Thus when the doctors bought a jet-propelled speedboat which would do thirty knots, the plant owner responded by purchasing a cabin cruiser of regal splendor. It was an unfair competition. The doctors, as salaried employees of the Provincial Health Service, had to make-do on a fixed income not much in excess of \$35,000.00 a year, but this was a pittance compared to the income the plant owner and his wife drew from their several enterprises. The competition also had its ludicrous side; one which was not lost on the people of Burgeo. When the doctor went equestrian and imported two riding horses, the plant family riposted by buying four thoroughbreds. The doctors met this challenge by bringing in two more horses *and* a Shetland pony. The plant owner’s reply was to import *four* more horses ... and a Mexican burro. Then, to settle matters for good, he added a brace of Peruvian Llamas! (Mowat 1972: 39-40)

It was a relationship in which the Lakes, and no one else, had the investments, the money, the knowledge, the connections, the equipment and the sophisticated tastes which could bring social improvement to the coast. And every day that the new labourers of the industrial village made their way back up the Lake-built road, past the Lake-built mansion to the employment that the Lakes provided – and away from the insecurity of an

old mode of production that could no longer provide – did they begin to renew the security that a reciprocal relationship with “Uncle Spence,” however uneven, could provide.

Class struggle, in essence, became expressed within and circumscribed by the boundaries established by a language of familial patronage. Expanding across the entire southwest coast was a chain of ‘managers’ whose position inbetween the local workforce and the Lake family placed them in a privileged position of authority. “The older employees of the Gaultois plant are thoroughly familiar with our Managing Director Mr. Spencer Lake who has on many occasions visited here and knows just about as many of you by your first names as I do” announced the Gaultois plant manager to an assembly of his employees in 1969.

This is not usual in operations of this size.

It can only happen in a private company where the owner, besides taking an interest in his own business, takes a personal interest in the people who operate it for him.

I would like to point out to some of our younger and newer employees that this personal interest also extends to them, and that in time, if they are as loyal as the old timers have been, they will reap the same benefits.

In closing I should point out that I am fully aware of the unsettling presence of outside union organizers, who will attempt to warp your thinking.

I shall also point out that they were not here yesterday to provide you with Jobs – nor can they, or will they, provide them in the future. I must add that this is extremely upsetting to management as Mr. Lake pointed out in his October visit, and continues to be of great concern to the Directors, who discussed it at some length at our meetings and asked me to communicate their concern to you.

Thank you very much, and my very best wishes for the year ahead.

P.S. At this point I got carried away and delivered a short lecture on the fact that if Lawrence Mahoney had a right to try and sway them towards union, I had a right to protect my efforts of seventeen years to improve their living conditions, and advised them AGAINST ill-considered action which might leave the

waterfront deserted, and the community out of work, etc etc.<sup>13</sup>

Etcetera. With the ability to instantaneously shift production to any of their ‘multiple-plants’ along the coast, the Lakes judiciously cultivated an overwhelming social and cultural portrayal of their power. “Fear,” Hugh Winsor wrote in 1971, “of being fired or fear that an owner will close the plant down are effective sanctions in a village where there is no alternative employer or market for your fish. It means the fish plant tells the fisherman what it will pay for his fish, when it will buy them, and what fish he must throw away because it doesn’t suit the plant to process them. It means disadvantage” (Winsor 1971: 3). With the camera turned out towards the water, an anonymous group of pickets captured off-screen during the strike spoke candidly to a CBC reporter about why they believed Lake had been able to reproduce his power for so long. “Fear” they responded. “Fear that the plant will close. He made us believe that no one else there could run the plant but Mr. Lake” (CBC Sept 1971). Even as many of them began to stand shoulder to shoulder working the factory and draggers lines, it was the power of the Lake family’s ability to magnify their economic power into the consciousness of the people on the coast that reproduced the dynamics of their rule. “Well working conditions were so that we didn’t know much different, until someone told us,” Louis Hann, president of the local Burgeo union told reporters during the strike (CBC Sept 1971). Deference, in essence, is the social expression of a relationship in which the ruling class’ control over employment and material goods is ‘absolute.’ Challenging the Lakes’ authority was made to be seen as challenging one’s own access to the very resources which they provided.

If labour recruitment in the early industrial village of rural Newfoundland took on

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<sup>13</sup> “Burgeo Plant managers meeting” 1969. Harold Lake Fonds Series 2.02.159. Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

the shape of a paternal clientage network, then it was also the space provided by these networks which established the limits to the Lakes' authority. Precisely because the new industrial owners relied upon a cohort of local leaders embedded within kin and household networks to delegate the organization of work, it was these same networks that allowed the outporters a degree of autonomy in organizing their own work schedules, creating rules around access to subsistence resources, and generally to contest the extent to which the Lakes could govern their time and social relationships. "Preferential treatment, high levels of worker control over organization and content of work, and some worker control over the employment relations in those jobs where new workers had to learn the job from others already there, were part of workers notions of fair treatment," Barbara Neis wrote of the 'family firms.'

There was an overlap between worker's status in the plant, their relationship to management, and their ties to other workers and to their families. This overlap could interfere with efforts on the part of management to adopt new strategies for control, or to tighten control along other dimensions through deskilling and job fragmentation (Neis 1988a: 165)

This was the stuff that made up the first generation of Newfoundland factory worker's ideas of 'rights', 'freedoms' and notions of justice and fairness. "Well working conditions were pretty good, we never had any trouble," recalled Percy Stone, one of Lake's foremen. "In fact our workers – well they never see much of Mr. Lake. But on the whole, you know, I think the labourers were kind of happy, because, you know, if they wanted a day off they got their holidays, if they wanted to go moose hunting when moose hunting time come they went! – They got their time off" (CBC Sept 1971). Through the familial appeal to Spencer Lake and the 'inherent' bonds formed through agnatic-kinship was a set of standardized claims, contractual obligations and grievance procedures established

in the early industrial village of rural Newfoundland. “All those houses up there were for his managers,” one man recalls today of the spatial chain of command which nucleated from the Lakes’ manorial compound near the factory. “They liked the Lakes. A lot of their kids are named after the Lakes. Spencer for the boys. The girls were Penny, Maggie. They liked them.” The more that one expressed and appeased to the familial connection to the Lakes – i.e. the naming of their children – could the new labourers also cultivate and place their own demands back on the Lake family. It formed a ‘moral economy’ of sorts. For if the early industrial plant owner was to express their authority by emphasizing labour’s mutual interest in contributing to the ‘family firm’s’ success, than they had better acknowledge and concede the legitimacy of labour’s claim that the Lakes serve as ‘god-parents’ to their own children. To not give fair consideration to the privileges associated with this status would risk breaching the perceived legitimacy and sanctity of the very same ‘familial’ hierarchies upon which the Lakes expressed their own authority.



Figure 2.3.0. – The Lakes. Private Collection

### **2.7.0. – The erosion of the patron-client society in the industrial village**

What most seriously threatened Spencer and Margaret Lake's power – along with all 'traditional patrons' – was the formation of capital outside of their authority. While the emergence of a petite bourgeoisie after Confederation was noted for other regions of rural Newfoundland, the Lakes' monopolization of investment on the southwest coast had in effect prevented the formation of this class. "Once I wanted to open a restaurant but I had to make an application to council before they would let me," one small entrepreneur who had attempted to expand his taxi service explained to the press during the 1971 strike. "Lake was the mayor and he didn't like me so my application was turned down. Just because he did not want me to open it, that is the only reason" (ET Nov 20 1971). It was not only the indigenous class of emergent small shopkeepers and petty entrepreneurs who found themselves unable to operate outside of Lake's purview, but competing big businesses in Burgeo: National Sea's jointly-owned herring-reduction plant, Irving's oil distribution as well as the various construction firms that invested in outport infrastructure development after Confederation. "Several men claimed" alluding to its longstanding practice,

that the wages paid by contractors were made to correspond with those paid in the fish plant. One man said that in order to get a higher hourly rate he was credited with extra hours of work so that his per-hour rate would not be out of line with the fish plant (UF 1970: 5).

When those from this new entrepreneurial class began to start their own local political associations – the Chambers of Commerce, the town councils, the Regional Development associations, the Lion's Clubs and Burgeo's own Sou'West Club – they represented new

organizational channels that the Lakes had to either dominate or lose their monopoly. “They were interested in everything,” one elder recalls today. “Spencer Lake had an interest in everything. Mostly commercial and economic, but the whole development of the town. You could do pretty much what you liked, he was never against anything, so long as he was boss.” While Margaret controlled the re-distribution of municipal surplus through her chairmanship of the Library Board, the Recreation Committee and various other boards and committees (Mowat 1983), Spencer joined his position as town mayor together with his position as the supermarket and factory owner. “Lake came around to the plant one day,” one elder recalls today, “and put a full stop to both cutting lines where the day shift was working and announced to everyone that if you were working at his plant, then he felt that it was right that you buy your groceries at his store.” As long as the Lakes remained at the top of a tributary chain of surplus, they were able to prevent the formation of an indigenous middle class and recreate each household’s dependency on the goods and services that only they had the means to supply. Where ‘leakage’ occurred, the society around it began to crumble as well.

The security of their monopoly began to unravel as independent ‘outsiders’ began to use old institutional gathering places as sites for organizing the new working class. As the Smallwood Liberals were in the process of losing 7 of the province’s 8 seats in Pierre Trudeau’s 1968 Federal Parliament, so too was Burgeo witnessing the arrival of Joe Burke, a young minister with the United Church who like many ministers of the time period, began to agitate. Even while Lake paid for his weekly grocery and accommodation costs, Burke founded the *Burgeo Lamplighter*, Burgeo’s first newspaper, geared the local development association towards empowering the workforce, and



through his influence in the church, began to break the ‘isolation’ of the coast. “The supermarket prices were quickly reduced,” one journalist recounted during the 1971 strike,

when a mimeographed newspaper run by a local minister conducted a survey which showed that prices were substantially cheaper in an outport a few miles away (Winsor: 1971: 4).

Being progressively dragged into the political arena by competing fragments of the bourgeoisie, the process had begun whereby the proletariat would begin to articulate an image of themselves as a class. Subjected to participation in competitive elections, dealing with civil servants, attendance at council meetings and the odd trade union meeting, they began to adopt the tools of the bourgeoisie for their own use – the newspaper, the survey, the petition. And with each new channel to the consumer goods of the outside world that was either opened or blocked, Spencer Lake’s monopoly became only more apparent. “The Monday morning there was a bonus, too, for an increase in all wages of all Lake employees – 10 cents an hour – giving theoretically the women in the plant \$1.26 and the men now employed \$1.60 a hour. The same day the price on stove oil, sold by the Lake company, rose from 30 cents to 37 cents a gallon” (Mulrooney 1971: 6). If these developments ‘crept in’ to Burgeo during the 1960s, they exploded during the 1971 strike. “Another dragger man has a different view of Spencer Lake, calling him ‘one son of a bitch.’ He said the company deducts \$90 a month meal allowance from the total wages which leaves the men with very little take home money. He said in one month, he wound up owing Burgeo Fish Industries Ltd. \$10 after deductions” (ET November 20 1971). For all who would look, the slow, ‘stagnant’, formation of accumulation in the outport would begin to provide them with the tools in

which to identify a class relationship which they had perhaps been able to only feel all along. With the right leadership, the union organizer invited in to speak by Minister Burke would tell them, the strategic necessity of organizing their power at the point of production would become apparent as well.

By 1971, with the road connecting the south-west coast to the Trans-Canada highway still only a dream, the people of Burgeo continued to exist in a state of material dependency. Yet what struck commentators during the strike most vividly was the society that had developed around the dependency. “The isolation is primarily psychological,” Hugh Winsor wrote during the strike, “it is impossible in Burgeo to get away from the influence of Lake and there is little denying that his entrepreneurial initiative is responsible for almost everything of significance in the town” (Winsor 1971: 4). Nathan Greene, the Nova Scotian judge who was assigned to conduct the industrial inquiry after the strike had reached an impasse wrote that “The Commission is therefore left in the position where it must make its assessment on this “relationship” and the influence of the Lake family on the community...”

One can only conclude that this influence was deep rooted and extensive possibly to a degree where employees probably did not express their support for the union for fear that such expression might or would invoke the displeasure of Mr. Lake and whatever the consequences of that might be, whether real or imagined. The intrusion of a union into this state of affairs constitutes a threat to Mr. Lake’s achievement and his influence on the community. And in no uncertain terms he made it clear that there was not room enough for he and a union in any business of his; nor would he allow another operator to come into Burgeo unless he had part of the action and it was on his terms (Greene 1971: 13).

Even now, the details still roll freely. “Spencer Lake owned the town, not like literally, but pretty much. He owned it. If he was still here, Sandbanks wouldn't be a public park.

He would have put a fence around the whole thing and kept it for riding his horses and grazing his sheep." For Lake, it was 'his' people as well. "And he knew it. He knew he had that power, people shitting their pants when he walked by. He had the power and the control of everybody there and he knew it."<sup>14</sup> As long as one remained dependant on the material goods provided exclusively by the Lakes, the forms of 'absolute' authority which they commanded remained as well. For one who thought of challenging this authority, it was made to represent not only a threat to their own household, but for all households in the industrial village. For most, this kind of challenge simply remained outside of their household's interest. There was room for negotiation, but it was on the terms in which Lake accepted.

### **2.8.0. – CONCLUSION: Accumulation and the Social Relations of Production**

What *made* Burgeo a "community" in the 1950s and 1960s was the relationship that bound each household to Spencer and Margaret Lake. There is no doubt that the family's initiatives throughout these decades transformed Burgeo into a 'town' whose level of available goods and services was unparalleled in a similarly remote outport at the time. Yet in doing so, they also incurred a debt that was also perhaps unparalleled elsewhere in Newfoundland. By commanding exclusive access to the distribution of resources, the Lakes cultivated an authority based around a unique, personalized and 'dyadic' relationship to each household. With each of these bargains wrapped up in multiple exchanges, it did not allow elements such as the wage, the pay for fish or any other to create a uniform measure on which 'they' – the new labouring proletariat – could

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<sup>14</sup> Interviews conducted in St. John's and Burgeo in 2012.

evaluate their position in relation to the Lakes. In the early industrial villages of rural Newfoundland capital and labour thus thrust upon each other a human relationship, complete with a series of mutual obligations and requirements in a carefully kept notebook of uneven reciprocity that provided the social boundaries which no side could breach without violating their own legitimacy. In doing so, the familial character of class struggle impeded the development of the impersonality, egotistical calculation and other elements of capitalistic managerial control. Yet it also prevented the emergence of a class consciousness among workers. What remained good for Burgeo, in essence, was what was good for Spencer Lake.

If it was in reference to the success of the family's firm that the paternal employer made claims on labour, it was this very same medium which also provided the basis for labour's claims against capital. In the first instance the new labourers of the industrial village of rural Newfoundland would struggle with the tools that they knew best. This was the world in which access to subsistence provided for a household's autonomy against capital and where the ties of kinship established 'seniority' on the production line. They would, however, begin to soon furnish the very tools which the bourgeoisie employed – the political pressure group, the cooperative enterprise, the trade union – and the lawyers and priests who would unite their claims into an ever-widening coalition. While it was precisely these 'politicians' whose 'politics' were part of the legal superstructure that acted to both dispossess them from the old world of work in the village and circumscribe their ability to participate as equals in the 'democratic process' of the new, it would be these very same methods that, with time, would become weapons for their own use. "Smallwood the modernizer fell victim to the modernized" wrote Peter

## CAPITAL

Neary. The process in which this began to take its ultimate shape was first forged on Spencer Lake, and for those who would subsequently organize themselves in a similar fashion, they would look to what ‘started in Burgeo.’

“Every fisherman is a tradesman. And you’ve got to get that into your skulls tonight:”  
LABOUR

## 3

The first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committee in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well.

E.P. Thompson (1967: 66).

### **3.1.0. – Introduction**

There had been, in fact, one previous attempt to organize a trade union in Burgeo. The year was 1955 and Spencer Lake, having just purchased the idle plant from Fisheries Products Limited with a substantial provincial loan had just moved into town. Cyril Strong, a union organizer working for the Canadian Labour Congress who had been involved in organizing fishplant worker unions since the late 1940s had just returned from helping a group of workers organize at the nearby southwest coast plant in Isle-aux-Morts. “Word of this must have spread further east on the coast, because I received a call from Burgeo indicating that the workers there were also interested in unionizing” (1987: 89). On October 5th, 1955 the first union meeting in Burgeo was held. Of the 160

employees listed on the payroll, 134 signed union cards and an executive committee was formed. This began, at what would become a critical juncture in Burgeo's post-Confederation history, the first attempt by people in the outport to unite with outside assistance in order to unionize the rapidly changing workplaces of rural Newfoundland. In its ultimate defeat, it also became a crucial event that shaped the character of capital's authority as industry emerged and expanded throughout Newfoundland's outports during the post-Confederation decades.

Dragged through the legal procedures of the Smallwood administration and ultimately crushed by the Lake family, this first attempt at unionizing is significant for the way in which it illustrates how effectively capital and state contained working class struggle during the two decades after the Second World War. While trying to persuade management to meet, Strong recalled that Spencer Lake "immediately took exception" to the idea of a union being formed in Burgeo. Finding himself faced against a co-ordinated effort by the entire Lake management team across the southwest coast, there was little that Strong could do to organize on a plant-by-plant basis. When Spencer Lake issued an ultimatum that the workers either forfeit their attempt to organize a union or have his company shut down the operations in Burgeo within twenty-four hours, support immediately collapsed. "I subsequently found out that the workers had been influenced in their decision by the actions of the company. To make their threat realistic the company had diverted their draggers to other plants and had given a month's notice lay-off to the monthly-paid people, foremen, superintendents, office staff, etc" (1987: 90). At the speed of the diverted draggers, Lake issued a threat not only to everyone in Burgeo but to the entire southwest coast. It was, merely months after Lake had moved into Burgeo a

precedent setting event that established the economic sanctions that would shape ruling class authority and the character of employment relations in the early industrial outposts of Newfoundland for the next decade and a half.

The idea of forming a union as a way to gain a degree of working class control within the new industrial workplaces, despite Lake's pressure, nevertheless persisted. Much of Smallwood's political platform for Confederation had been based on his credentials with the labour movement. Now, in the early 1950s, it was to the labour movement that thousands of Newfoundland's new labourers were thus turning. "We felt that the Premier was a friend of labour and because of this Burgeo had voted for his government. Simultaneously the government had made a significant loan to the company and was therefore unlikely to allow management to close the plant because the workers had formed a union" (1987: 90). On this assumption the group in Burgeo attempted a second certification vote in April 1956. After legal wrangling within the parent labour congress deferred the vote count until the next year, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1957, 153 workers in the Burgeo plant were officially certified by the Newfoundland Labour Relations Board as General Workers Union, Local 1523 of the Canadian Labour Congress. With the assistance of a provincial mediator, contract negotiations began during the last week of May 1957 but resulted in an agreement that offered no increase in wages, no additional benefits and no real recognition on the part of Lake to work with the union. When the contract expired one year later in the spring of 1959 and the union determined to press for increased recognition before the opening of the spring fishing season, "Spencer Lake's only response when the union's contract demands were being read into the record was a series of nos" (UF Aug 1971: 5). With Strong growing suspicious that Smallwood had



brokered a deal with Spencer's brother Harold in St. John's to guarantee that the provincially-appointed mediator would side against the union, the workers were forced to either concede their union demands or use a strike to force the company into a compromise. "The members were loath to take such action, however, and I was loath to urge them to do so," Strong recalled.

