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WOMEN, WORK AND WELFARE: 
THE THOMSON REPORT AND BEYOND

Michael D. Wright*

I. INTRODUCTION**
While recognising what has come to be understood as the traditional form of social assistance, that of simply providing income to meet basic needs, the Social Assistance Review Committee (hereinafter the Committee) argues that within Ontario, a "philosophical reorientation is needed so that the provision of assistance to become self-reliant and active participants in the life of the community will be considered just as important".¹ Specifically, the Committee's Report states that while self-reliance is best thought of as a continuum, paid employment represents the most effective means of achieving this integration into society.² Yet in coming to this conclusion, the Committee fails to address the fact that paid employment is already the major income source for the majority of poor families.³ This paper is an attempt to

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2. Ibid. at 8, 15, and 258. Also note that at 89, the Report states that employment is a "key element" in the transition from "dependence" to "self-reliance and community integration".

3. Ibid. Figure 2 at 31. This analysis is based on the Statistics Canada microdata tape, Incomes of Economic Families, 1984, which contains data collected in the 1985 Survey of Consumer Finances. The data reveals that of a total of 275,090 families, employment was the major source of income for 58 per cent (full-time employment 27 per cent and part-time employment 31 per cent) and social assistance payments was the major income source for 42 per cent of the families. Regarding part-time workers, it should be noted that since 1981, the proportion of full-time jobs has decreased, and that many of the over 1.5 million workers in part-time work would have preferred full-time employment. See Statistics
answer the question of why the Committee would advocate moving more poor people into the existing labour market, which to date has been unable to provide an adequate standard of living for all. It is also an examination of some alternatives that are available beyond this main focus of the Committee’s Report.

In this paper, I take the view that any alternatives to the approach taken by the Committee must address the higher incidence of poverty among women, and specifically among female single parents. Women lead 85 percent of single parent families, and more than 50 percent of single parent families are poor. Moreover, their numbers are growing: between 1971 and 1981, single parent families in Canada increased by nearly 60 percent. They now make up 15 percent of all families, and are increasing at about two-and-a-half times the growth rate of two parent families. As the Committee recognises: “To be a woman raising children alone can be a passport to a life of poverty.”

The Committee supports a social assistance program that gives single mothers the choice between re-entering the labour market and staying home to raise their children. In response to this type of policy, it has been argued that transferring from dependence upon one man to reliance upon a male-dominated state is simply the familiar dependence in a new form. Yet as Mary McIntosh notes, the level of analysis is not “how does the state oppress women?” but “what part does the state play in establishing and sustaining systems in which women are oppressed and subordinated to men?” In considering where to direct energy in contesting the oppression of women that has resulted in the feminisation of poverty, it is helpful to consider the three sites of this oppression: the family, the state, and the labour market. However, before undertaking this examination, I wish to preface it with a discus-

4. The Labour Force. supra, note 3 at 30, 41 and Table 7 at 62.
5. Ibid. at 41.
6. Ibid. at 63.
7. Ibid. at 44.
sion of the environment in which changes to social assistance must occur.

II. THE THOMSON REPORT: 
THE LIMITS OF LIBERAL REFORM

Despite its stated objective of ensuring that social assistance recipients are able to make the transition from dependence to autonomy, the Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee remains silent on the issue of how to change the context in which this self-sufficiency is to occur. The Committee recognises that integration requires jobs which provide sufficient income to meet basic needs, access to affordable child care, and a co-ordinated approach to education and skills training. It also points out that "the incidence of poverty, especially among the working poor, can shrink or grow dramatically in response to changing economic conditions." However, the Committee develops its recommendations for social assistance programs without further reference to these factors.

Yet it would be difficult to argue that any of the attitudes or recommendations in the Report is intended to be directly or particularly harmful to individuals. On the contrary, the Report represents a paradigm of liberal reform: individual rights and personal dignity are not simply respected in the Report, they are promoted and strengthened. Yet it is this attention to the individual that structures and limits the Report for purposes of social change. John Myles has pointed out that there is an inherent bias in Anglo-American democracies towards liberal versions of reform simply because that is the path of least resistance. This can be seen clearly in the Report, which uncovers and makes visible the sites of poverty, but not the sources, and it is for this reason that I argue it is ultimately incapable of being a basis for meaningful change.

10. Report, supra, note 1 at 8.
11. Ibid. at 257.
12. Ibid. at 65.
In my view, the liberal-pluralist theory of the state\textsuperscript{14} which defines the Committee's context must be rejected because it fails to acknowledge that political power is related to economic power, it does not account for the inequality of power between groups such as men and women and capital and labour, and, more importantly for my purposes, it overlooks the state's particular interest in maintaining and further supporting this inequality. What needs to be made explicit is that even though the state has its own particular interests, it remains the product of capital. As Leo Panitch points out, the state was developed by capital to respond to contradictions produced in the economic base, and its actions produce modifications in the economic base.\textsuperscript{15}

Based on this assessment, I argue that alternatives to the approach taken by the Committee are required if we are to achieve meaningful change. By examining the source and nature of oppression in the


In my consideration of the advanced capitalist state, I depend heavily on the work of Claus Offe. Offe argues that the study of policy formation is "fundamentally incomplete" as long as its main emphasis is on policy content. Offe's premise is that the capitalist state is defined by: (a) its exclusion from accumulation; (b) its necessary function for accumulation; (c) its dependence upon accumulation; and (d) its function to deny and conceal (a), (b) and (c). He concludes that "the reality of the capitalist state can thus best be described as the reality (and dominance) of an unrealistic attempt." See C. Offe, "The Theory of the Capitalist State and the Problem of Policy Formation" in L.N. Linberg et. al., eds., \textit{Stress and Contradiction in Modern Capitalism} (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1975) 125 at 140–144.