First there was the isolation, a lonely settlement on a rock-bound coast with communication with other places only by boat. Then there was the community interest. Quite a few members of the community were fishermen, fishing from small boats and selling their catches to the plant. A strike would affect the fishermen as well as the plant workers and they were all inter-related. Added to this the plant workers had lost their leader. He had quit his job at the plant and had gone back fishing. ... I had little inclination to recommend that the union members take strike action. It would be difficult to hurt the company; for it could and would send catches of its deep-sea fishing boats to other plants and Burgeo would literally be left striking against itself (1987: 92-93).

It was this "community interest" – combined with Lake's appeal to the Smallwood state – that made 1959 a year of defeat for the workers of Burgeo. While a Labour Relations Act passed in 1950 had institutionalized trade union activity in Newfoundland, the continued 'persistence' of small independent fishing households in the outports existing alongside the new factory proletariat resulted in a working class formation that had little or no united 'consciousness' in relation to Spencer Lake. "Burgeo was not ready for them yet," one local elder recalls now. "It was a tough job to start unionizing the fish plant workers in Newfoundland and fishermen in Newfoundland. That was a monumental task that took more than what two local fisherman could handle. ... it couldn't succeed. There was just as many, there was more people against the union than there was for it. Because nobody, I know my parents, they didn't like the union organizers who were trying to organize at the time because they were afraid. Spencer Lake would fire anybody who they thought, he thought, was trying to organize a union. He had it in his mind that he wasn't going to

work with a union. No way. So, you know, nobody wanted to lose their job. You know, and they had a liking for Spencer Lake, some people hated him of course, for his dictatorial ways, but I think they were a minority. He had a lot of respect. ... You needed more than just a will. You needed more than what these guys had. You needed the know-how, of how to legally set up a union, from an organizational point of view. And you needed the communication skills to rally the crowd, make speeches in front of crowds, and make sense of it. To have people admire what you were saying, George Rose and Ward Coley couldn't do that. They were just two strong willed people who would have liked very much to do it. They didn't have enough."

While the idea of forming a union would live on as an aspiration, a precedent, an ideal and a method in which the new labourers of the industrial village could organize, the largely unsung and unnoticed collapse of the union attempt in 1959 made way for the rise and establishment of the "new commercial fish monarchies." Through their alliance with the Smallwood state, these new industrial bourgeoisie built a frozen fish empire and created the conditions of 'underdevelopment' that sent whatever open and organized political confrontation between those who owned the means of production and those who laboured to a quiet, fragmented and inarticulate grumble that would remain largely outside the historical record until late in 1970. It was only then, after years of scattered and localized struggles that died out as soon as they flared up, that a campaign starting with a small group of independent fishers in Port-aux-Choix, using as their weapon a challenge to the laws which defined their relationship to the plant-owners, would morph into a movement that would unite the various categories of workers in the fishing industry and the outport in general into a common coalition.

### **3.2.0. –THEORY: The Labour Movement and the Industrial Revolution**

The historical struggle whereby the new labourers of the industrial world come to reorganize around their perceived common interest in relation to capital is always conditioned by the uneven development of capitalist expansion. “Even in cases where a rural proletarian community may appear to consist entirely of landless, wage-earning, store-buying and, corporately-employed agricultural workers,” Sidney Mintz noted in his discussion of the formation of proletarian consciousness, “many of its members may come from families that are or were landholders and/or sharecroppers, while others may combine their wage-earning activities with other adaptations of a ‘peasant-like’ kind” (1974: 300). Capitalist expansion, drawing its working class from within the class of small independent producers, from who it also often contracts out work, results in a ‘labouring’ population at various stages on the continuum from small ‘peasant’ ownership to dispossessed proletariat. Correspondingly, even as the capitalist mode of production becomes dominant, the continuing availability of non-industrial productive activities as well as the social relationships which surround them hinder the emergence of a distinctly ‘proletarian’ or ‘working class’ consciousness.

Where industrial waged labour has not yet become a ‘way of life’, so to speak, neither can the institutions, organizations, social devices and forms of class solidarity associated with bourgeois society and the industrial ‘labour’ movement correspondingly emerge. Even as the scattered, independent ‘peasant’ households of the pre-industrial mode of production are united into a common position by virtue of their relationship to the new industrialists, it is the ‘remnants’ of the social organization derived from the

older world of work that continues to shape their political orientation. “The peasants are not united by working in big enterprises,” Lenin noted in his analysis of the development of Russian capitalism. “On the contrary, they are disunited by their small, individual farming. Unlike the workers, they do not see before them an open, obvious, single enemy in the person of the capitalist. They are themselves to a certain extent masters and proprietors” (Lenin 1978: 44). For those who are not united in collectivized waged-labour or commercial production as their primary means of earning a livelihood, they therefore develop none of the relationships that place them in a collective opposition to capital. “The predominance of pre-bourgeois relationship seriously affected those workers in respect of their capacity to constitute themselves into a class by developing the necessary kinds of solidarity, organization and consciousness,” Chakrabarty has noted in his analysis of early industrial transformations. “The trade union, properly conceived, is thus a bourgeois democratic organization and is organized in the image of the bourgeois-democratic government” (1989). Their political movements remain ‘primitive’ in the language of the old social historians, geared more towards protecting their own small ‘peasant’ property against the threat of proletarianization and avoiding the ‘democratic’ decisions imposed by larger groups.

The politics which emerges within regions in which small producers continue to exist alongside a dispossessed proletariat or working class is therefore rooted in ‘populism’ rather than a distinctly class-based politics. “In areas where the working class is politically underdeveloped and small,” James Overton has noted,

the lessons of the working class movement are not part of the agenda for those wishing to alter society. In such situations it is quite common for a kind of populism to be developed in an effort to mobilize other social groups – the

unemployed, small producers, rural inhabitant, and other underprivileged and dissatisfied sections of the population – in order to try and alter society (1979: 242).

Where there exists neither a unifying labouring experience and hence no corresponding political organization, what joins these class ‘fragments’ together is the appeal to ‘popular’ politics. “The very ambiguity of many people’s experience as labour,” Patrick Joyce wrote of the industrial transformation of northern England “of being a worker by hand and for wages yet having a great deal in common with others who were not – surely made for the successful appeal of notions like ‘the people’ which often depended upon just such sorts of ambiguity” (1991: 6). It is thus ‘populism’ – often through a political leadership that portrays itself in the image and style of the old patron elite– as much as a distinctly ‘working class’-based politics on which movements in ‘underdeveloped’ regions emerge. It is, in a sense, a political dimension to class struggle that can act to paper over the differences or conflicts between materially different labouring populations and allow for alliances to be made, which, at least on the surface, are believed to serve all of their interests. It is also in the varying class interests of these movements, however, that both limit their revolutionary potential and provide the fault lines where they tend to fragment.

### **3.3.0. – LITERATURE: The making and unmaking of the ‘post-war settlement’**

There was something of Newfoundland’s colonial history incorporated into the logic and planning of the island’s mid-twentieth century industrial transformation. While large organizing drives from the 1940s onwards funded by the expanding American Federation of Labour had matched every expansion of the new industrial fish plant

workforce (Gillespie 1986; Strong 1987; Cullum 2003), the Smallwood administration's adoption of a version of the 'post-war settlement' – a series of legal concessions between capital and labour intended to maintain the kind of peaceful productivity embraced across North America – created new restrictions around who and what was considered 'legal' union activity (Palmer 1992; Heron and Story 1986). Combined with Smallwood's highly publicized 1959 attack on the I.W.A. in which he 'legislated out of existence' a democratically established trade union among the island's loggers, further technicalities put in place by the 1950 Labour Relations Act created classifications that spliced a relatively homogenous outport population into technically distinct and differentiated 'occupations.' By labelling small fish harvesters as 'independents', the outport households that continued to fish were prohibited from engaging with unions or organizing to bargain collectively over the price paid for the fish they sold. For the people being funneled into the offshore trawler fishery, their legal status as 'co-ventures' similarly prohibited them from forming unions and locked them into a dubious system of payment that derived from a share of the often uneven and irregular catches (Inglis: 1986). This was added to a general regime of new legal technicalities and a willfully neglectful state that left many of the new fish companies of the 1950s and 1960s to be generally free to operate without union representation among its workers (Neis: 1988a).

The result of the development of North American labour legislation during this time period was the creation of certain protected trades, particularly in urban heavy industry in the Great Lakes region that were able to enjoy workplace control and a standard of living that rose in conjunction with the expanding productivity of the burgeoning U.S. market. Supporting this growth, however, were those who were

excluded from this ‘settlement’ by the actions of these very same unions. On a planetary scale, these workers were located in the ‘underdeveloped’ regions, the ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ whose semi- and fully proletarianized labour was mobilized to harvest, prepare and transport the basic raw materials that bolstered the growth of the major manufacturing ‘cores’ and the American standard of living. Tens of thousands of Newfoundlanders, incorporated very near to if not at the bottom of the international division of labour since the early 1800s as a class of petty commodity producers were now being reincorporated into the capitalist economy as a new industrial proletariat. Set into the context of the ‘multi-plant family firms’ like those that arose in the industrial villages of the southwest coast, it was a regime in which the threat of strikes, slow-downs, and other autonomous working class action were made to pose little, if any major threat to the overall system of accumulation (Neis 1988a: Appendix B). Through their differentiated legal and cultural status, the outport Newfoundlander remained an outsider looking in at the prosperity of the ‘golden age’ achieved by those who benefitted from the ‘settlement.’<sup>15</sup>

If it was the political regimes associated with the ‘post-war settlement’ that had created a series of exclusions on which accumulation throughout these decades had been based, what was occurring by the end of the 1960s was the push by the excluded for inclusion. Where the struggles of working people during the 1930s and 1940s had been activated by the political language associated with socialism, the legalization of trade unions in the 1940s, combined with the anti-communist purges of the 1950s had led to

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<sup>15</sup> Philbrook (1966) even describes the social and cultural ‘traits’ and ‘characteristics’ that were relied upon to differentiate outport Newfoundlanders from ‘mainland’ skilled tradesmen and management personnel and hence place them into a low-paid proletariat in the various mining and construction operations that appeared on the island during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

the discrediting of this language as a popular tool of working class solidarity. As the upwardly mobile ‘white’ working class who had benefitted from the ‘settlement’ began to ‘boom’ and perceive themselves as a new ‘middle class’, the movement of that portion of the proletariat purposefully excluded from the postwar bargain began to coalesce around the politics of the very language which was used to exclude them – and hence formed the civil rights movement. It was “a time when the limitations of the labor unions had become dreadfully apparent,” Michael Honey wrote, “as the older generation of white union leaders held on to power and often stifled the initiatives of others. In this climate, unions desperately needed the link to the moral agenda of the larger civil rights movement” (1999: 237). There thus emerged a movement from within the trade union movement itself – a “wild-cat fever” whose only expression was deemed ‘illegal’ – that joined youthful baby-boomers from across the excluded proletarian populations with middle-class activists into a planetary movement that identified itself into opposition to the legal, civil and moralistic restrictions imposed on them by the state, their employers, their distant union leaders, and their parents. “The revolt of the young within unions thus had a profound impact on class relations in the mid-1960s” Bryan Palmer has written.

It not only upped the level and nature of conflict with employers; it also threatened the capacity of the state to contain struggles within respected boundaries of legalism and industrial pluralism. Finally, it rocked the boat of trade unionism itself. For youthful rebels had none of the political baggage of the older labour movement leaders: they had not experienced the anti-communist purges of the 1950s; cultivated no intense loyalties to a layer of social democratic trade union officials; and had not, for the most part, known the difficult, insecure, and often violent vindictive times of the Great Depression, and before, to which their fathers and mothers had a more organic connection through family or direct experience (2009: 218).

From the student-led campus revolts spread a movement that initiated a cycle of struggle which united the proletariat across the boundaries, borders, ideologies, rules and



expectations which the ruling class had placed on them. “Many of these so-called quickie strikes, lasting days or merely hours, represented effective guerilla tactics against the ponderous bureaucracy of Canadian industrial relations,” Peter McNinnis has written. “What ... labour executives failed to understand was that a substantial cross-section of their membership had come to interpret industrial relations procedures as less a bulwark for basic union rights and more as an impediment to the effective application of workers’ self-determination. The system of Canadian labour relations was not the solution to the problem – it was the problem” (2012: 157-159). In Newfoundland, as elsewhere, after twenty-five years of legislation that had granted a degree of upward social mobility for some while explicitly placing legal restrictions that excluded others, it was this new call for ‘civil rights’ that began to shape the political dynamic of class struggle.

#### **3.4.0. – The Newfoundland ‘fisherman’s union:’ Breaking the ‘settlement’**

It was precisely in relation to the legal and civil legislation which circumscribed the relationship between the rural Newfoundlander and the owners of fish companies on which the Northern Fishermen’s Union (NFU) was formed in 1969. The 1968 drop in world fish prices had been handled by the Canadian federal government by bailing out the major processing companies while leaving the small harvesters and plantworkers to bear their own costs of the low prices and lost wages. While this had led to a corresponding surge in the number of plantworkers joining the Canadian Food and Allied Workers, a Toronto and Chicago based meat-packers union who had been organizing fish plants in Newfoundland since 1967 (and would acrimoniously merge with the NFU in 1970 to form the Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union (NFFAWU)), the

laws which prohibited small harvesters from bargaining collectively over the price of fish gave them no legal recourse of protest. The story of the NFFAWU begins in this context, when, in a small schoolroom in Port-aux-Choix on the northern peninsula of the island a group of these independent fishers – together with their Catholic parish priest Desmond McGrath and soon joined by St. John’s lawyer and Liberal politician Richard Cashin – began a movement to unite Newfoundland’s independent fishers behind a political challenge to these legal prohibitions (Inglis: 1986). With British Columbia having just waived its similar clauses, Smallwood responded to the organization’s rapid spread over 1970 by announcing in January of 1971 the formation of a committee headed by a Earl Winsor who would be responsible for travelling to Norway and making recommendations for the establishment of a new pricing system. The announcement began a series of comparisons in the daily newspapers between the centrally organized Norwegian model and Newfoundland’s scattered industry. “There is no real concert of interests. From the large companies that operate trawlers and processing plants to the wholly self-employed fishermen, individualism prevails,” one commentary wrote (DN Jan 25 1971). Another noted that:

Every company that operates draggers and processing plants and every fishermen who owns a longliner is today a law unto himself. There is no overall plan (DN Jan 11 1971).

These portrayals were reflective of the way in which the outport’s labour and resources had over the past twenty years been incorporated in a piecemeal fashion as branch-plant “supply-zones” for the U.S. market. The model pioneered by Arthur Munroe and followed by Spencer Lake and others after the Second World War was to derive as much profit by harvesting and preparing fish products at minimal cost in Newfoundland before

sending them to unionized plants in New England to be finished and marketed (Neis 1988a). With Smallwood's relatively unfettered granting of Federal transfer payments to finance these operations, there emerged no real focus on developing any type of long-term plans for sustainability or social benefit for Newfoundland (Wright 2001). It was rather one in which the coasts of Newfoundland still represented a rural 'hinterland' in which the labour and resources were hyper exploited by the new industrialists in order to maximize their profit to the fullest extent allowed by law. With a the state willfully preventing the formation of labour organizations and the 'multi-plant' family firms able to enforce their own regimes on the remote coasts, the outport Newfoundlander continued to remain shut out from the rising 'standard of living' being achieved by workers elsewhere.

It was not only the 'hinterland' status that was brought up by the announcement of the Winsor Commission's formation in early 1971, but also the society and culture that was believed to have accompanied it. The renewed potential for Newfoundland's scattered outport fishers to organize into a common organization drew out the vernacular portrayals of the household mode of production. "They were, and still are, a selfish and self-centered lot," Wick Collins wrote in *The Evening Telegram*

too concerned with their own problems to combine in a strong union to fight a common battle for the good of all fishermen. After centuries of what chroniclers are fond of calling rugged individualism the fishermen are so pig headed and suspicious of each other that they are unable to agree even on things which are in their best interest (MacDonald 1971)

These were the "itinerant" (Neary 1973: 113) workers of early industrial Newfoundland, who, faced with unreliable industrial employment and a fluctuating world market for their staple product, had remained as pre-disposed to 'troutin,' hunting, gathering and

joining together subsistence activities and social relationships centered around the village household as much as they were oriented towards the discipline of steady waged-labour or collectivised commercial fish harvesting. Comments such as these published in *The Evening Telegram* were the language for describing a mode of production that did not bring the outport households into mutual interaction with one another and describing a society where, like other early industrial populations, “the incipient awareness of belonging to a class remained a prisoner of his pre-capitalist culture; the class identity of the worker could never be distilled out of the pre-capitalist identities that arose from the relationships he had been born into” (Chakrabarty 1989: 218). Even as industrialization and urbanization was uniting thousands as a factory-working, commercial fishing and store-buying proletarian class, it was the persistence of the social relationships rooted in the small-boat village fishery and the household unit of production and consumption that – reinforced by the new state-subsidies – remained crucial to their own material and social reproduction. “What Earl Winsor will find is that Norway has a nationalized fish industry in which all participants co-operate to obtain maximum benefits. In this province any attempt to apply Norwegian methods is likely to crumble before the rugged individualism that remains one of our dominant traits” (ET Jan 11 1971). It remained a “dual” or “plural” economy in the early characterizations of the ISER observers in the 1960s, in which the seasonal, migratory and shifting occupational structure of the rural population provided at best a weak basis for the shared work experience which could unite outport people in a common political consciousness in which they saw themselves as ‘labourers’ in opposition to ‘capitalists.’

It was these very same characteristics, while often rooted in the cultural ‘traits’

derived from the village mode of production, that were also being identified as being part of the laws and regulations of the capitalist state. “This notion is an old one,” one commentator attacked.

Fishermen were considered ‘independent’ businessmen, and as such, in equal partnership with owners and buyers. But through this ‘co-adventurers’ idea the fisherman has lost – he had not been free nor independent but had only been degraded to a position of third-class citizenry, tied to a system of debt which produced a loss of dignity and dependence on the benevolence and hand-outs from the governments and owners which he supports (Mulrooney 1971a).

From this perspective, it was not the historic reluctance of the fisherfolk to take leadership positions, their ‘individuality’ or their inability to see or act in their best interests as a class, but rather the way in which the state had circumscribed their relationship to owners and buyers. “There is no trade union activity among the trawler crews,” Ottar Brox wrote in the late 1960s, “and the illusion is cherished that deep-sea fishermen are ‘self-employed;’ that is, they are paid according to the catches they land. ... The prices used in calculating the crewman’s earnings are totally fictitious, as we are concerned with dealings between different departments of the same corporation” (1972: 46). If the buyer’s class and their allies in government thus benefitted from the relationship established through their legislative classifications, then it was precisely around this legislation which the ‘fishermen’ could now rally. “Now in relation to the dragger fishery,” Kevin Condon, a future convert to the union wrote in 1968, “we still appear to be in the slave age. Any dragger captain can work his crew 20 hours a day, and then, if they get tired and refuse to work he can bring them ashore and have them convicted. ... There is only one group of people who can put an end to this disgraceful situation and that is the fishermen themselves. A very effective way would be to form a strong union. It would require 100 per cent effort on the part of all the fishermen, not a

quarter, not one half, but all of them” (ET Feb 16 1968). The more that the ‘historic traits’ of the outport household were identified as being rooted within the relationship between buyer and seller, capital and labour, the more that became seen as a part of a set of rules and regulations that were ‘repressive’ and hence open to change. Given the proper ingredients, as authors such as Ian MacDonald were writing in the then recently revived Coaker-era newspaper the *Fisherman’s Advocate*, and as others at the *St. John’s Alternate Press* were enthusiastically reporting on, the fishers could unite, as they had before, in a common alliance. Long an ‘independent’, the fishers were thus on their way to becoming a collective class actor.

### **3.5.0. – Civil Rights: Re-Making the ‘Settlement’**

The civil rights movement, or more specifically the struggle to redefine the legal boundaries which fragmented and circumscribed the ability of ‘labour’ to unify and act as a class in relation to ‘capital’ had a profound impact on the development of the trade union movement in Newfoundland. While the demand for union representation in the 1950s – when the first Burgeo attempt was occurring – still often revolved around calls to socialism, what animated attempts in the late 1960s was the emergent ‘rights’ movement. “There can be no doubt,” an editorial in *The Evening Telegram* wrote in response to the NFFAWU’s formation,

about the right of fishermen, whether working in trawlers or smallboats, and fish plant workers, whether in Burgeo, Burin or anywhere else to form a union and to bargain with their employers or the buyers of their fish over wages, prices and other issues. The surprising thing about the present situation is that it has been so long delayed, and that the first working agreement covering trawler fishermen was not signed until October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1970. One might have expected it at least 20 years earlier (ET Nov 11 1970).

And it was precisely in the ambiguity of the concept of ‘fisherman’ to apply to trawler-workers, small boat fishers, or even plantworkers that gave it the broad ‘popular’ appeal. “Even in the most urbanized segments of the society,” Gordon Inglis later wrote, “the historic sense of Newfoundland as a fishing nation was a focal point of cultural identity. ... It is also important to recall here that the NFFAWU never lost its popular designation as ‘the fishermen’s union,’ in spite of the central role of plant workers in its structure. It is the fishermen who triggers the public imagination” (1986: 296). The more that the civil and legal framework that shaped the experience of those who worked in rural Newfoundland was identified, the more that their position could be aligned with the ‘wretched’ populations elsewhere whose struggles had pushed the Civil Rights movement forward. What was once identified as a cultural ‘trait’ that prevented their collective power was reversed to provide the very political program on which they now rallied.

What gave the new ‘fisherman’s’ union its momentum was the broader movement of the rural proletariat in Newfoundland. While the extension of the civil service to the outports after Confederation had fostered the emergence of corresponding ‘modern’ representative institutions: municipal governments, regional associations and other organizations which purported to ‘represent’ the outport population to the central government, Smallwood’s continued authority over these bodies into the 1960s had led to the proletariat forming their own political ‘channels.’ “The Subterranean Political Movement is boring through to the surface” wrote Ron Crocker and Randy Joyce in the Memorial University student newspaper *The Muse*. While still as scattered and disconnected as were the outports, what united this upsurge of spontaneously-organized protests, anti-resettlement campaigns, ‘wildcat’ strikes, tie-ups, demonstrations, leafleting

campaigns and other collective actions was their common element of all “working outside the existing political power structure to achieve their political ends” (Joyce & Crocker 1970: 20). By being progressively mobilized over the past two and a half decades as a factory-working, store-shopping, election voting, union meeting attending, petition-signing proletariat, the old ‘peasant’ fishing households of the outports had begun to adopt the political tools of the bourgeoisie. It now formed a politics, as a hysterical Newfoundland Board of Trade complained, that was focusing its attack on the inequality established by the legal and political boundaries of the ‘post-war settlement.’ “Although Federal labour legislation affects only a comparatively small number of workers in this Province,”

it has created unrest by setting up pockets of employees who receive wages and working conditions well beyond the capacity of most private companies or even the Provincial Government to pay and by imposing working conditions on private companies coming under Federal labour jurisdiction which is economically impossible for them to live with and which has or will put them out of business. An example of this is the devastating effect of the Canada Labour Standards Code on the Newfoundland shipping industry, re 40 hours work per week plus overtime not exceeding 8 hours. ... Yours is not an easy task, Sir, and your most difficult problem will be to balance the tide of rising expectations among workers at every level of work in the Province with the harsh realities of our economic fact (Russell 1969).

Emerging from within the groups who had been excluded from the ‘post-war settlement’ was a movement now driven by “a desire for a fair slice of whatever riches a society had and the longing for some say in how that society is run” (Joyce & Crocker 1970: 21). While the early formation of these actions was defined by what can be described as ‘inarticulate,’ ‘primitive’, particular in character and spontaneous rather than sustained, it was nevertheless “these developments,” David MacDonald later wrote, that “served to create an embryonic political consciousness in the outports, a development which neither Smallwoodism nor the new middle class politics could foster or stem” (1979: 43). When



a portion of the bourgeoisie began to break away from the ruling class, lending their skills of leadership, legal articulation, priestly legitimacy and political organization, what had been scattered, spontaneous and often ‘illegal’ protest actions would begin to merge into a movement that would begin to find its way into corporate boardrooms, Royal Commissions, the newspapers, the streets of St. John’s, ‘public opinion’ and ultimately the provincial legislature.

Many of these outporters had found their new-found political voices in interaction with the organized labour movement. While an organization of independent fishers had existed since 1951 when Smallwood created the Newfoundland Federation of Fishermen, with neither the power to bargain collectively over the price of fish or operate autonomously from the government, the Federation’s critics began to argue that its only purpose was to claim organizational jurisdiction over fishers. “The federation was never really a union ... it was more of a club,” Desmond McGrath was quoted as saying as the union campaign was gaining traction. “We want fishermen recognized as tradesmen ... and to restore the dignity of fishermen ... we’ve had whole locals (of the federation) come over lock, stock and barrel” (ET Nov 10 1970). This joining together of an inherent ‘rights’ movement with demands for trade union representation became popularized at the founding convention of the newly merged Northern Fisherman’s Union (NFU) and the Canadian Food and Allied Workers (CFAW) in April of 1971. While questions continued to circulate as to whether plant workers, trawlermen, and ‘independent’ fishers could be suitably accommodated under one organization, what made the headlines was when Smallwood, addressing the convention, delivered a speech that left it uncertain whether or not the law would be changed to allow for fishers to organize in time for the

upcoming season. On his way out of the convention, he was confronted and blocked at the doorway by a fisherman purportedly twice his size named Woodrow Philpott. “Are we going to get bargaining rights or not? Why can’t you be clear?” Philpott was recorded as saying. “The premier, obviously perturbed, retorted, “It’s not up to me. It’s up to the committee we set up to study the matter” (AP May 1971). It was a moment, as records of the time period suggest, that illustrates the way in which the civil rights movement had become intertwined with demands for union representation. “The incident typifies a great change which has occurred within the last year,” the *St. John’s Alternate Press* reported.

Barely a year ago the organizing for the union of fishermen and plant workers in the province began. Disgruntled fishermen now called for answers and action to their problems and were willing to ask for them. ... it signalled that there is a voice speaking up, that will be heard. He was speaking for many hundreds of the island’s fishermen, a voice, when united, which cannot be denied or ignored by fish plant owners and buyers, nor by the provincial and federal politicians (AP May 1971).

The politics of class struggle had thus coalesced around the struggle for civil rights. In the conference rooms, the newspapers, and in the parish halls of the isolated outposts a coalition was in formation that was bringing together the independent fishing households and their plant-working and trawler-crewing kin in a common campaign for the recognition of the legal rights and standards associated with a trade. “The fisherman or plant worker who joins the new union will no longer be an isolated individual left to fight for his rights all alone” called out the NFFAWU (UF Nov 1970). The more that they began to learn about the ‘historic disadvantage’ that circumscribed their relationship to the owners, the more that the opportunity presented to them by union organizers began to resemble “a vision,” as Michael Honey called it, “of what might be called civil rights unionism, a unionism engaged simultaneously with striking for decent jobs and equal political and legal rights” (1999: 237). And it was precisely in the ambiguity of what

could truly constitute a ‘fishermen’ that gave these early pleas a ‘popular’ appeal. For the shifting occupational structure of the rural Newfoundlander, migrating between jobs, work, ‘trades’ and regions as opportunity arose, the divisions that had been made through the legal technicalities associated with the ‘settlement’ were less a reflection of their true household strategies than it was a regime imposed on them ‘from above’ that had the effect of devaluing all of their labour. The more that their experience was identified as part of a system of ‘man-made’ legislation, this legislation became there to, if anything, be transcended and remade on behalf of the ‘rights’ of those who laboured.



Figure 3.1.0. – ‘Fishermen’ circa 1969-1971 (Gordon Inglis 1985)

### **3.6.0. – “What do you call a fisherman”: The new ‘settlement’**

The political push for the inclusion of ‘fishermen’ into the categories and

characterization of a ‘trade’ represented the breaking down of the old settlement on which accumulation had been based over the past twenty years. Yet with none of the wage, benefits, hours and working condition relationships typically negotiated through a ‘collective bargain,’ the proposal to organize ‘fishermen’ into a common organization – not to mention alongside the other inter-related ‘trades’ of the industry – raised a number of technical problems. “A union,” *The Evening Telegram* reported on Gus Etchegary’s submissions to the Commission on behalf of the industry, “if that is what is involved, under a collective agreement must be able to bind its members to do certain things at certain times and under certain conditions in return for what the members gain under the agreement. ... it is difficult to imagine inshore fishermen binding themselves to produce fish and carry out their time honoured independent operations in ways determined by a contract” (DN Apr 17 1971). It was a complication that was noted as well in the diversity of what could even be considered a ‘fisherman.’ “One of the main points to look at would be the large variety of fisherman,” the industry later reported,

- trapmen, longliner operators, men who fish for specific types such as cod, family operators, small-boat operators with a few hired hands, full-time and part time fisherman and the fact that some fisherman put a great deal of importance on unemployment insurance while other do not. Also considered should be the fact that fisherman, possibly 60 percent, sell their catches to middle men who truck the fish to plant and could sell to as many as three different buyers a week (ET April 19 1971).

There was, simply, no unified ‘collectivity’ on which a ‘bargain’ or ‘trade’ could be established. It was a concern voiced by the representatives of the “fishermen” as well, who argued that a ‘union’ would give one organization exclusive power to determine who would be covered within the ‘collectivity’ of the new ‘bargain.’ “Every fishermen in Newfoundland should have the right to become a member of the union of his choice,” Pat Antle, president of the Newfoundland Federation of Fishermen wrote in his submissions

to the Committee (ET Apr 22 1971). While his position may have been motivated by an attempt to regain jurisdiction over a membership that he was clearly losing, these words nevertheless point to the interests of those class ‘fragments’ who would not fit the criteria of the new ‘collective’ that the union was now pressing forward.

The solution lay, essentially, in drafting a new ‘settlement’ defined by a specific definition of what constituted a ‘fisherman.’ “One touchy matter confronting the Select Committee was how to define the word fishermen,” *The Evening Telegram* reported.

In its organization meetings – at the district level, the fishermen’s union had suggested a restriction on the number of men engaged in commercial fishing. Some fishermen had asked, for instance, that old age pensioners and those receiving social welfare or regular unemployment insurance (fishermen receive seasonal unemployment) be barred from fishing, so as to make the operation more attractive for men solely depended on it for a livelihood (DN May 21 1971).

Throughout the 1970s the union and the federal government would jointly pursue the limited-entry ‘licensing’ and ‘quota’ schemes that would push those who did not fit the criteria of a “full-time” fisher out of the industry. “Fishing is often combined on a part-time and/or seasonal basis, with other occupations” David MacDonald later wrote. “Clearly it was an easier task for the union to obtain the mandate of a majority of professional commercial fishermen (however defined) than would be the case if occasional or part time fishermen were included in the bargaining unit” (MacDonald 1979: 52). It was an emerging ‘post-post-war settlement’ in which the breakdown and disorganization of one particular regime of accumulation was at the same time the corresponding formation of a new regime of accumulation.

Regardless of the particular class interests that were being lined up behind the NFFAWU, it was the ‘popular’ thrust of the campaign that remained its driving force.

Legislative amendments removing the prohibition against collective organization and bargaining were passed on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1971, just three days before the plantworker's strike in Burgeo broke out, and was accompanied by a number of long, drawn out self-congratulatory speeches from members of the House of Assembly. Smallwood declared it to be his "second proudest" moment in politics after that of Confederation. While the particularities of the new amendment and the political struggle over how to define a 'fisherman' would be put on hold over the next three years as the NFFAWU's activities were drawn into the strike in Burgeo and after that towards standardizing plant workers' conditions across the island, by the mid-1970s, the Newfoundland Federation of Fishermen had withered away and the new union had emerged as the sole representatives of 'fishermen' on the island. While the debates captured by the Winsor Commission would begin to be defined by new events and new actors, there is perhaps one quote from *The Evening Telegram* in late 1970 which captures the enthusiasm of the time period that allowed the nuances of the class structure of outport Newfoundland to be papered over. "We can foresee many difficulties in the attempt to cover inshore fishermen, trawler fishermen, boat owners, sharemen and plant workers all in the one union," *The Evening Telegram's* collective editorial board wrote.

There are clear conflicts of interest, and grave dangers facing the new union being organized by Mr. Richard Cashin and Father Desmond McGrath; but there can be no doubt about its moral and legal right to proceed in the direction it has – that of organizing an effective and active bargaining agent for those employed in the lower levels of the industry (ET Nov 11 1970).

What the speculated effect on these "lower levels" would be was not mentioned. And neither would the union, in its blanket statements of the 'inshore' fishery distinguish this either. Rather, over the next decade they would press the class structure of rural

Newfoundland into a model which fit the ‘labour’ movement. “Outports, classlike in some respects in the context of merchant capital, are being dragged willy-nilly into a modern class system, whether or not the residents are yet factory workers,” one observer noted fifteen years later, as this process, only beginning to take shape in 1971 and in no way certain, had become established. “And the fishermen’s own efforts at unionization have contributed to this process” (Sider 1986: 181). When the fight with Spencer Lake began, it was this class of modern ‘near-shore’ radar-equipped, fish-finder spotting, hydraulic-reeling, longliner-owners whose distance from the ‘owners’ of true wooden 17-25 foot small-boat inshore fishery was still relatively slight. By the end of the 1970s the boats that would be defined as the ‘inshore’ fishery would have tripled in size (Fairley 1985). And as their initial capital investment, distance capability and harvesting returns increased, so too did the distance expand between an ever-shrinking class of union-represented small-capitalist ‘skippers’ and the ever-increasing dispossessed crewmen that they employed. “Limited entry achieves the enclosure of the resources and its subsequent redistributions into the hands of the select few,” one commentator wrote on the process of licensing that, while beginning in 1967, took off after 1973 (Street 2010). It was only with the union’s help that the final nail was placed in the coffin of the ‘jack-of-all-trades’ outport Newfoundlander. For those that would remain in the industry, the new categories of the bourgeoisie would demand that they become ‘professionals.’ For those that were excluded in the new settlement, they would become ‘sharemen’, plantworkers, or would be forced out of the outport or island altogether to pursue a ‘trade’ elsewhere. They had finally become, much through their own initiative – and to the extent that Smallwood, Parzival Copes and all the early apologists of ‘modernity’ could have only dreamed of –

‘occupationally specific.’

This, however, is a story that would take the next decade and a host of new events that had yet to unfold in order to occur. At the beginning of 1971, when the campaign to press for the legal and civil rights for independent fishers, and when Spencer and Margaret Lake’s hostile refusal to recognize even the plant workers’ union extended the same issue to every trade involved in the fishery and every Newfoundlander, it was the breaking down of the exclusions captured in the old ‘post-war settlement’ that remained the driving political force. “The reforms needed must not only be related to the social and economic conditions which are peculiar to Newfoundland and Labrador but must have as its objective the attainment for Newfoundlanders of the quality of life to which they are entitled as Canadian and world citizens,” the Newfoundland Federation of Labour wrote in its submissions to the Commission on Labour Legislation formed in 1972.

Too often in the past the cry in this Province has been that our people must preserve their heritage or hardship and rugged individualism in order to remain true Newfoundlanders. This subtle appeal to patriotic loyalty was effective in the past to such a degree that the rest of Canada is often referred to by most of our people as that faceless blob of geography – “the mainland”. The psychological isolation thus produced enabled the ruling authority to project an image of itself as the sole provider of the social benefits which accrued to Newfoundlanders by virtue of their being Canadian citizens (1972).

It was a “psychological isolation” that, despite its power to reproduce itself over these years, had been breaking down for decades. It was a movement documented by Cyril Strong who, when organizing plant-worker unions in mid-1950s, came across a sociological dilemma rooted in the discrepancy between the society and culture of a pre-industrial people and the political and legal structures demanded by the emergent



bourgeois society. “Following the AFL-CIO merger headquarters installed an auditing system for handling local union accounts. This required each local union to list the name of each member on its monthly report to headquarters. In complying with this, it was the initial listing which gave the most trouble, particularly for Burin Local 24560. The system required that each member have two initials. We discovered that most of the members had registered only one initial with the local. To contact the over 400 members would take months and we had to get out a membership report within a week or so. To solve the problem, we gave a second initial to each member without one. The choice of initial was based on the cove or village where the member resided so that all the members who came from a particular area got the letter assigned to that area. The plant obtained its work force from many coves or villages, so that we almost ran out of letters. We learned afterwards that many of those whom we christened with a second initial adopted it as part of their name” (1987: 74-75). The people of outport Newfoundland, over the relatively short historical process of being mobilized as an industrial proletariat, had come to re-organize and re-adapt themselves – and their ‘names’ – to the strictures and political-legal systems of the new bourgeoisie society that confronted them. And by taking this step forward, occurring over a period of twenty five years from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1960s, they had come to recognize themselves as part of a wider working class and international proletariat whose standards and conditions could no longer be denied to them by any law or any man. To demand or accept anything less would be nothing less than a denial of their dignity.

### **3.7.0. – Conclusion: The working class and the labour movement**

The ‘revolutionary consciousness’ located within the formative period of the ‘baby-boom’ generation was part of a much larger planetary alignment of class struggle that reached an apogee at the end of the 1960s. This was a “cycle of struggle” in which the ideals and ideas sparked by the student revolts circulated the Atlantic World and eventually spread to the working class and other proletarian population who drew inspiration and an incipient reform-oriented bourgeois leadership through which they could work towards changing their own circumstances. For those who worked in Newfoundland they could look to Homer Stevens and the British Columbia-based fisher’s union that was in the process of bringing their high-profile tactics and confrontations to trawler crews operating just across the Gulf of St. Lawrence in Canso, Nova Scotia. Many others had been or were paying dues to the militant Seafarers’ International Union while operating the transport freighters that worked the Great Lakes sea lanes or had attended union meetings while working in a Nova Scotia-based heavy industry.<sup>16</sup> Even for the broader public, the Smallwood Liberals’ loss of 7 of 8 seats in the federal election of 1968 and the emergence of open and public critics like John Crosbie in St. John’s and Tom Burgess in Labrador illustrated that the local-level protest movements were beginning to reach the highest levels of domestic political powers. It was a period of rolling struggle in which the idea of revolution and revolt circulated the Atlantic world at the speed of not only the trans-continental ships that many Newfoundlanders operated and by the airplanes landing at the airfields that they had built but also instantaneously through the new radios and televisions which they incorporated into their old households.

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<sup>16</sup> Those whose labour was reading could hold up Rolf Hattenhauer’s *Brief Labour History of Newfoundland* published in 1968 as part of a Royal Commission as testament that a new era was being entered.