I take pains to make my position on the state clear because I feel it is a prerequisite to any discussion of social policy. As Bob Jessop has written, analysis of the state is important as it is "an absolute precondition to economic theorising today." See B. Jessop, "Recent Theories of the Capitalist State" (1977) 1 Cambridge J. of Economics 353 at 356; and also E. Wilson \textit{Women and the Welfare State} (London: Tavistock, 1978).
family, the state, and the labour market, it is possible to develop the basis of a strategy for reform.

III. CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

(I) THE FAMILY AND FAMILIALISM

Perhaps the most startling example of the disparity between the Report and the reality of poverty, particularly women's poverty, is the attitude which the Report adopts towards the family. The Committee recognises the family as playing the dominant role in the development of human competence and character, and states that it is "the most economical system known for making and keeping human beings human." Moreover, support of families is one of the principles upon which the Committee believes social reform should be based.

In response to this type of assumption, Michele Barrett has argued that "family responsibilities play a direct role in the structure of women's wage labour and in setting limits on women's participation." Moreover, the family has become the central social institution and the lens through which society and the economy are frequently seen. Yet it is important to question to what extent the family explains lower wage rates for women, and to consider how these rates relate to the sphere of production and to patriarchal ideology.


17. Ibid. at 92.


19. As Barrett and McIntosh write: "Just as the family has been socially constructed, so society has been familialised. Indeed it can be argued that in contemporary capitalist society one dominant set of social meanings is precisely an ideology of familialism." See their The Anti-Social Family (London: Verso, 1982) at 31. At the same time, writers such as George Gilder have been prompted to write that "to a great extent poverty and unemployment, and even the largely psychological conditions of 'unemployability' are chiefly reflections of family deterioration." See G.F. Gilder, Wealth and Poverty (London: Buchan and Enright, 1982) at 74.
It has been argued that because of the family, capital is able to draw on female labour in particular ways as an industrial reserve army.\(^{20}\) While the merits and shortcomings of this approach in the context of the labour market are considered later in the paper, the role of the family in this process should be specifically examined here. It has been pointed out that in the Report, women's work in the home is invisible, as it is in the rest of society.\(^{21}\) When the importance of domestic labour as it relates to participation in the waged labour market is considered, this absence becomes even more problematic.

The "family-household system" of contemporary capitalism is an important organising principle of our society's relations of production.\(^{22}\) In this regard, some writers have argued that domestic labour is essential in the production of surplus value, as it is the other half of capitalist organisation.\(^{23}\) Moreover, this perspective suggests that because of their unwaged status, women who work in the home are considered to be in an inferior position in relation to waged workers.\(^{24}\) Because women's unpaid domestic labour reduces the value of labour power as a whole, its retention as part of the system benefits capital. These writers conclude that women's position in society is determined exclusively by their position in the domestic sphere.

In considering this position, Maxine Molyneux cautions against the danger of assimilating work in the home into the capitalist mode of

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22. Michele Barrett adopts this phrase from Mary McIntosh as it is able to convey the combination of (1) the material relations of the household; and (2) the ideological construction of familialism and gender and allows for their joint exploration. See Barrett, supra, note 18 at 210-11.


production. She argues that because domestic labour is privatized individual labour not subject to the law of value, assimilation places it in a wholly functional relation to capital. This kind of "economic reductionism" should be replaced with a recognition of the complexity of the relations through which women's subordination is mediated. Himmelweit and Mohun note that women's oppression is not merely a cultural phenomenon, but has "a material basis in domestic labour, independent of and prior to her 'super-exploitation' in the labour market." Though this insight is valuable, it must be complemented by an analysis of the labour market, which itself reinforces women's reproductive roles and their subordination in the home.

While the oppression of women predates capitalism and exists in socialist societies, its specific forms and functions must be seen in the context of the system of production and the class structure of which it now forms a part. Historically, as waged work has spread, capital has seized upon pre-existing divisions between men and women, and has incorporated that division within its own workforce to its own advantage. As will be elaborated below, it is helpful when considering the gender divisions of social production in capitalism to refer to these cleavages as manifested in the organisation of the household and the ideology of familialism.