In the process of being mobilized as an international proletariat, they had begun to see themselves in the context of the standards and possibilities that the ‘national’ working class had already achieved. As the laws which shaped their own experience became points of antagonism, it was precisely these laws that became the points of political struggle on which they began to recognize their class position. And it was with a union, many of them believed, that they would be able to achieve what many of them were in the process of coming to recognize as their ‘rights.’

The circulation of these ideas, however, reached the outports of Newfoundland whose material circumstances were similar to the fragmented class formations that had hindered the establishment of a trade union in Burgeo during the 1950s. With a slow and uneven drift towards wage labour, the strategies of the outport household remained as embedded in the social relationships centered on the household as much as they were towards the relationships emerging in collectivized industrial and commercial mass production. When the “outside agitators” came to town with union cards in their pockets, they would find a society where these relationships were in transition, somewhere in-between the pre-capitalist relations of kinship and feudality and the industrial ones of citizen and worker. And it was by using the categories of their own employers that they would begin to demand the very same rights and obligations as those associated with a trade. “Every fisherman is a tradesman,” Father Desmond McGrath, founding organizer of the Northern Fisherman’s Union pleaded to a group of outporters in early 1971. “And you’ve got to get that into your skulls tonight. You’ve got a trade. But why isn’t your trade improving?” Where this transformation had not proceeded far enough, they would induce it. The story of that started in Burgeo.

“They would take him up in their arms and carry him around but now they want him out”: CLASS

## 4

The wealthy man in a peasant village can seldom rely on outside force or law to protect him; instead, his wealth and position are ultimately validated by the legitimacy he acquires in the local community.

James Scott (1972a: 108)

### **4.1.0. – Introduction**

What gave the Newfoundland Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (NFFAWU) the leverage that all previous unions had been lacking was their intimate connection to the channels of political power. “We would like to know the Newfoundland Government’s stand on this matter,” Desmond McGrath demanded of Premier Smallwood via telegram after Spencer Lake had yet again threatened to close his Burgeo operations. “Will the government of Newfoundland stand by the people in exercising their democratic right to organize?” (ET Nov 9 1970). Smallwood’s response, coming the very next day, and more symbolic than substantive, nevertheless recognized the union’s legitimacy. “We believe absolutely and unchangeable in the right of all workers of hand

and brain to organize themselves and to bargain collectively. This right is almost as basic and precious as the right to life itself and this government will defend and encourage it to the absolute limit,” he began.

Mr. Spencer Lake has made a magnificent contribution to the upbuilding of the fisheries on the southwest coast and it is a great pity that we do not have many Newfoundlanders like him in that regard for leaders in industry are badly needed in our province today.

The government do not share Mr. Lake’s attitude in the matter of trade union organization of the fishermen or plant employees. We think he is absolutely and hopelessly wrong in his attitude in this particular matter and I would plead with him to change his attitude and re-establish the fine personal relationship he and his family have and have had on the south west coast. He is a very able and strong-willed man or he would not have been able to build the great fishing industry he has built. This might make it all the harder for him to bend at the present time but as a personal friend I implore him to do so and throw his welcoming gates open to his workers to organize and then sit down and bargain with them. However whether he does or does not do this the Newfoundland government proudly take their stand beside the fishermen and workers in Burgeo and everywhere else in our province (ET Nov 5 1971; UF 1970: 5).

While it would take a ten month strike before the union was conclusively established in Burgeo, it was Smallwood’s statement here in November 1970 that marked the end of the Lake family’s authority. By recognizing the right of the people working in Burgeo to organize and freely choose their own political representation, the monopoly which the Lake family commanded over the administration of the southwest coast was broken.

It was Spencer Lake, perhaps more than anyone else, who recognized the significance of Smallwood’s endorsement of the union. For those who lived on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, the organization of their time, their social relationships and all the means through which they had made their livelihood over the past fifteen years had been done in relation to the Lake family. “Mr. Lake took the results of the election as a personal condemnation of his own management of the plant and his dealing with the people” the press reported after the workforce at the smaller of the two

Burgeo fish plants had voted 14 to 3 to certify the union. “I consider that a genuine vote of non-confidence against me,” he was recorded as saying. By having used their position as factory owners and town mayor to actively prevent the formation of autonomous working class organizations, the Lake family was now using their absence as the very justification necessitating their rule. “I didn’t want to be unionized,” he continued.

Actually in these isolated outports I contend that there is no place for a union. You can’t operate satisfactorily ‘cause it’s a different kettle of fish, this fish business, than most things. I’m not anti-union, I just think that in certain circumstances unions are not practical. And this is one of them: isolated outports in Newfoundland. You haven’t got the local leadership to run them intelligently, with all due respect to the people – I’m very fond of them. They don’t know what it’s all about. They get a bunch of smart alecks in here ... from Chicago or somewhere, and they sell them a bill of goods – including a parish priest, by the way, from Newfoundland (ET Nov 6 1970).

By then resigning from his management position, selling off his shares in the plant and threatening to close the rest of his Burgeo operations, he tied his portrayal of class authority to the economic sanctions he possessed. “There is a real attitude of fear in Burgeo,” union president Richard Cashin noted to the *Union Forum* as the campaign to organize the main plant subsequently began. “There is little direct contact with the government. It is apparent to the people there that the fish company is all powerful. ... The residents of Burgeo, particularly the clergymen in the area, informed the organizers, including Fr. McGrath and myself, that the people were quite concerned – quite fearful that the Lakes would pull out. They wanted some information, some confidence as to what recourse they would have should this happen” (UF Nov 1970). For every material advancement made since Confederation in 1949 that brought Burgeo into convergence with the North American standard of living, its accessibility continued to be exclusively mediated by the Lake family’s channels of distribution. As long as they commanded these junctures, they were able to present the goods, services, and standard of living of

the ‘modern’ world as being synonymous with their family’s rule.

It was precisely the ability to reproduce this monopoly that was ruptured by Smallwood’s recognition of the union. Speaking to over 600 people in the local high school auditorium after the November 1970 certification vote, “Both Mr. Cashin and Fr. McGrath assured the meeting that ‘no government could stand idly by and permit any entrepreneur in the fishing industry to close a fish plant solely as a reprisal against its employees’ basic right to organize’” (UF Nov 1970). From that day onwards, when the vote brought a mere 17 men from the smaller of the two fish plants in Burgeo into the union’s membership, Richard Cashin and Desmond McGrath were given an official title as town representatives. And with Smallwood’s approval in hand, their campaign to unionize every workplace in Burgeo was given its political legitimacy. “After that,” one member of the small herring plant local recalls today, “we used to go over to the main plant after work and agitate.” Out of the struggle that would subsequently occur, there would develop an irreconcilable sense of antagonism among the striking workers in relation to the Lake family and their supporters. By breaching the social and cultural boundaries which the Lake family had built around their participation in politics, workplace management and the wider town’s administration, they would come to organize a new understanding of themselves on the basis of their legal rights as citizens.

#### **4.2.0. – THEORY: Class and the Industrial Revolution**

The formation of the working class has both an objective material dimension as well as a social-cultural dimension. While having been mobilized into a common economic position in relation to the bourgeoisie, it is only through the process of struggle

in which the proletariat comes to form a conscious political platform around their interests as a class. “The very conditions of their lives make the workers capable of struggle,” Vladimir Lenin has written.

Capital collects the workers in great masses in big cities, uniting them, teaching them to act in union. At every step the workers come face to face with their main enemy - the capitalist class. In combat with this enemy the worker becomes a socialist, comes to realize the necessity of a complete reconstruction of the whole of society, the complete abolition of all poverty and oppression (Lenin 1978: 44)

Through the historical process of being united as a corporate body within the bourgeoisie's production process, so too does the working class learn to use this unity to act towards protecting and advancing their own interests. “To put it bluntly,” E.P. Thompson wrote, “classes do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and then start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class consciousness. Class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the first, stage in real historical process” (Thompson 1978: 149). In the struggle to contest capital's control over their livelihoods, so too do they come to recognize the institutions, politics and policies which unite their experience as the working class.

What gives shape to this struggle, then, is the social relationships which surround productive and consumer activities. For each moment in which capital attempts to reproduce its rule by expanding the working class, so too does its relationship to human



labour become increasingly de-personalized, undifferentiated, and contractually mediated. “These changes, in turn, led working people to look to themselves, rather than to those more powerful than they, for the solution of their problems,” Sidney Mintz has explained.

In the choice of godparents for their children, assistance with tasks they could not carry out themselves, and help of all kinds, they turned to other workers, rather than to the hacendados, foremen, and ‘*gente importante*’ (influential people) upon whom they might have been able to rely in the past. Their class membership, as such, may have become no different; but the existence of that class itself was now unmitigated by other aspects of the social environment (1974: 309).

As the working class’ dependence on wages and employment expands, in other words, so too does its struggle against capital. “The collapse of vertical ties of loyalty is,” James Scott has noted, “at best, a precondition – a latent potential – for peasant protest and class-based organization” (Scott 1972b: 35). The struggle, literally, in which the old ‘patron-client’ relationship dissolves, is at one and the same time the parallel formation of a working-class consciousness.

What gives ‘character’ to the relationship between capital and the working class, then, is the societal and cultural dynamic in which their struggle is articulated and made political. For every move made by capital towards collectivising or ‘rationalizing’ the production process through capitalistic managerial techniques, so too does labour begin to articulate a political position around what it perceives as violations to its existing social standards or rights. This dynamic forms, as James Scott again notes, “a norm of reciprocity – a standard package of reciprocal rights and obligations – that acquires a moral force of its own.”

The resulting norms, so long as they provide basic protection and security to

clients, will be jealously defended against breaches which threaten the peasants' existing level of benefits. Sudden efforts to reset these norms will be seen as a violation of traditional obligations which patrons have historically assumed – a violation that serves as the moral rationale for peasant outrage (1972b: 11).

Even as this relationship shifts into a capitalist employment relation, so too do norms and standards continue to influence the shape of struggle. “We do not understand a particular expression of defiance,” Chakrabarty has likewise noted, “until we have examined the particular forms of manifestation of the “authority” that is under challenge. The way the mill worker chose to register his protest had something to do with the way he related to authority. Far from being “blind”, it depended on how he actually saw authority” (1989: 158). It is through these culturally-conditioned appeals to ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’ – emerging in a society only at the moment of their perceived breach – that become the active consciousness of the working class.

#### **4.3.0. – LITERATURE: The industrial village and the making of the working class in rural Newfoundland**

What gives the working class of rural Newfoundland its ‘character,’ then, is the particular social history of outport Newfoundland. With a household-based mode of artisanal and craft production, the activities which formed the basis of the outport’s livelihood generated a corresponding society and culture in which there was little political cohesion between the individual households that made up the labouring ‘class’ (Sider: 1979, 1989; Wadel 1973: 3). Reflected and reinforced by a system of political patronage which allowed politicians like provincial premier Joseph Smallwood and various large regional brokers to dominate the redistribution of surplus, it was a system that even into the immediate post-Confederation period actively worked to prevent the

formation of political organizations or grassroots leadership within the outports (see Paine: n.d.; Cohen: 1975; MacDonald: 1980). Even in the circumstances which generated the discontent, labour strikes, small-producer boycotts and tie-ups in the fishing industry during the mid-to late 1960s, the absence of sustained collective political organizations among the outport working class meant that the scope of their protest remained rooted within addressing a perceived violation in the relationship between the individual proletarian household and their local power holder (Hattenhauer: 1970). As long as the capitalist class was able to use the remoteness of the outports to cultivate a monopoly over the distribution and re-investment of capital, class struggle continued to be defined within the paternal dimensions which an ‘absolute’ authority had built around it.

What led to the formation of a working-class consciousness in rural Newfoundland, then, was the changing material composition of class struggle initiated by the outport’s re-incorporation within a transcontinental supply chain of North American industrial production. While the initial sites of frozen-fish production during the 1940s and early 1950s had drawn on the politically fragmented seasonal, migratory, and independently-contracted labour from the surrounding villages, the restructuring of the industry after 1954-55 towards supplying a mass-produced frozen cod product to the U.S. fast food market generated the corresponding formation of a factory working class (Wright: 2001; Neis 1988a). The social and cultural ‘experience’ of this class began to emerge most prominently in 1968 when an industry ‘crisis’ combined with the surging interests of well-financed U.S.-based international labour unions whose political leadership began to foster a growing awareness of their ‘collective’ occupational and class concerns (see Strong: 1987; MacDonald 1980: 44). With every move made towards

restructuring the composition of the working class within a new regime of mass production and consumption, so too did it generate a corresponding struggle on which labour began to organize its own interests as a class.

#### **4.4.0. – Community organizing and the making of the working class in rural Newfoundland**

What defined the emerging confrontation over union recognition in Burgeo, then, was the struggle over labour's relationship to capital. With a Chicago-based international labour union now guiding a cohort of local leaders towards a certification vote at the main Burgeo plant, Spencer Lake distributed a letter addressed to "all employees." Pointing to nearly two decades of his family's personal and financial sacrifice, he appealed to the 'familial' bond which he believed established the legitimate boundaries of their relationship. "Because of the fact that there are union organizers now in Burgeo trying to organize our people into a union, I think it is my duty to let you know how I feel about unions in general and in particular about your forming a union here in Burgeo," he begun.

First of all, I would like to say that the worst thing about unions is that people who belong to them are usually pushed around and told what to do by outside organizers and union bosses from such places as St. John's, Toronto or Chicago, who do not understand local conditions and often do not think of the welfare of the workers. ...

Secondly, I think our record of operating this company is very good and we have tried very hard to treat you fairly and to be as generous as we could afford, and, in fact, sometimes more generous than we could afford.

In the past five years, we have given you raises which add up to over 35 percent and as you know, we suffered very hard times during that period. In fact although you probably were not aware of it, one year the fish market was so bad that Mrs. Lake and I had to put a lot of extra money into the company so that the company could continue to operate. ...

Therefore, I don't think anyone can say that we have been unfair, but if you form a union all that will change because the close and friendly relationship which I like to think presently exists between us will change and you will be influenced by those outside people I spoke of earlier, and situations will not be handled or discussed in a friendly manner. ...

Furthermore, I personally have worked very hard, sometimes at a great personal inconvenience for the town and people of Burgeo to get water and sewage, improved town road and now a road to connect us with the Trans-Canadian Highway.

In closing, I would like you all to think this matter over very seriously before you sign up to have a union in Burgeo because I am afraid I could not operate under such circumstances (Green 1971: Appendix).

It was an attempt, an appeal, a last dying effort at drawing people's perception of the 'social relations of production' back around the paternal, factional and 'dyadic' qualities on which his family's class authority was based. "If we were left alone here," Spencer Lake was quoted saying later in the strike, "in two weeks this would be all over, no problem. And we've offered the people on that picket line to come back to work, and there is some good men on that picket line we'd like to have back. But there are a whole lot that are no good, and we don't want back" (CBC Sept 1971). With the union now providing an alternative channel to the outside world, it was now the Lake family's continuing threats of economic sanction, their coercive attitude, their affectionate appeals of altruism and the entire society that they had cultivated that began to spin off in a frantic display that only further reinforced the perception that they had lost their legitimacy. "If the union is successful it should build a monument to Spencer Lake," Desmond McGrath was quoted as saying in the month leading up to the strike (ET April 30 1971). For every attempt at recreating their authority, it only helped emphasize the union's position that what the Lakes' portrayed as benevolence was in fact an exploitative class relationship.

It was thus directly in relation to the Lake family's portrayal of paternal authority

that the working class of rural Newfoundland began to organize itself. Taking up residence with local workers, holding meetings at the United Church and public rallies at various locations around town, what the union did was begin a process whereby the circumstances of the people in Burgeo were attributed as being directly rooted within their common relationship to the Lake family. “I’ve never known a rabble rouser like Des McGrath,” one elder recalls today.

They would bribe people with booze, and make up all sorts of lies about Lake, saying that he was the owner of town and everyone in it. He was treated really badly by the people. Everyone saying ‘well they are millionaires so they must have made it off the backs of us.’ I found it just appalling. Des McGrath and the United Church Minister up on the pulpit slamming their fists saying you’re not a Christian if you don’t join the union. That was the last I had anything to do with the United Church.

Through a process of creating disenchantment and the presentation of alternatives, the union began to build a portrayal of class struggle embedded within rural Newfoundland’s society and culture. “Richard Cashin was a kind of person that could communicate,” one Burgeo elder reflected today. “So I guess a lot of people got the message that people in Burgeo – in all, every fishing community – were being exploited by the owners, the businessmen. And a lot of people took to it, and could understand the message that the disparity between the rich and poor, with one rich family, abundantly rich, and everybody else not being able to hardly scrape through. They must have been able to see that with Richard Cashin and Desmond McGrath.” Whether it was through these grand portrayals of the social inequality produced by the historic relationship between the fish companies and fisherfolk or through appeals to their everyday experience, the union began to build an organization based on the promotion of class interests. “We used to roll our own smokes,” one elder reflected today, gesturing to his breast pocket where he and his friends would keep their tobacco. “We used to roll them as thin as we could, to make the

pouches last as long as we could. When Cashin started coming around he would look at us and say that ‘You’ll be smoking them thicker than that if we get this union going, boys.’” With the union providing the organizational vehicle and leadership through which they could channel their discontent, what had once been problems that were seen as rooted within their individual relationship to the plant owner or as circumstances outside of their control were now becoming conceptualized as being political issues common to them all.

What gave expression to this struggle was the shifting understanding of exploitation which had accompanied the outport’s reincorporation into the international division of labour over the previous twenty-five years. As the industrial bourgeoisie had extended their control through forms of ‘free’ and waged labour recruitment throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between capital and the working class had likewise become increasingly depersonalized, undifferentiated and contractually mediated. “It appears to me that the people who are interested in forming a union are some of the younger men and women who perhaps do not know me so well and who cannot look back and remember how conditions were in Burgeo before we came here,” Spencer Lake’s January 1971 letter continued.

I can assure you younger people, however, that great progress had been made here in the past sixteen years – we are producing almost three times as much fish, providing three times as much labour, and paying a great deal more money for it (Green 1971: Appendix).

What the Lakes were finding out the hard way was that their ‘record’ as ‘patron’ had come to hold a diminishing value. In relation to the expanding segment of these “fair weather” clients (Scott 1972a: 99) or “that sector of the economy which was independent

of a subject relationship with the gentry” (Thompson 1974: 385), they had become strictly employers rather than providers. The larger and more interconnected that the industrial ‘growth centers’ had become, the more that the proletariat of rural Newfoundland had in-turn come to see their relationship to capital not as individuals, but rather as part of an international working class. “Talking to the dockworkers at Gloucester,” workers on the Lakes’ refrigerated transport ship the ‘Caribou Reefer’ told reporters during the strike, it was reported back that U.S. workers “laughed at the thought that the men in Burgeo were being paid \$1.36 per hour to load the fish on the Reefer. In Gloucester, they said, the men got \$15 per hour to unload the same ship for the same company” (Mulrooney 1971b: 10). For each wage payment that was becoming recognized as substandard or redeemable only as a perquisite at the company-owned store and for each hiring or employment decision that seemed to be justified by nothing other than Spencer Lake’s arbitrary personal preference, the relationship that these men and women held to the Lake family was becoming experienced as exploitative, coercive, and ultimately unjust. “One of “them” for instance, George Coley, working in the Burgeo Fish Industries carpenter shop,” the *Union Forum* wrote in 1971.

George was one of the first to join the union, a fact which soon came to the attention of management. Mr. Lake himself informed the foreman of the ship that he did not want any union members employed there. Whereupon George Coley was summarily fired. A few hours later, having apparently been made aware of the rashness of this action, Mr. Lake instructed that George be given his job back; but on condition that he would be sent home with the other plant workers whenever there was no fish to be processed. This in spite of the fact that work in the carpenter shop has little bearing on whether or not there is fish to be cut in the plant.” (UF 1971: 7)

Whatever their particular grievance, what united these ‘fair-weather’ clients was their common position on the ‘periphery’ to the Lakes’ ‘core’ group of followers. These were



those who were not the Lakes' 'favourites.' To them 'Uncle Spence' was 'Mr. Lake.' And they thus found themselves standing increasingly in an instrumental, undifferentiated and de-personalized relationship serviced by none of the 'extra-economic' loyalties, affection, favouritism or any of the other social and cultural dynamics on which the paternalist legitimized their regime.

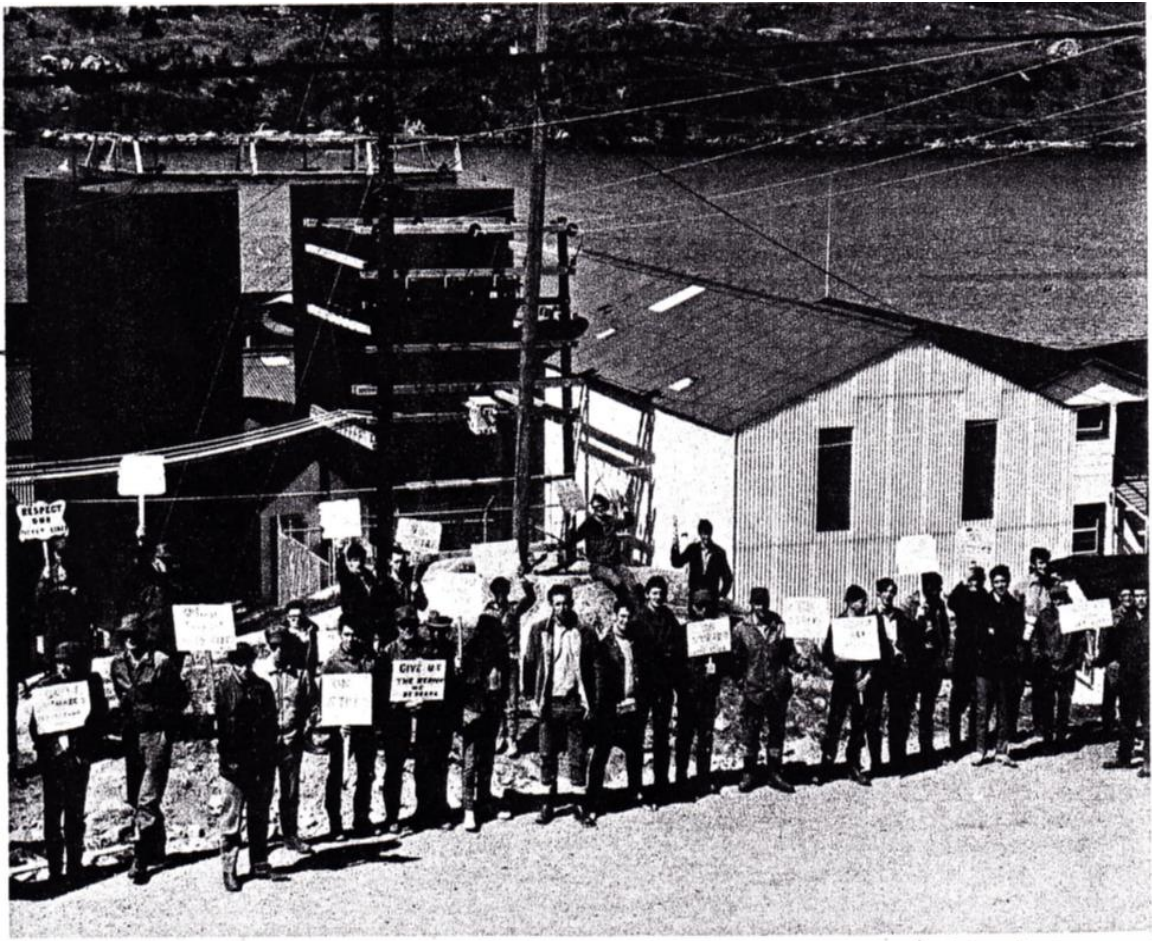


Figure 4.1.0. – Burgeo, 1971 “They were making three times what we were making out in British Columbia. We knew it, we heard it on the radio” (Quote: Author’s Interview, 2012; Photo: *Union Forum*).

#### 4.5.0. – Re-Making Class: Production

The changing material composition of class struggle during the post-Confederation decades was thus matched by a shifting set of expectations around work and society. By the time that contract negotiations between the company and the union

broke down at the end of May 1971, the NFFAWU had already moved themselves to the forefront of a broader movement challenging the legal and civil framework which shaped employment relations in rural Newfoundland (see Chapter 3). As the lunch bell rang at the main Lake-owned plant on June 4, 1971, some “200 fish plant workers walked off the job Friday and set up picket lines in a fight for recognition as a trade union” (ET June 8 1971). While the amendments to the collective bargaining law recognizing the ability of ‘fishermen’ to join a union were yet to be finalized, 35 inshore fishermen in Burgeo nevertheless signed union membership cards, boycotted Lake’s plant and “hired a store on the land wash, built a stage head out from it and proceeded to set themselves up in a salt fish operation” (UF 1971: 7). This began, for the first time in Burgeo’s history, not only the opening of commercial channels into the outport that existed outside of the Lake family’s administration, but also the open, public, and political confrontation to their class authority which an action of this sort entailed.

The ‘character’ of this confrontation was first expressed by the Lakes’ attempt to recapture their authority. While the power which the merchant firms held over the outport’s consumption had diminished in the time since Confederation, it had been the Lake family’s continuing ability to monopolize the channels of distribution that had allowed them to refuse any limitation on their personal authority. “My family owns it lock stock and barrel, and I just won’t give in” Spencer Lake was reported as saying after contract negotiations broke down at the end of May, 1971.

If they go on strike, I’ll close the plant down until they get better sense and come back to work. ... I’m prepared to shut down that plant as long as I have to, maybe longer. ... If they think I’m going to be dictated to by priests, lawyers, or gangsters from Chicago, they’ve got another thing coming. ...they should mind their own business instead of going around stirring up trouble in communities where there is full employment” (ET May 24 1971).

As with Smallwood's intervention in the 1959 loggers strike, the focus of Lake's attempt at restoring his family's authority was not directed toward the symbolic 'wayward children' but rather the 'outside agitator' who through an illegitimate attempt at building a political following had led the workers astray and incited them to act out of character (Paine: n.d.; also see Chakrabarty: 1989:163). When the strike vote was taken in early June and a picket line subsequently set up, Lake told reporters that he would approach the striking workers and ask them in a "common sense, practical manner to lay down their silly placards and return to work." He afterwards explained to reporters that the strike was nothing more than an action "stirred up by outside trouble makers" and an "outside influence that came in and incited the people" (ET June 7 1971). In a society where class authority was based on the portrayal of one's inherent 'station' in life, it was not only the issue of increasing wages that a union contract would inevitably force, but the integrity of the entire society which they had cultivated around their position as the exclusive providers of goods and services to the coast. "Money, then, is not the reason he is so opposed to unions," journalist Hugh Winsor wrote during the strike. "It is a deep seated philosophical aversion – the refusal to tolerate any restraints on his decision making. But it is more. It is the deference Lake now demands and enjoys. It would not just be a union in his fish plant. It might spread to his trawlers, to question the 63 per cent share of the trawler income he keeps for himself and the 37 per cent which goes to the crew" (Winsor 1971: 4). The Lake family's position throughout the strike was less an attempt at explaining their cause to the outside world as much as they were threats directed towards their own following. They were – much as they had been carried out for the past decade and a half – designed to reinforce the boundaries of struggle within the 'absolute'

authority which they commanded.

It was precisely the way in which economic exploitation in the ‘industrial village’ was intertwined within a dynamic of paternal class authority that allowed the striking workers to portray their demand for union recognition as part of a wider struggle for civil rights. “Obviously,” Cashin offered in response to Lake’s comments, “Mr. Lake thinks that Newfoundlanders are white niggers” (ET June 8 1971). “The issue at stake in this action is one of basic human rights and one that effects all Newfoundlanders, particularly those in the fishing industry. It is the right of Newfoundland fish plant workers and fishermen to have a union and to deal with employers and buyers of fish on an equal basis. ... We are against paternalism of any kind, even if it is the so-called benevolent paternalism we have been subjected to in Newfoundland” (ET June 7 1971). Louis Hann, president of the Burgeo local also stated that “There is no question of Mr. Lake’s sincerity in thinking that he is the only person in Burgeo who is capable of making decisions for his employees,”

– so much greater the tragedy. If Mr. Lake were not so convinced of his divine rights then there would be no problem in getting him to recognize the human rights of his employees. This is not the case, however, and he insists that his workers are not capable of running a trade union and that he is the only one who can do their thinking for them. ... We are willing to starve on our feet but not on our knees (ET June 9 1971).

By engaging with the broader principles associated with the ‘rights’ movement, the union cultivated an image of the strike as being a struggle against political oppression. “The labor situation of Burgeo is almost unbelievable,” Dave Butler acknowledged in *The Evening Telegram*. “It reeks of the atmosphere of a 19th century Scottish coal mine or the cotton mills of the old American South. Quite obviously, the position taken by Spencer Lake, the owner of the fish plant being struck, is an impossible one. Even if Mr. Lake

were right he cannot win. Even if he were being pushed to the brink of bankruptcy, he will be buried under the sheer weight of public and private opinion. In an age when every working man has the inalienable right to dictate his own course into the future, the Victorian paternalism is out of place at best. Perhaps the hardest thing for Mr. Lake to understand is that grown men do not want to be benevolently taken care of” (ET June 11 1971). If it was by bringing together political and legal repressions with economic exploitation on which the accumulation regime of the ‘multi-plant family firms’ of early industrial Newfoundland were based, then it was precisely in relation to this political-legal dynamic on which labour began to struggle. The more that the Lake family struggled to recapture their authority, the more that labour came to correspondingly recognize the political and socio-cultural dynamics which united their individual struggles together as the working class.

#### **4.6.0. – Re-Making Class: Redistribution**

The engagement with the broader principles of the civil rights movement also reflected the struggle occurring in Burgeo’s realm of redistribution. What had given the Lakes their power over the coast was their ‘patron’ monopoly. Not only did they command authority by being able to act as the town’s exclusive employer and merchant but also as the administrative link to Smallwood (see Chapter 2). When the strike at the fish plant began in June, the Lakes immediately attempted to recapture their authority by shifting their capital investment into other areas of production. “Burgeo Fish plant owner hopes to put non-strikers to work on community projects,” read *The Evening Telegram’s* headline on then-mayor Spencer Lake’s proposal to offer “non-union employees the

equivalent of strike pay until the current strike at the plant is over” (ET June 8 1971). Two days later it was reported that “Mr. Lake said most of the non-union employees are now working under his company building a road to a public beach a couple of miles outside Burgeo” (ET June 10 1971). It was this ability to shift their capital investments at a moment’s notice that had allowed the Lakes to maintain labour’s compliance throughout the 1950s and 1960s. If it was not by threatening to close a plant and moving employment to any one of their other three southwest coast operations at the slightest mention of a threat to their authority, then it was by using their ability to shift capital investments between different areas of each town.

It was thus precisely in relation to all these ‘junctures’ of economic activity in which the working class began to struggle. “On the morning the work was to start Lake had his people wait at the playground site,” the *Union Forum* wrote on one of the proposed ‘community’ projects. “The only ones who turned up were a group of irate housewives whose children had marched in “Walkathons” to raise much of the money that Mayor Lake was using to try to turn the community against the picketers. At that point the playground project died as far as the strike was concerned” (UF 1971: 5). This was, as Marilyn Porter has written elsewhere, “the latent power of the organized women of rural Newfoundland” (1985: 89). It was, she continues, the “impressively efficient communications networks” developed through ‘voluntary associations’ that while not customarily “in open conflict with the state, or with capital” nevertheless hold a substantial amount of power through their control of redistributive networks within the outport. As Barbara Neis has also shown elsewhere, these networks have the capability to be translated into open political confrontation in times of struggle as a “protest line”

(Neis: 1988b). While the Lakes had drawn the redistribution of surplus under their own class authority through their control of municipal government, as the strike broke out, so too did these women begin to struggle. “Can you imagine turning down a gift like that?” an astonished Margaret Lake was quoted as saying in reference to the women’s rejection of the playground proposal. “Now you know how stupid these people are” (Winsor 1971: 6). As the Lakes’ control over the point of production was being challenged, so too were their wider ‘patron’ positions were being identified, challenged and disorganized.

In combination with forming spontaneous “protest lines” it was these women and the redistributive networks they controlled who formed the material base on which the new union organization was built. While the outport had previously relied upon the capital investment channelled through the Lake family’s administration, the union used their own connections to the outside world to subvert this dependency. “Each of the workers, members of the Newfoundland Fishermen, Food, and Allied Workers Union was presented with a \$50 cheque at a supper Friday night prepared by a woman’s committee organized to boost the men’s moral” *The Evening Telegram* reported (ET June 21 1971). Speaking to *The Daily News*, Mike Martin, a union spokesperson “commented on the union’s Women’s Group, saying that it was a ‘most unique group.’ Mr. Martin said it is the first such group to be formed on the Newfoundland labour scene” (DN June 21 1971). One man from Burgeo who was not a part of the union or the fish plant workforce recalls today that “They had parties,”

every Friday night. There would be movies shown and there would be food. There was nothing like that happening anywhere else in Burgeo at the time. It wasn’t just the people on strike but it was everyone in town going to those. I don’t remember anything then being specifically about the union, but it was a lot of fun to be there. ... There may have been guys supporting Lake, I don’t know, but they sure weren’t having parties like that. I guess it was because it was all the

old guys who supported the Lakes.

What were once ‘apolitical’ voluntary associations whose politics as a ‘class’ had only existed in ‘primitive’ or ‘inarticulate’ form were now mobilizing into an organized a struggle with capital. “Those Friday evening socials are becoming something of an institution in Burgeo now,” the *Union Forum* reported, “and it’s likely they will go on long after the strike has been won and forgotten about” (UF 1971: 5). The customary redistributive functions that Porter outlined as being performed by women’s labour in the outport, once subject to the authority of the ‘patron-client’ relationship, were now being contested, disorganized, and reorganized distinctly in alignment with their class interests.

#### **4.7.0. – Re-Making Class: Community**

It was through these struggles that the working class began to make itself as a self-conscious social and political entity. Mid-way through July, with the plant still idle, Spencer Lake held an early morning meeting with a group of loyal workers and hatched a plan to retake the plant. Soon afterwards, with his son Berch in the lead boat, they took the group up the reach towards the plant wharf. “As far as can be learned,” *The Evening Telegram* reported, “strikers tried to prevent non-union plant workers from entering the plant via the harbor by placing a rope from one end of the wharf to the other when one of the men still on the job cut the rope. There was some rock-throwing and a heated argument ensued” (ET July 12 1971). “The following morning,” judge Nathan Greene wrote in his report on the strike,

the Company boat Limanda with employees aboard headed for the Company wharf. A crowd, estimated at 300, crowded the wharf and there is little doubt that the mood of the crowd was such that the boat would not have been permitted to dock; the boat veered off and did not dock. Many of the crowd carried boards



with slogans, others carried just boards, the atmosphere was explosive (Greene 1971: 11).

While the confrontations led to a court injunction being issued, the RCMP moving a force into Burgeo and the plant being re-opened in late July with school children on holiday, it was nevertheless the transformation in the social relationships which surrounded production that emerged as the most significant aspect of the events. “The rebellion in Burgeo will probably be recorded as having started when the striking plant workers physically confronted strike-breakers entering the Burgeo Fish Industries plant,” one account noted (Mulrooney 1971b: 7). Through their attempt to use an open, physical confrontation to re-start production, the Lake family had ruptured their legitimacy as providers. “So I got up and asked a question,” one of Lake’s foremen recalled of the early morning meeting held before attempting to take back the plant. “What are we supposed to do when we go back to work on the plant if the picketers come over the hill to the plant?’ And he said ‘Fight. Protect the plant.’ And I said ‘In other words we have to do battle.’ And that ended it for us. He told me after that through me saying what I said in the Orange Hall, I almost turned every man – every person against him. And he almost lost his injunction on the account of me. That was his very words” (CBC 1971). Whereas the Lake family’s power relied upon a chain of local managers to delegate the organization of work, this reliance had also set of boundaries around their ability to treat labour as pure commodity (see Chapter 2). By asking his foremen and loyal workers to act in such a blatantly confrontational manner towards their ‘fellow’ kin, he had breached the boundaries of his own authority and removed any veneer from the exploitative character of his relationship to labour.

What began to broaden the dimensions of the working class struggle, however,

was the way in which it proliferated across the wider institutions of ‘civil’ society. With the Lake family unable to reproduce the legitimacy of their class rule any longer, their only option was to turn to outside assistance. “A private plane arrived about 9 o’clock the same evening carrying the bailiff from St. John’s who was greeted by Doug Hunt and an executive of the company,” *The Evening Telegram* wrote on the arrival of Lake’s lawyer and the court injunction issues against the picket line.

Immediately they proceeded to the house where Richard Cashin stayed, presenting him with the injunction issued that evening in St. John’s, The Supreme Court Judge who signed the injunction was Judge James D. Higgins, who was formerly a member of the law firm (Hunt Emerson, Sterling and Higgins) representing the Burgeo Fish Industries plant in 1954, according to its corporation records. The bailiff who flew the injunction out to Burgeo stayed at the Lake residence for the week or so he was in Burgeo, using the Lake family vehicle for seeing that the injunction was being carried out. A Photostat copy of the injunction was delivered in person to most Burgeo households the day after it was issued (ET July 20 1971).

The more that the Lakes attempted to reproduce their class authority through the use of law, state, politics, courts – whatever – so too did the striking workers begin to struggle around these very same elements. “I sometimes wonder,” Des McGrath was reported as saying in regards to the injunction to a receptive crowd of union supporters in Burgeo “whether there are two sets of laws and punishments – one for the rich and one for the poor” (Mulrooney 1971b: 5). Although these were rather standard union slogans and rhetorical statements, they nevertheless began to broaden the dimensions of the struggle and further challenge the legal-political mechanisms through which the Lakes reproduced their rule. “It’s discouraging for the man on the picket line to know that there are 49 elected representative in this province who are saying very little about the Burgeo struggle. If they come out and said something they might not get invited to so many Christmas cocktail parties next year. They might have to develop a taste for beer instead

of wine” (ET July 27 1971). With Cashin, McGrath, the union and a cohort of small local elites translating the cause of the striking workers into the language of the bourgeoisie's own ‘civil’ society, the proletariat was beginning to mobilize its own working class politics.

One social and cultural dimension at a time, the broadening of the strike's implications represented the erosion of the old societal institutions through which the Lake family had justified, reproduced and expanded their class control. By joining with other segments of the working class in Burgeo who the Lakes' had also marginalized, the striking workers identified and began struggling towards refashioning the outport's ‘civil’ institutions towards being representative of their interests as a class. “Apart from the basic issue of rights for the workers at the plant, there are several factors in the relationship between the town and the company which needs to be corrected if the town is to function normally,” United Church Minister Joe Burke wrote in the *Union Forum*.

Among these are the blatant acts of coercion which the company has been practicing of late, obviously in an effort to suppress adverse publicity or opposing opinion. Some of the town's people who are employed with government agencies or other companies have had pressure put on them by the company in an effort to curtail support for the workers and the union which represents them. By this attempt to suppress public opinion, Mr. Lake has extended the issue to the whole community. It has also brought mounting opposition to the company itself for having the audacity to play with the freedom, and free expression of opinion by the community at large (UF 1971: 17).

The wider that the parameters of the struggle spread, the more that support for the strike grew. Kyril Dollimount, a local high school teacher according to *The Evening Telegram* “is a supporter of the union as are most other high school teachers, the employees of the federal civil service in Burgeo and most of the staff at the Burgeo Cottage Hospital.” According to him: “I am for the union because I think the people were poor even though

they were working at the plant. Lake tried to dominate every phase of life in Burgeo and tried to interfere with too much. The aim of the union was never to drive Lake out but to go back and work with him” (ET Nov 20 1971). With their teachers, shopkeepers, civil leaders and the union spokespeople standing next to them, the outport working class was beginning to form its own own-class politics. “More than anything else the people of Burgeo are now aware of a kind of public deception which most people have been mistaking for benevolence,” Minister Burke continued. “They realize that a chicken for Christmas cannot supplement the subsistence wage which they receive all year. The community projects which were thought up of late by the company to employ its non-union workers is another glaring example of how very deceptive such acts of benevolence can be. For example; a road to the Sand Banks would surely benefit the people of Burgeo. But few people know that the Sand Banks and part of the Little Barchoix, all 28 acres, are owned by Spencer G. Lake. A curious kind of community project – building a road to your own property. ... The workers believe, and rightly so, that a union can give them a voice in the decision making and will also give them an opportunity to participate more meaningfully in their chosen trade” (UF 1971: 17). By channeling their fight behind a supporting cast of small local elites, the striking workers formed a new political organization dedicated to advancing their interests in relation to their employer. In return, the union and town leaders’ promise was to allow the working class a new level of participation in workplace, public and civil administration. It was, so to speak, a new contract that gave them a space to become contributing members to the new ‘community’ in all the ways that Lake had previously denied them.



Figure 4.2.0 – July 15, 1971. *The Evening Telegram*. “Burgeo itself was no more than the noisiest evocation of what was going on all over the island. The green-and-black “It started in Burgeo” bumper sticker on the cars of union sympathizers were no more than a handy symbol for a transformation underway long before as dissent, open and unafraid, took the place of Newfoundland’s long tradition of mute apathy.” Richard Gwyn (1973).

#### 4.8.0. – Re-Making Class: Consciousness

What finally led to the demise of the Lake family’s authority was ultimately a violent upheaval. “Burgeo protest closes fish plant” reported *The Evening Telegram* in October. “At about 6 a.m today two fish plant management personnel went to work at the plant and shortly after they arrived about 50 to 60 people arrived and began throwing

stones. Damage to the offices, plant and adjoining premises were damaged considerably by these stones. ... There were more non-union people there than actual union members and following a demonstration of support for the plant workers, no one went to work” (ET Oct 19 1971). *The Daily News* added that “At about 6:30, a group of picketers in front of the plant increased to about 40 people, and these were joined by about 30 sympathizers. The group jeered the men in the plant and threw rocks, breaking several windows. A spokesman for the RCMP said that the incident had suddenly flared up and died out just as quickly” (DN Oct 20 1971). The ‘crowd’ that formed that day – joining both workers and other members of the community – was an expression of how the ‘social relations of production’ had shifted. For the most part, it was a shift that had smouldered among those on the ‘periphery’ of the Lakes’ followers for years. Of course, when Cashin and McGrath illustrated the exploitative and coercive character of this relationship, it provided a clear justification for the factory to be occupied, for the laundromat to be broken, for the rocks to fly and the windows to be smashed. When the Lakes could no longer sustain the notion that they were ‘providing’ a service for the people by building them a supermarket, importing oil and fresh produce, or maintaining any of their facilities, but that they were rather businesses operated for the family’s own material gain, the legitimacy of their authority was lost. These services were no longer symbols of the collaboration between a patronal superior to the common people, but rather one of unbridled economic exploitation. It was the outsiders to Burgeo who, perhaps more than anyone else, saw this transformation occur most clearly. “Before the union started the people thought Mr. Lake was God Almighty,” observed a draggerman who had migrated between Burgeo and his home in English Harbour East for the

previous nine years. “They would take him up in their arms and carry him around but now they want him out. He built the Laundromat and the beauty parlour and the store for them but now they don’t want it” (ET Nov 20 1971). Another observer, originally an outsider recalls today that “Des McGrath would get them so riled up, and I guess Cashin too, that they forgot who they were and where they came from.”

The laundromat, they just destroyed it. They loved the Laundromat. We had things in Burgeo that no one else in Newfoundland had at the time. You’ve got to remember that Lake opened the supermarket after people had petitioned him to open one so that they could get things that other merchants in town couldn’t offer. It’s like they just all forgot about all that during the strike. They got so riled up that they just forgot about all that.

In having begun to struggle over the terms of their bargain with the Lakes, the workers had come to feel, articulate and ultimately express an understanding of their interests in relation to the Lake family as a class. “The whole point is that we live here in Burgeo,” Louis Hann, president of the union local told reporters later in the strike. “If we did not do what he (Mr. Lake) said, that was it, you had it. Lake tells you to jump and you were supposed to crawl and ask him how high. Why does he call us goons, gangsters and morons? We were good enough for him last year when we used to produce 140,000 pound of fish for him. We were not goons and gangsters then” (ET Nov 20 1971). For every union slogan etched onto a placard or recited around town, for every anti-union insult hurled at the picket line from the window of a passing car, for every scuffle that broke out and for every relationship between family and friends that was broken, so too was a new relationship in formation whose dimensions were as clear-cut as whose side of the point of production one stood on.

What organized, maintained and reproduced this expression of class consciousness, however, was the way in which it was institutionalized within the union

bureaucracy and the political organizations of the emergent local small bourgeoisie. With the Lake family having left town in early November after the crowd occupied the plant, the new ‘settlement’ emerging was one marked as much by working class solidarity as it was one based on an allegiance to a new set of political leaders. “We had the three groups – the original union people, the non-union people, and the management” explained George Coley, the first person to join the union in Burgeo and the son of Ward Coley, one of the men who had attempted to organize a union fifteen years earlier with Cyril Strong.

The management was good. They negotiated straight out, and didn’t try to break the union. Some of our own guys thought that because we’d won they could do anything they liked – we had to deal with that. And we had to show the others that the union could do a good job for them. ... You know, here we had all these guys we’d been calling scabs for nine months. So we started calling them “fnups” – formerly non-union personnel. It was a joke, but it helped get over the bad feeling. They’re all in the union now. Some of them have been shop stewards and officers. Burgeo’s a union town now (quoted in Inglis 1985: 163).

By aligning their movement behind political ‘parties,’ they again created a ‘settlement’ bound within the confines of capitalist accumulation. “The mayor said that non-union people in the town appear to be seeking a way to bring Mr. Lake back while the union people seem to be determined that he will not be brought back,” *The Evening Telegram* reported after speaking to new interim-mayor Dr. Ann Calder (ET Nov 11 1971). It was a struggle that again returned to express itself in an older language which conceptualized the strike as a struggle between competing ‘family’ factions in which one pled their allegiance to either ‘Uncle Spence’ or ‘Brother Cashin’ and ‘Father McGrath.’

As Spencer Lake was finding the town whose growth he had presided over now



inhospitable, so too had Smallwood found that his political reign had lost its legitimacy among the province's voters. In March of 1972, the new Frank Moores Conservative provincial government would nationalize the Burgeo plant through an enormous payout to Spencer Lake and re-open it in partnership with Nova Scotian company National Sea. When the union moved into Margaret Lake's (maiden name Penny) home islands of Ramea in the mid-1970s, the society and culture which had been seen in Burgeo earlier in the decade was nowhere to be found. "I think the best the collective agreement we've had was the one with Penny," Cashin recalls today.

Because they had good local customs anyways so they put that in the agreement. Anything, you know, whatever the paternalism was doing for them, you know getting two pairs of this or something. We put all that in the agreement, and we picked all the little cherries that we could. So the best collective agreement we ever had, whenever it was, it was in the late seventies with Margaret.

But when they signed the collective agreement, I remember that the Penny's had almost liveried servants. You know they had a house boy and staff and they went back a couple of generations. When they had to sign the agreement, they had a cocktail party. And she invited to the party all of our stewards plus, not everybody in the town, but say we six or seven or ten or twelve of her workers on the executive, they were all invited. And their counterparts the foreman here or foreman there. So there was twenty odd people there and was waited on by the maid. I mean it was a class act. ... So that was the end of that.

The Lake family's defeat at Burgeo represented the end of a society in which the control and political administration of capital investment was so clearly dominated by one family. No longer could an employer command the power associated with being the only available option to a worker and demand the corresponding political obligations. Rather, out of the strike in Burgeo was the establishment of a new segment of the bourgeoisie – the 'plural' society – which now had to compete for the political support of the working class. By forcing this struggle the proletariat had won for themselves a say for their class interests within the political realm. Their union 'representatives' now held the same law

school degrees, spoke the same business jargon and went to the same ‘cocktail’ parties as the bourgeoisie. By signing union membership cards, the proletariat found a voice that would enforce and advance their interests within the legislature, the media and the corporate board rooms of their employers. In-turn, they had come to recognize their common occupational interests as the working class. Without them, they now knew, production, value, profit and everything which the bourgeoisie depended on could not exist.

#### **4.9.0. – CONCLUSION: Class and Consciousness**

What gave the strike in Burgeo its historical significance was the way in which it expressed the experience of the rural working class in outport Newfoundland. Many of these men and women had over the previous decade been progressively mobilized within an industrial supply chain that moved them across the continent in search of work and had thus come across ideas about union organizing and alternative conceptions about work and society. While the majority of them had no ‘proper’ education, were poor and had no experience in dealing with the legal language of their employers or even the union organizers who claimed to represent them, it was these ‘fellows’ that would nevertheless form the first cracks within the boundaries established by ruling class paternalism. They spoke in the dialect of their fellow workers because they were one of them, and they took it upon themselves to convince their fellows of a thing that they had no words to describe other than their ‘God-given democratic rights.’ The more that the Lakes told them that they were ungrateful, the more that it only convinced them that they were out-of-touch.

What gave political expression to this class experience, however, was the way in

which it was articulated and institutionalized by an emergent segment of the bourgeoisie. Arriving by floatplane from St. John's with suit jackets, ties, typewriters, and fancy signatures, this was the clergy, the lawyers, the educated activists, the union organizers or reform-oriented politicians who began to articulate the movement in terms of the broader language of the media, politics and the business of the elite. Speaking to the press from their position on the picket line, they explained to the workers how they had their best interests in mind and asked them to sign membership cards that promised to give them a new voice in the politics and the decision making process that affected their lives. And if they needed proof for this claim, they merely had to point to the very words and actions of Spencer Lake to show them that another world was possible. "When Rick Cashin charges that it is paternalism, Lake agrees. He doesn't see anything wrong with paternalism" (Winsor 1971: 4). It was the contradiction between the society they experienced in Burgeo and that which they knew existed elsewhere that provided the impulse for them to organize around their interests as the working class. When Richard Cashin, Desmond McGrath and the union articulated the significance of their struggle in terms of a broader fight against the political oppression that characterized all of Newfoundland, they gave the striking workers the link on which they could see their cause as part of the struggle facing working people everywhere. What was starting on the dusty gravel road outside the fish plant in Burgeo, they claimed, was only the beginning.

“The truth once and for all about whether Joey is for the fisherman or the businessman”: CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

## 5

It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions.

- Karl Marx (2000: 232 [1847]).

### **5.1.0. – Introduction**

Contemporaries noted that something of an evolutionary leap had occurred over the year 1971. It was a transformation, as *The Daily News* noted in its year-end review, characterized as a process of “adjusting to a new age of sophistication.”

The year in Newfoundland was a significant crossroads in the post-Confederation era which was marked by a series of political, economic and social upheavals and ended on a note of uncertainty and confusion. ... The one thing that emerged most clearly is that Newfoundland is caught between two worlds, still to a large extent a prisoner of the past, but also, thanks to the communications explosion, adjusting to a new age of sophistication with its new moral and economic standards and attitudes (DN December 31 1971).

For every prolonged labour strike that had sent pickets onto the streets and their cause

into the newspapers, for every citizen-led community protest that shook the apparent complacency of the outports and for every vote cast in the October election against Smallwood's twenty-two year reign as provincial Premier, it was a transformation which was being driven forward by the movement of thousands of ordinary people. The "uncertainty and confusion" reflected in the newspaper commentary was one that was being experienced not by the thousands armed with picket signs, petitions and votes who were taking their protests to the streets, but rather by those in power who were faced with the threat of having to either reform their laws, rulings and relationship to the common people or face their own dissolution.

Perhaps the central place in which this "upheaval" took shape was in the changing dynamic of labour and employment relations sweeping across rural Newfoundland. On Christmas Eve 1971, with the Lake family having left Burgeo, the plant lying idle and the town's future still uncertain, workers at the Atlantic Seafood Ltd. fish plant in the south-coast town of Marystown walked out on strike. Although denounced by the Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union (NFFAWU) leadership as an unwarranted action stirred up by troublesome local elements within their own ranks, this new strike nevertheless illustrated how groups across the island had begun to conceptualize themselves as part of an international working class. "We are not going to give in until we are promised the same wages as people working in other plants and why should we?" one Marystown union member was recorded as saying. "If we let them get away with paying us less this time, what is going to happen in two years' time?" (Post January 13 1972). Indeed, the workers in Marystown were building off a demand for wage parity which had been growing within all the major labour actions that hit

Newfoundland in 1971. “Whatever differences may exist between workers and management in the present strikes,” *The Daily News* wrote earlier in the year,

there appears to be a new factor that is common to all. That is a demand for wage parity with persons in equivalent employment in some other provinces. It is an issue that reflects some of the anomalies that exist in the Canadian wage structure (DN April 22 1971).

Having been progressively united within the process of industrial production since joining Confederation in 1949, the people of Newfoundland had in-turn come to understand themselves as part of a wider Atlantic, Canadian and North American working class. With over twenty-five years’ experience of having lived, migrated and organized among a diversity of working people across North America, they had in-turn begun to demand new international standards of pay, conditions, and terms of employment in Newfoundland. Anything less than parity, it now seemed, had become perceived as intolerable and a justifiable cause for grievance.

What gave this movement its particular ‘character,’ however, was the way in which it expressed itself as a struggle against political oppression. The Marystown strike, while overshadowed by the major 1971 disputes taking place in Burgeo, Buchans, St. Lawrence and among the electricians who shut down construction across the entire island for several months, nevertheless provides what is perhaps the most extreme example of how the demand for economic parity had become intertwined within a broader claim for political and civil equality. “The situation in Marystown has not polarized to the extent that it did in Burgeo when the NFFAWU pulled its members out on strike in June, 1971 against Burgeo Fish Industries Ltd.,” wrote Bob Benson in *The Evening Telegram*. “However, the warning signs are there. The Marystown strikers are beginning to speak in

the union polemic of ‘we don’t want to be treated as second-class citizens’ and ominously state, no doubt as the result of listening to the talk of union organizers, that they do not intend to become the ‘Niggers’ of Newfoundland.” By using an analogy of the struggle for civil rights in the southern United States, what this language did was illustrate the way in which their own individual employment relations were rooted within a broader set of political circumstances. “There is no doubt workers believe every word they say but it seems somewhat incongruous to hear fish-plant workers identify themselves with segregation of Negro bus riders in the United States,” Benson continued.

But some workers fervently equate themselves with the Negros. “In the United States they make the Negroes ride in the back seat of the buses,” said one man. “That means they’re treated like second-class citizens. Well, there is no one around here who is going to treat us like second class citizens” (ET February 26 1972).

It was an image of struggle that at its core had been made possible in the context of Newfoundland through the striking Burgeo workers’ revolt against Spencer and Margaret Lake. By having illustrated the way in which workers and people in the outports continued to be excluded from the ‘civil’ decision-making process, the Burgeo strike had provided the link on which working-people across the island could identify their own particular struggles as being rooted within a broader universal movement for equality. “The shackles that bound us have been broken,” Alex Brown, president of the Marystown union told the press. “The company will come to realize that they can no longer pay skilled men and women less than they are worth in order to reap excessive profits or finance the inflated cost of plant and machinery” (Post February 17 1972). Having been united by their common economic relationship to the new industrial bourgeoisie over the past twenty-five years, the people of the industrial villages of rural Newfoundland had in-

turn come to articulate an identity of their interests as a class. Whether one was in Burgeo, Marystown or anywhere else, it was through this new claim to human dignity and civic equality which was now being used as a tool to unite working class struggle.

### **5.2.0. – THEORY: Class Consciousness and the Industrial Revolution**

The convergence between one's structural class position and the conscious articulation of this position occurs through a process of political struggle. While the process of dispossession and proletarian class formation may bring into existence a working class, their struggle with the capitalist class can only be united across their various individual local circumstances through a common political platform. "The working class exclusively by its own efforts is able to develop only trade-union consciousness," Vladimir Lenin has explained.

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers" (Lenin 1978: 62).

It is, in essence, only through the intervention of 'outside agitators' in which the everyday struggles of working people are universalized and articulated in a way that make them political. "To the extent that discontent achieves expression through the little community," James Scott has noted on the formation of class consciousness, "it is likely to be strongly localized and parochial. But the social framework of protest may circumscribe its breadth. It is for this reason that present coalitions of organizations that reach well beyond the local arena – if they occur at all – are likely to be patched together by non-peasant counter elites linked to the towns" (Scott 1972a: 36). By abstracting and analogizing their local struggle in terms of its relevance to wider political experience and



movements, so too may the local working class begin to understand the way in which their own individual relationships are a manifestation of broader political institutions.

What gives conscious 'expression' to the movement of the proletariat, then, is the particular social and cultural dynamics upon which a particular struggle is articulated as being part of a broader set of political institutions. While the struggle over the terms of their 'employment contract' may be rooted within similar economic relationship, it is within the political and cultural domains in which the exploitative and oppressive relationships are identified and challenge. "The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily," E.P. Thompson has written. However,

Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not. We can see a logic in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predict any law. Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way (1966: 10).

For every moment in which the working class struggles towards subverting the capitalist's control over their time, the access to their livelihoods and the formation of their social relationships, so too does it identify, politicize and challenge all the institutional norms, standards, laws and the entirety of society and culture which the bourgeoisie uses to reproduce its control. "For the insoluble internal contradictions of the system become revealed with increasing starkness and so confront its supporters with a choice," Georg Lukacs has argued. "Either they must consciously ignore insights which become increasingly urgent or else they must suppress their own moral instincts in order to be able to support with a good conscience an economic system that serves only their

own interests” (1971 [1920]: 66-8). The more that the working class comes to politicize the institutions, politics and politicians which reproduce their particular relationship to capital, the more that these institutions become seen as nothing else other than simple slogans representing the interests of a narrow segment of the ruling class.

It is these very same cultural and social dynamics, however, that also reveal the fault lines where the movement of the proletariat fragments. While it is through the mediation of traditional political brokers – ‘elected leaders’ and other elites – whose education and spokespersonship that a local cause is abstracted and given its political potential within the context of ‘civil’ society, it is precisely these same leaders that limit the radical extent of reform. “How can you count on the liberal bourgeoisie?” Vladimir Lenin complained in his early twentieth century analysis of coalition politics.

Their struggle for liberty will be half-hearted. Their property, status, and class interests are tied up with the existing social order. Therefore, they will seek a constitutional compromise which will not overthrow Tsarism or prevent it from crushing the peasant-proletarian movement! (Lenin 1978: 81).

The more that the movement of the proletariat is channelled into localized electoral and constitutional politics, trade-union bureaucracies and the organizational realm of politics, lawyers and politicians, the more it becomes a movement defined within the limits set by bourgeois society and the mechanisms of the capitalist state. “The further we move from the elementary social units and situations in which class and organizations mutually control one another,” Hobsbawm has explained, “– eg. in the classic case, the socialist or communist union lodge in the mining village – and into the vast and complex area where the major decisions about society are taken, the greater the potential for divergence” (1984: 28). While it is through these divergences that the bourgeoisie is able to again

fragment the unity of a revolutionary working class, it is through this very same process of struggling to organize itself within the institutions and mechanisms of the ‘civil’ society that the working class establishes legislative, contractual and judicial recognition of its occupational interests.

### **5.3.0. – LITERATURE: Merchants, fisherfolk and the ‘character’ of class struggle in rural Newfoundland**

What gave the North American capitalist class their power following the Second World War was their ability to fragment and localize the struggle of the working class. While massive strikes and protest threatening to shut down both war-time and post-war production had forced the capitalist class to legalize trade union activity and grant a series of general human welfare reforms in the 1940s and 1950s, it had been done in a way that spliced a new ‘organized’ working class located in the Northeastern and Great Lakes regions of central North America apart from the ‘unorganized’ labouring proletariat everywhere else (Heron and Storey: 1986; Palmer: 1992). In Newfoundland, this inequality was enforced and reproduced throughout the 1950s and 1960s by a number of legal mechanisms that actively prevented the expanding industrial working class from effectively forming organizations for the purpose of bargaining collectively or advancing their occupational interests (Neis: 1988a; Wright: 2001; Hattenhauer: 1970; see Chapter 3). Combined with a system of political patronage based around the cult of ‘Joey’ Smallwood, the remoteness and isolation of the new industrial outports were used to keep working class protest regionalized, fragmented and unorganized (Paine: n.d.; Philbrook: 1966). It thus produced a society and culture in which even as rural Newfoundland was

increasingly incorporated within the North American chain of consumer goods and mass production, the ‘social relations of production’ and the political struggles which surrounded them remained structured by relations of patronage.

The limits of patronage as a viable political system became increasingly clear in the mid-to-late 1960s when these same ‘excluded’ populations mobilized to demand the same rights, freedoms and standards of living as the ‘organized’ working class. Combined with a proliferating U.S.-based international labour unions, the labouring proletariat of rural Newfoundland now began to use the very same network of rural development agencies, St. John’s-based organizing committees and civil services which twenty years earlier had been created to facilitate the flow of capital investment into the countryside as the platforms from which to begin organizing their own interconnected working class movement (Inglis: 1986; Strong: 1987; Clement: 1986). Expressing itself as the “new wave of confidence” that rolled across the outports in the shape of community protests and the overwhelming electoral defeat of Smallwood’s federal Liberal party in 1968, it was a movement that was beginning to use electoral, legislative and ‘official’ channels of political participation as new mechanisms of organizing, coordinating and advancing the interests of rural labourers in the province (Gwyn 1973: 308; Noel: 1971). And where these ‘official’ political channels were identified as failing to respond, the more that the rural proletariat began to make their own political ‘scene’ (Cadigan 2009; Strong: 1987; see Palmer: 2009 and McInnis: 2012 for a wider North American context). The louder the decibel count that these street demonstrations reached, the firmer the picket lines grew, and the more that the outports co-ordinated their protest through union organizers, newspapers, radio waves and telegrams sent from one side of

the island to the other, the more that what had previously been seen as localized, individual circumstances were becoming increasingly perceived as part of a broader set of systemic political issues.

#### **5.4.0. – The labour movement and consciousness**

What gave the 1971 strike in Burgeo its significance, then, was the way in which it epitomized the process whereby the rural proletariat of Newfoundland's outports re-adapted its society and culture to match its relationship with industrial capital. While the NFFAWU had successfully organized a campaign in 1970 challenging the laws that circumscribed the ability of small-boat fishers to organize and act as a class, it was now the Lake family's blanket refusal to recognize even their plant-workers' ability to join a trade union that politicized the wider working class' relationship to capital. "Luck played a big part," Wick Collins wrote of the union's rapid spread throughout the early months of 1971.

It came in the unlikely form of Spencer Lake of Burgeo who tried to block the new union from organizing his plant. It was a stupid action on Lake's part for it created the old David and Goliath situation all over again. Here was the most, priestly organizer pitted against the mighty fish giant who controls one of the great fish empires in the province. But the little priest picked the right pebble, a telegram to Premier Smallwood, and the powerful fish merchant crumbled, as indeed he had to. As Father McGrath said, "If the union is successful it should build a monument to Spencer Lake." ... This was the storm of wind that carried the new union's message to every cove and tickle in the province (ET April 30 1971).

For every new report which emerged from November 1970 onwards illustrating the coercive and paternalistic mechanisms that the Lake family had been using to reproduce their authority in Burgeo, so too did the union begin to build a portrayal of the wider

political institutions which shaped employment relations in rural Newfoundland. “The dispute goes right to the very roots of Newfoundland society” union president Richard Cashin noted after the outbreak of the strike in June. “What we are fighting in Burgeo is a feudal mentality. ... The fishing industry is controlled by a privileged group of people subsidized by the government, and these are the same people for whom the laws that break strikes are made” (ET July 27). The more that the Lake family fought back against the striking worker’s bid to organize, the more that the union portrayed them as the personification of the very political mechanisms upon which the ruling class had reproduced a society and culture in which the rural Newfoundlanders continued to be unequal.

It was through this process of politicizing the strike that allowed it to act as the example of the institutions which shaped work and society. With the union’s close connection to the channels of political power, its ease in talking to the media and its use of a well-coordinated and well-financed public relations campaign, it was able to illustrate how the Lake family’s relationship to the people of Burgeo was a manifestation of the broader set of political institutions which shaped employment relations across rural Newfoundland. “The tragedy of Burgeo lies not in the fact that one group of people in a small isolated community are being denied their democratic rights,” union spokesperson Mike Martin wrote to *The Evening Telegram*.

but that the whole concept of democratic rights has so little meaning for so many people of this province, whose very station in life results from and demand their guardianship of the institution of democracy. This perhaps goes a long way towards explaining Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders. Because the trouble with Burgeo is the trouble with Newfoundland. Burgeo is merely a small reflection of the practices and attitudes that plague this province (ET September 17 1971).

By emphasizing how the Lake family's position was characteristic of the position of big employers across Newfoundland, this portrayal allowed others across the island to begin to understand their own particular circumstances as being rooted within the very same set of constraints. "Workers in other parts of the province" wrote the *Union Forum* in August 1971, "both in the fishery and in unrelated industries, began to see that the Burgeo issue touched all of them. For if one man could stand up to a union and crush it then anyone else might be able to do the same thing anywhere else at any time. And if that happened once it would be bound to happen again, and again. ... And all the while the telegrams kept coming in, from individuals and locals across the province. For they too remembered that Burgeo is not the only place with a Spencer Lake" (UF August 1971). By beginning to abstract from the strike a narrative of the wider Newfoundland outport experience, the union began to build an image of society and culture in which others across the island could relate to. For every strike erupting around the island over unequal wages, for every community beginning to organize around their concerns about Smallwood's system of political patronage, and for every protest emerging out of a general dissatisfaction with a government bureaucracy which continued to limit their ability to participate effectively in 'civil' decisions, so too did they find an analogy of their own situation in the struggle of the striking Burgeo workers.

What gave this portrayal its 'character,' however, was the way in which it

engaged with the broader ideals associated with the civil rights movement. By using the Lakes family's attack on union members and their general paternalistic position of power as their example, the union aligned the cause of striking Burgeo workers with the struggle of other politically oppressed groups. The striking workers fight for union recognition was, as local United Church Minister Joe Burke wrote for the *Union Forum*, not only about a higher wage but also a "cause for Christian concern."

To those in Church and State who have committed themselves to a better society, the cause at Burgeo calls for them to support the workers and the community in their efforts to establish a more meaningful democracy. ... In keeping with the policy of the United Church I felt obliged to take a stand on the side of the workers. If, as a Christian, I was prepared to boycott grapes picketed by non-union workers in the southern United States in protest of the injustice done to them by their employers, how much more ought I to stand for the rights of my own people in the community where I worked when their position is identical with the workers of the deep south (UF August 1971).

By universalizing the local situation, the union spokespeople began to broaden the political dimensions of the struggle. "We are faced with a situation where an employer violates the civil rights of his workers in a plant which had been heavily subsidized by government funds and to which, in fact, the government had appointed one of its officials to sit on the board of directors, and presumably to look out to other public interests where the company is concerned," wrote union spokesperson Woodrow Wilson. "Yet Spencer Lake maintains his stand that he will not have a union in his plant. He has violated the Labour Relations Act by threatening to close his plant down because of a labour dispute; he has involved inshore fishermen, who were innocent bystanders in the affair by refusing to buy their fish as long as they were union members. He has used threatening tactics on his dragger fishermen by requiring them to sign documents denouncing the union and he has led non-union employees through the picket lines and in many other



ways tried to provoke the picketers. In a democratic country this cannot be allowed to continue, and must therefore be of concern to every citizen. If Spencer Lake is allowed to get away with these kinds of tactics the way will be paved for other employers in any other industry to do the same thing" (DN July 16 1971). The further that the Lake family went in their attempt to recapture their authority, the further that it was used to illustrate the political mechanisms and social institutions existing right across the island which had been used to reproduce the inequality of the rural Newfoundlander in relation to their 'mainland' counterparts.



Figure 5.1.0. June 9, 1971. *The Daily News*

### 5.5.0. – 'Civil' politics and consciousness

It was through this politicization of the strike that the working class began to struggle to establish itself as a powerful presence within civil and political society. By illustrating how Smallwood's refusal to stand on the side of the striking workers was a breach of his own obligation to represent and protect the interests of the outport

constituency which had returned him into office for the previous twenty-two years, the union began to rupture the legitimacy of his governing authority. “Whatever chance he had of gaining union confidence has now been thrown away,” wrote *The Evening Telegram*’s editorial board.

The unions are forced to fall back on their own resources and will continue to use the weapons they know best. They feel that Premier Smallwood had deserted them in favor of management (ET July 30 1971).

Even while John Crosbie, then emerging as one of the most prominent politicians in the province claimed that union President Richard Cashin was “injecting partisan politics” into an issue that “no politician should get involved in at this stage,” it was through Cashin’s ability to target specific politics, politician and laws for their implication for the strike that enabled the working class to begin to identify its allies and enemies. “The Burgeo dispute” Cashin announced to a labour convention in July, “will tell the truth once and for all about whether Joey is for the fishermen or the businessmen, as it appears he is now.” “You can’t get out of that box, Joey,” *The Daily News* added him saying (DN July 27 1971). No matter how much one attempted to remain neutral or outside the struggle, every institution, policy, law and politician were in the process of being drawn into the struggle for their support for either capitalist or labourer. “The question that bothers me now,” Cashin added in regards to Spencer Lake, “is how a man of that view could ever be appointed as a director of the Bank of Canada by a Prime Minister (Trudeau) who uses the words ‘just society’” (DN June 9 1971). By identifying those who opposed working class interests and the institutions which supported them, the labourers of rural Newfoundland began to identify the focus of their struggle.

It was through this process of drawing the strike into the realm of the

bourgeoisie's own 'civil' society that the working class began to organize around challenging the political institutions which capital used to reproduce its rule. With public demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, Cashin reaching out to then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and bumper stickers intuitively stating 'It started in Burgeo' being plastered on cars across the island (ET August 3-5 1971), the strike was made to be an electoral, political, legal, judicial issue. "I always thought that past history was a subject you had to read from a book," Esau Thoms, a supporting Newfoundland labour leader wrote in to *The Evening Telegram*.

It's not so at Burgeo, there you can live 17<sup>th</sup> century history in 1971. ... The only real solution to the Burgeo problem is for all workers and their families to ensure that they vote for candidates who will state in public what their political party will do if elected. ... If the working people in this province do not exercise this power on polling day, then it is an example that they want the Burgeo worker held down forever (ET Thursday September 2).

The longer that Smallwood refused to comment on the strike, the more that he was seen as being aligned with the forces, legal mechanisms and institutions which reproduced the rural Newfoundlander's inequality. "That in any part of Canada," Federal NDP leader David Lewis argued during an ongoing federal election campaign visit to Newfoundland "it should be possible for an employer to say nuts, I won't deal with a union, I'll look after my people, as if they were his serfs or slaves ... in 1971 ... and that the provincial government ... should sit back and let it happen is just a shameful thing. ... But I'm assuming that Mr. Smallwood is under some obligations to certain sections of wealth in this province" (DN August 9 1971). By using the strike as their weapon, the working class began to force its way into the realm of bourgeois politics. Where a law, institution or politician was seen as either in opposition or even simply not responsive to protecting their interests, then they began to struggle against it. With reformist-politicians and law-

school educated labour leaders politicizing their cause and a growing cohort of everyday people writing letters-to-the-editor, the rural proletariat of outport Newfoundland was beginning to form its own distinct working class politics.

It was through the identification of the broader political institutions involved in the strike, then, that provided the link upon which other groups across the island began to unite their struggles. “In Harbour Breton, some 200 employees of the B.C. Packers walked off the job in sympathy with the Newfoundland Fishermen, Food and Allied Workers Union (NFFAWU) whose employees are striking against Burgeo Fish Industries,” *The Evening Telegram* reported as ‘illegal’ wildcat sympathy strikes began to roll across the province in mid-summer. “The men are expected to stay off until the government intervenes in the Burgeo strike and forces the company to close down the fish plant which is being picketed by striking employees” (ET July 26 1971). Hundreds of kilometers away on the opposite side of the island, “The Bonavista local also stated that the fishermen of Newfoundland can no longer support a government who refused to protect their rights” (DN July 23 1971). Even after Smallwood finally visited Burgeo with his new Minister of Labour, Roy Legge, in early September in what would be a failed attempt to restart contract negotiations, he was unable to escape the portrayal that he and the state bureaucracy he had built and continued to preside over supported the society that the Lakes were attempting to preserve. “The facts are inescapable,” Mike Martin of the union wrote to *The Evening Telegram*.

## CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

The Lakes are holding the jobs of their employees as ransom against the free voice of those who wish to have some say in the matters which effect their own destinies, the fate of their community, and the future of their children. The Lakes are using the public treasury, and the courts of this nation to support their domination over the group of people who dare speak up for their rights (ET September 17 1971).

The more that the union spokespeople portrayed the strike as a struggle against a broader system of social inequality that characterized Newfoundland, the more that it became a representation of the way that Smallwood, the state, the law, politics and the entirety of 'civil' society were mechanisms through which the bourgeoisie reproduced its rule. Correspondingly, what had once been seen among the rural proletariat as localized, circumstantial issues related to their own particular lives were now becoming understood as simply local manifestations of a broader class struggle which they, as voters, as citizens, as workers, as consumer had the power to change.



Figure 5.2.0 – July 16, 1971. *The Evening Telegram*

### 5.6.0. – Class Consciousness

It was through this articulation of a local struggle in terms of wider political and social theory that gave the strike in Burgeo its power to epitomize working class struggle and the experience of the outport proletariat. While it is not possible to say with any statistical certainty that the strike had any measurable effect on the election results of

October 1971,<sup>17</sup> what did decisively occur during this period was a fundamental rupture in the legitimacy of Smallwood's authority and the entire society and culture through which he had justified and reproduced his rule. "If you're looking for a couple of kindred spirits on the whirligig of Newfoundland politics," wrote Ron Crocker on the weekend after the election, "an ideal pair, it seems to me, would be Premier (or whatever he is now) Joseph R. Smallwood and that fish merchant extraordinaire, Spencer G. Lake of Burgeo."

Joey Smallwood and Spencer Lake were fashioned from one mold; but the shape of that mold was something that neither of them could determine. It was determined rather by no less formidable a force than historic servility of Newfoundlanders and the unreasonable and almost pathetic faith they have always placed in those who would be leaders, either in politics or in business. ... Joey and Spencer are monuments to the might of the old ways and because they are creatures of the old system, they can never adapt to the new ... Joey harbored roughly the same attitudes towards the people of Newfoundland yet neither he nor Lake nor the thousands like them could accept that this was no way to behave. After all, in the system that produced them that was quite the proper way to behave. In truth, there could be no alternative so Newfoundland is – relatively speaking – in the throes of revolution (ET November 6 1971).

For each moment over the past twenty-five years in which the people of rural Newfoundland had been united within a North American supply chain of industrial mass production and consumption, so too had they begun to form as a 'mass' of workers and consumers in relation to the owners of capital. And for every moment in which Spencer Lake, Smallwood and all the owners of capital attempted to reproduce their authority against this 'mass' through paternalistic favouritism, patronage politics and a whole range of legal mechanisms which fragmented their struggle, the more that a sense of political

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<sup>17</sup> Liberal received 20 seats, the Conservatives 20 and a dramatic single vote for Labrador Right Leader Tom Burgess who held the balance. The election would eventually be challenged by Smallwood on the basis of a technicality and he would assume a position of pseudo-premiership over the next six months until a second election in March of 1972 decidedly brought Frank Moore's Conservatives to power, Smallwood's retirement and the nationalization of the Burgeo plant.

oppression became increasingly radicalized. “The rise of citizens groups, of what might be called the politics of the street, has been the most visible result of this change in public feeling” Joyce Richardson wrote in the moments before the October election. “This has accompanied a changing attitude towards authority, a feeling that people really do not need any longer to wait to be told what to do” (ET October 1 1971). When the institutions of ruling class authority which had reproduced the inequality of rural Newfoundland were revealed in Burgeo in their starkest form, it was immediately extrapolated onto Smallwood’s rule. By not being able to escape his association with the Lake family, so too was his own political rule and the entire society which he presided over thrown into disrepute. Where it was once Smallwood who had portrayed himself as the representative of outport people against the bourgeoisie and their game of ‘civil’ society, twenty-years later it was now him who was becoming understood as the mechanism which reproduced their continued exclusion.

When the dust began to settle in March of 1972 after the Frank Moores conservative government had taken power, nationalized the Burgeo plant and recognized the union, it was the role of the striking Burgeo workers in bursting open new channels of political participation that was already becoming recognized as their most significant effect. “Now they had to rock the boat in order to change this,” a ‘Mr. Barry’ noted in the Provincial legislature. “And there are people in Newfoundland who would say and who did say ... that they were fools to do this. That they should not have done this. That they were getting a good living. That they were keeping themselves and their families clothed and fed, keeping body and soul together and that this should have been enough for them.”



Now the people in Burgeo set out, as an example I think to all of us here in Newfoundland, that keeping body and soul together is not enough for any working man in Newfoundland, that there is such a thing as respect which the working man in Newfoundland expects to have and there is such a thing as the working man in Newfoundland wanting to be able to stand up and say "I am not dependent on the good will of anyone for earning a living. I am here. I am willing to do a good day's work for a good day's wages and I am entitled to a fair and decent wage because of that." Now this is what the people in Burgeo were saying they wanted in this labour dispute.

When the Marystown strike erupted in late 1971, it was precisely upon this very same notion of a fight for human dignity that animated their struggle. It was a struggle expressed not only in the way that workers had developed a perception of themselves as part of a wider 'continental' or 'Canadian' working class, but more significantly in the way in which they could now articulate their interests as a class in relation to their employers as clearly as the 'colours' of racial oppression in the southern United States. "Some mainland companies have the idea that Newfoundlanders are a backward people who can be made to work for less than other Canadians. They think we are white niggers who will work our fingers to the bone for a crust of bread, but they are wrong. We are not looking for more than other Canadians are entitled to, but we are not going to accept less," a worker in Marystown was quoted as saying (Post March 9 1972). Out of the dozens of struggles that took place across the island in 1971, it was the struggle against the old aristocratic ruling family in Burgeo that had come to epitomize them all. By finding themselves organized in opposition to the entire Newfoundland capitalist class, the labouring proletariat of outport Newfoundland had come to recognize themselves and all the political issues and institutions which united them as the working class. It was a "new breed of Newfoundlander," as Chesley Beck of the Marystown local wrote in to the editor, "proud and independent like their forefathers but now organized and able to

combat the exploitation to which they have been subject to for so long. We no longer have to doff our cap and cast our eyes downwards at the approach of the exploiter, but we raise our hats..." (Post March 23 1972). With the Burgeo strike's redefinition of the old fisherfolk-merchant struggle within the context of bourgeois society, it can be said that at this point a working class had been made in rural Newfoundland. The value of the men and women of rural Newfoundland and the labours that they performed had become an area of struggle that could never again be ignored.

#### **5.7.0. – Conclusion: Revolution and Reform**

What gave the 1971 strike in Burgeo its significance was the way in which it re-invented the popular dichotomy between merchant and fisherfolk within the context of bourgeois society. Out from the struggle of the African American and other workers in the auto factory cities of Detroit, Windsor and the Great Lakes regions during the 1940s, 50s and 60s emerged a middle-class standard of living which set itself as the benchmark for working-people across the world. When the ripple effects of these strikes, boycotts, riots and protests hit the shores of Newfoundland, making their way to the southwest coast via the freighters, airplanes, ships and radio waves on which rural Newfoundlanders worked it created an undeniable contradiction between the work and society that those in the outports continued to experience and that which they now knew was possible elsewhere. Over the years of having been mobilized within an international division of labour that moved them across the continent and back in search of work, they had in-turn come to realize that the history that Smallwood had promised to make for them with the stroke of his pen in 1949 had turned out to be nothing other than an empty promise. If

they were to meet the standards of the wider North-American working class and achieve for themselves the dignity which they believed would accompany it, then there was no one else but themselves that would have to make it. And it was from the dusty gravel road outside the fish plant in the isolated town of Burgeo in which the men and women who stood in opposition to its owner that the story of an old-time fight against the ruling merchant class would spark a movement which eventually spread across the island.

Yet the tendency towards reform, rather than revolution, meant that the overthrow of the Lake family in Burgeo and what had the makings of a genuine redistribution of power in the late 1960s remained relatively localized. What eventually brought Smallwood down was the formation and gradual strengthening of a rural proletariat organized and united by the very same network of coastal boats, civil services and industrial employments which he had initiated many years earlier in his quest to ‘modernize’ society. Receiving their political education in interaction with the new bourgeoisie who hired them and taught them to work and act as a group, this new proletariat built a set of relationships that united them across the entire eastern coast of North America. When they still found themselves marginalized by the paternal authority of the old ruling class in Newfoundland, they called into action their school teachers, skippers, shopkeepers and outside union agitators who took their struggle and made it legal, ‘civil,’ electoral and political. For the men and women who manned the picket lines day after day, however, it was a ‘politics’ based on nothing other than the simple recognition that it was those who fished the richest fishing grounds on the planet that were again the ones who found themselves to be the poorest. “Burgeo has become more than just another fishing village,” the *Union Forum* stated in August 1971. “Burgeo is a

state of mind” (UF 1971: 4). Where the ‘fishermen's union,’ the 1971-72 elections, the politicians and the lawyers, priests and union organizers eventually took this movement would be circumscribed by the barriers of the system which they, as bourgeois institutions, were themselves a part of. The impulse that started among those who laboured in Burgeo, however – and as limited as it may have ultimately been – was indeed “bonafied.”

## CONCLUSION: The Making and Unmaking of the Twentieth Century's Great Industrial Working Class

Class composition is in constant change. If workers resisting capital *compose* themselves as a collectivity, capital must strive to *decompose* or break up this threatening cohesion. It does this by constant revolutionizing of the means of production – by recurrent *restructurings*, involving organizational changes and technological innovations that divide, deskill, or eliminate dangerous groups of workers. But since capital is a system that depends on its power to organize labor through the wage, it cannot entirely destroy its antagonist. Each capitalist restructuring must recruit new and different types of labor, and thus yields the possibility of working class *recomposition* involving different strata of workers with fresh capacities of resistance and counterinitiative.

Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999: 66)

### 6.1.0. - Dispossession and Proletarian Class Formation

The process whereby the old craft and artisanal ‘peasant’ societies of the countryside were broken down and re-organized around mass production and consumption was thus at the very same time the making of the twentieth century’s great industrial working class. Whether it was by replacing ‘hunting and gathering’ activities with Federal social assistance cheques, imposing classroom attendance laws or building the basic infrastructure upon which capital investment could flow into the outports, the history of Newfoundland in the two decades after Confederation in 1949 is a history of

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the Smallwood state's initiative to transform the people into a store-shopping, factory-working and semi-urban proletariat.

While it was precisely the ability of the outport household to produce as a small fisher and cover a portion of its own consumption costs through 'subsistence' activities that allowed the early manufacturers to establish themselves as a new industrial bourgeoisie, it was precisely the independence and 'resilience' provided by these very same activities that eventually impeded the capability of expanding capitalist control. The 1954-5 overproduction 'crisis' was thus not only rooted within the new bourgeoisie's 'over-enthusiastic' jump into producing frozen fish products for an apparent demand within the U.S. market. Rather, it was a signal of a 'restructuring' of the social relationships in rural Newfoundland towards ones which suited a regime of expanding capitalist accumulation. Fisheries Products Limited's (FPL) closing down of the plant in Burgeo that year, in effect creating a capital strike that left thousands of fishing households with no market to sell their fish was combined with the Smallwood state's concomitant enactment of the household Resettlement program, the enforcement of new anti-'poaching' laws and the dismantling of the institutional basis of the old salt-fish industry. When Spencer and Harold Lake took over ownership of the Burgeo plant in 1955, they benefitted not only from a substantial government loan but also the initiative of the entire capitalist class towards eliminating any economic alternative to waged work within the outports. After a year which saw thousands of fishing households with no outlet to sell their fish, outports began to close and the industrial 'growth centers' saw a corresponding expansion of the group gathered outside the factory gates as available 'hands.' It was nothing other than a massive transfer of ownership over the 'means of

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production' to the new capitalist class. This transformation is perhaps best captured by the fact that at the very same moment that capital initiated this restructuring, so too were the new dispossessed labourers of Burgeo making telephone calls to St. John's seeking professional assistance to organize themselves as a new trade union. What emerged as victorious, however, was the Lake family's overwhelming capacity to mobilize and monopolize the investment of capital and the redistribution of surplus flowing into the outport. Building off the Penny family's long aristocratic tradition, the new Lake family was able to act as the personification of the promise to 'revitalize' the coast. Through this power, they established the boundaries upon which working class struggle was circumscribed for the next 15 years.

It is thus precisely within this process of 'crisis and restructuring' taking place throughout the 1950s and 1960s that one can see the major moves towards reorganizing the society of outport Newfoundland to facilitate expanded industrial accumulation. As the means of one's livelihood was changing ownership, so too was there a corresponding shift in the ways that people engaged with the local ecology, each other and how they fed their families and reproduced themselves over time. Whether looking at the diffusion of Sears and Eaton's catalogues into the outports, the new coastal boats and postal service networks or the Federal cheques to help pay for it all, the 1950s and 1960s can be read as the history in which the cultural criteria derived from the relationships associated with industrial mass production and consumption displaced the cultural criteria from the world of work of the village-based family fishery. With each 'labour shortage' proclaimed by the processing companies, so too was there a corresponding response by the provincial-federal government and their new 'municipal' organizations towards placing emphasis on

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the importance of 'skills training,' 'qualifications,' 'education' and all the organizational characteristics which codified and reproduced industrial employment relations. The hopes, anxieties and insecurities characteristic of the outport people at this time period all reflect the way in which they were beginning for the first time to think about their future through the new measurements of 'education,' 'cash-incomes,' 'employment' and ultimately 'progress.' While the emergence of consumer culture and ideals of humanistic self-development is often attributed as being the moving force in history, it can also be understood as the social expression of an incipient proletariat coming to articulate its interest as North American-style factory workers, supermarket shoppers and municipal, provincial, and national 'citizens.'

### **6.2.0. - Capitalist Accumulation and the Social Relations of Production**

The particular history in which the 1971 Burgeo strike finds its significance thus begins with the way in which the social relationships built around the old craft and artisanal commodity production process were broken down and reshaped around industrial mass manufacturing and consumption. For every increase in the number of people who resettled in the 'growth centers,' so too did the wells, the stream-fed fresh water, the game, the fish all begin to run dry. The keystone of this regime was the factory - multiplying to two after Lake's arrival in 1955 - which in itself contained an engine which could systematically exhaust the capability of the outporters to generate a livelihood from small artisanal production off the local ecology. By then expanding their ownership over the supply of each household's consumer needs through the building of a dairy farm, importing livestock and consumer goods through their supermarket business,



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the Lake family progressively brought consumption under their control. With this control, they were able to slowly draw more and more of a following into a material dependency on their imported consumer goods. With this power, they thus cultivated the creation of an entire society and culture geared towards reproducing the social relationships based on the necessity that both men and women return to work for them each day. As people began to depend on the Lakes' groceries and connections to meet their own critical needs, so too did the scheduling and organization of one's time and the shape of their social relationships come under the administration of the capitalist.

The very concept of growth, then, became the central logic upon which both the capitalist and the working class began to struggle. While dispossession continually acted as a force to expand the outport's reliance on the Lake family's imported store-bought goods, it was this very same process of becoming reliant on the capitalist's 'means of production' which propelled the proletariat to mobilize a politics based around advancing their own class interests. As this relationship expanded across a trans-continental supply chain of refrigerated cargo ships, electric radio waves, Federal civil services and a migratory employment that took them to the heart of North America and back, so too did they begin to reorganize themselves as part of an international working class. For every socio-cultural mechanism which the Lake family then cultivated around being the exclusive 'provider' of consumer goods and waged employment to the southwest coast, it only exacerbated a growing contradiction between the circumstances that people experienced in Burgeo and those which Smallwood had articulated to them as being part of their 'rights' by virtue of being a Canadian 'citizen.'

### **6.3.0. - Working class formation and the Organized Labour Movement**

What thus shaped the society and culture of the emerging 'industrial villages' of rural Newfoundland, then, was the political dynamic of class struggle. While the Smallwood state had enacted a relentless campaign of using labour law, willful neglect and personal charisma to ensure no autonomous organizations of working people could emerge, it was in relation to these very same legal, political and socio-cultural institutions that the proletariat of outport Newfoundland began to understand and articulate their circumstances as being political. Where once the scheduling of time, the redistribution of surplus between households and the entire daily organization of society in the village had fallen under the administration of the household women who gathered as 'shore crowds' around the activities of splitting and drying fish, gardening and the making and cleaning of clothing, it was now through the organization of these very same women that the outport people began to mobilize themselves in relation to the new industrial bourgeoisie. What the 1971 strike in Burgeo reveals is that the NFFAWU - among the hundreds of organizations which emerged in the outports during the 1950s and 1960s - was built upon the labour and organized networks of outport women. Making the sandwiches, brewing the coffee, setting up the chairs in meeting rooms, and chairing the discussions with a forthrightness which fishermen found uncomfortable, it was the women – with male allies in the churches, schools and civil service – who organized the frontlines of the proletariat's political struggle within the new 'civil' society of the bourgeoisie. If it was through the new town 'councils,' roads 'committees,' development 'agencies,' 'associations' and 'management' on which the industrial bourgeoisie attempted to expand their control over the administration and scheduling of the outporter's time, consumption

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and reproduction, then it was precisely through these very same institutional mechanisms that the proletariat came to re-organize their own politics.

What thus gives significance to the 1971 strike in Burgeo is the way in which it embodied and epitomized the formation of the wider proletariat in rural Newfoundland. While the movements of the 1960s are often attributed to a 'youthful rebellion' which reflected the changing demographic composition associated with the 'baby-boom' generation, this expression of defiance is more precisely a reflection of the way that the working class was defining itself in relation to the forms of capitalist authority characteristic of the time period. While the bourgeoisie's response to working class struggle during the 1940s was to grant legal recognition to trade unions, this 'settlement' had at the very same time created a new alliance between the state, capitalist and 'big' labour which ultimately worked towards fragmenting the unity of the wider working class. In the rural 'hinterlands' where raw resources were extracted as well as in the many racialized communities who laboured in the 'peripheries' of the expanding urban cities, the new legal framework established the boundaries around who constituted and received the benefits associated with the 'organized' working class. Reproduced by an entire society and culture that reinforced and justified the position of women, Newfoundlanders and other minorities at the bottom of the pay scale, the movement of the proletariat during these decades thus coalesced around an international movement which began to define itself in relation to the political, social and state-reinforced mechanisms which reproduced their economic inequality. They thus formed the 'civil rights movement,' who through challenging the state, capitalist, political parties and trade union bureaucracies themselves were able to win the institutionalization of new democratic mechanisms

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which recognized their interest as a class. While expressed as the history of the ‘young vs the old’ and ‘inclusion vs exclusion’ it was more precisely a movement which joined together young and old and men and women from across the excluded proletarian populations in a movement of protest, picket and revolution which established the recognition of their full rights of citizenship. The movement for the recognition of trade union and collective bargaining rights for Newfoundland’s fishers, isolated plant workers and dragger crews which swept across the island in the years 1969-1975 was but a manifestation of this larger planetary revolution.

It was the way that the struggle in Burgeo captured this movement within the context of rural Newfoundland that illustrates the way in which the movement of the proletariat produced a corresponding societal and cultural shift. For every middle-class activist who began to portray the case of the striking Burgeo workers as being an example of the broader struggle against inequality, so too can we see the expansion of working-class consciousness. While it is difficult to discern the actual ‘sympathy’ of the people who engaged in the sympathy strikes, walk-outs and demonstrations which rippled across Newfoundland in 1971 in support of the workers in Burgeo, it was in these very same places where plant workers would, in 1972 and 1973, undertake their own strike actions for standardization of pay in the factories. They would again, in 1974-5, be the sites of the trawler strikes that won legislative recognition of an employment contract between dragger crews and the processing companies. The struggle between the striking workers and the Lake family in Burgeo in 1971 thus built an image through which other people began to understand and articulate their experience as being rooted within a broader political system. The power that this perception holds in mobilizing people into a

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popular movement, if not attested to by the undeniable organizational success of the NFFAWU, was most vividly demonstrated by the voting out of Joseph Smallwood in the 1971-1972 provincial election. It was the apex of a societal transformation that had begun twenty-five years earlier whereby the material circumstances of rural outports had been completely transformed through their integration into North American mass production and consumption. When the proletariat began to struggle against the newly imposed conditions, they in-turn came to recognize their subordinate class position in society. It was now their interests which politician, employer, or any aspiring leader had to represent, or risk losing their legitimacy.

### **6.4.0. - Class Struggle and History**

What this narrative has shown is that the story which culminated in the 1971 Burgeo strike can be interpreted as following the classical ‘trajectory’ of capitalist development. In place likes Burgeo and the southwest coast where the ‘transition’ from the village-based family-fishery to a factory-based regime of mass manufacturing during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s had been used to reproduce and expand the power of a new industrial bourgeoisie, it had nevertheless at the very same time created an interconnected industrial working class. The 1971 strike can in this way be portrayed as a classic contradiction in which the ‘social relations of production’ are through the movement of the proletariat burst apart and re-arranged around the new objective ‘forces of production.’ In fact, by 1971, the actors in the strike themselves knew something of the models of bourgeois economic development and the way in which the working class could organize itself as rights-bearing ‘citizen’ workers.

## CONCLUSION

While following the this common ‘trajectory,’ the particularities of the Newfoundland experience as well as the subsequent history of the working class that ‘started in Burgeo’ can also be interpreted as a moment within the unplanned outcome of two struggling class subjects. In the years since the 1971 strike, capital’s response has been unending. The adoption of high-volume production machinery after National Sea took over the operation of the plant in 1972 and a renewed focus on Taylorist efficiency methods was a strategy to re-assert capital’s dominance through restructuring the work process and the composition of the working class. Yet even as National Sea installed de-personalized forms of management which allowed for easy job-fragmentation and the ability to replace workers with machines, the working class again remade itself. As Neis (1988a) has documented and is well remembered by people in the community today, the local working class again resisted through mass job absenteeism, work slow-downs, product destruction, and a never-ending series of unplanned walk-outs and wildcat strikes that has given Burgeo its reputation of militancy. National Sea responded by closing the plant around 1989-1990, branding it the worst workforce on the island, and selling the operations to Bill Barry for a total price tag of \$1. It has thus only been with the shipping overseas of industrial manufacturing that the working class formation of the industrialized outports of rural Newfoundland has perhaps been unmade. The smaller the workforce with each subsequent ‘restructuring’ since the 1992 cod moratorium, the more Alberta license plates have appeared in town. As it always has been, the working class is again on the move.

The 1971 Burgeo strike - like many of the ‘1968 generation’ revolts - is thus characteristic of a bourgeois political revolution. By the mid-1970s, the NFFAWU’s

## CONCLUSION

political activities shifted away from standardizing plant workers' conditions and contracts across the island towards spokespersonship for the owners of the emergent million-dollar 'nearshore' long-liner fleets. By contributing to the push for 'professionalizing' the industry through limiting access to fish by licensing only 'full-time' fishers, the union worked alongside state and capital to dispossess the remaining subsistence and 'occupationally plural' smallboat fishers. Bryant Fairley argued in 1983 that "...it would be a mistake to consider the NFFAWU a working-class body. On the contrary, it is a bourgeois one in which the political and economic interests of the workers and pauperized proprietors are expressed only to the extent that such interests are in keeping with the project of the new bourgeoisie." Whether or not the new 'crews' of the nearshore long-liner fleet had more in common with the 'skippers' who hired them than with the processing companies who purchased their fish is an empirical question, but the changing class composition of the union's political interests and hence the outports over the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is clear. The Great Industrial Working Class which had arisen out of the struggles over human welfare during the 1930s Depression and the fights for representation during the Second World War and its aftermath had made itself in Newfoundland as well. With it, they had fought and won the institutionalization in state and law of a middle-class standard of living which continues to shape our baseline socio-cultural understanding of human welfare today. Each subsequent 'crisis and restructuring' in the time since, however, has been the story of its unmaking. As the struggle for equal citizenship continues to roll across the planet today, we can look to the isolated village of Burgeo to find a lesson on the way that the language of rights can be used to mobilize.

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