(II) THE STATE

In its Report, the Committee notes that it understands participation in the labour force "is not a realistic expectation for all social assistance recipients", and that reliance on the state for basic needs is a social necessity in some cases. Specifically, those individuals who have child care responsibilities or disabilities to contend with will not be required

26. Ibid. at 22.
27. Supra, note 24 at 18.
28. Ibid. at 24. In this regard, see discussion in the text accompanying notes 40-63, infra.
to participate in "opportunity planning" as a condition of entitlement.\textsuperscript{30}

In respect to these types of provisions, Mary McIntosh has argued that the level of state provision for sole support mothers in fact defines their relationship to the labour market: "a generous and unconditional provision could keep them out of employment altogether", while "a meagre provision could force them to seek work at whatever wages". She concludes that welfare policy is thus "potentially a fairly flexible instrument keeping women more or less in reserve for wage labour."\textsuperscript{31}

It is interesting to consider McIntosh's comments in the context of the current trend, of "slimming the work force".\textsuperscript{32} Since the 1970s, mining and forest industries, which have traditionally been dominated by male workers, have drastically reduced their work force. Overall, the forest industries have lost approximately 30,000 jobs, and mining has seen its work force cut by twenty percent. Similar decreases can be found among oil and gas companies and in the manufacturing sector.\textsuperscript{33} These workers have been forced to find new work, and many of them have moved into the lower-paying service sectors of the

\textsuperscript{30} Report, supra, note 1 at 8, 230 and 257-58. Note F. Stairs' discussion of the juxtaposition of disability and mothering supra, note 21.


This is of particular importance for women, as over four-fifths of female employment in Canada is in services. As will be discussed, the state's role in structuring women's employment in these sectors is an important factor in their relationship to work.

(III) THE LABOUR MARKET

The Social Assistance Review Committee states in its Report that participation in the labour market provides people with more than just income; it also provides "a sense of belonging, and contributing to the community, which increases self-esteem." The Committee recognises the inadequacy of current wages, and in Recommendation 100 suggests an income supplementation to top up the wages of low income workers as a remedy. This approach, included as a suggestion in both the reports of the MacDonald and Forget Commissions, is considered advantageous as it allows business to minimise labour costs. The Committee recognizes the argument that income supplementation would act as a subsidy to employers, and suggests that "possibly a

34. Though employment in Canada has grown by 11.8 percent or an additional one million jobs in the last three years, service industries employment has increased 14.7 percent to approximately four million jobs. At the same time, relative to the service industry, less employment is available in the manufacturing sector, which has increased only 7.1 percent over the same three year period. See C. Waddell, "Beyond McJobs", Report on Business Magazine, The Toronto Globe and Mail (June 1988) 21.

In addition, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has noted that "since the beginning of the 1970s [the service sector] has been the only sector to create jobs in most member countries." See OECD, Employment Outlook, September 1984, as quoted in J. Kolko, Restructuring the World Economy (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) at 59 (emphasis in original). From 1951 to 1981, the service sector increased its share of the experienced labour force from 47 per cent to 66 per cent: W.G. Picot, Canada's Industries: Growth in Jobs over Three Decades (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1986) at 14.

35. Myles, supra, note 13 at 89.

36. Report, supra, note 1 at 266.

37. Ibid. at 285.

higher minimum wage is a better method."39 Despite realizing the difficulties inherent in income supplementation, the Committee still goes on to recommend its integration with the minimum wage.40

Moreover, entitlement to income supplementation would "clearly" be limited to those who participate in the paid labour force.41 This specification would exclude the many women who work out of the home on a piece-work basis, and also those who exchange the products of their labour informally. The bottom line, however, is why give money intended to overcome poverty to employers? This type of policy simply encourages the proliferation of low-wage businesses and, contrary to what many writers believe, adds to social inefficiency.42

At no point are the implications of the Committee's employment recommendations considered. The Report simply does not address the other side of 'the welfare trap'. Content with easing the transition from dependence on social assistance to reintegration into the labour market, it fails to address the reasons for the subordinate position of women in the labour market, and, more importantly, the role of the state in perpetuating their subordination. In considering women's oppression in the labour market, it is necessary not only to make this oppression visible, but also to theorize it, for this understanding is a prerequisite to developing strategies for change.

39. Report, supra, note 1 at 289-90. This is important as the Committee cites evidence from the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto that the value of the minimum wage is much lower than it used to be, and that as of December 1984, sixty-two percent of minimum-wage workers were women and 60 percent were under the age of twenty-five. See Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, "Minimum Wages and Adequate Income", Social Infopac (Toronto: The Council, April 1987) at 10.

40. Report, ibid. at 284, 290 and 295 (Recommendation 102).

41. Ibid. at 289.

42. This is an important point, and it forms the basis of the discussion in the fifth section of the paper. Free market theorists such as Friedrich Hayek have never pretended that the exchange economy is just in terms of distribution of earnings, but argued that the system is efficient and is the most likely to preserve individual liberty, see F. Hayek, The Constitution of Liberty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) at 93-100. However, even this limited endorsement is untenable: for a critique of the assumption that private enterprise is socially efficient, see H.E. Bronson, The Profit Parasites (Peterborough, Ont.: Beat Raven, 1986). For a detailed review of the hundreds of billions of dollars of economic waste generated by the United States economy in the 1980s, see S. Bowles, D.M. Gordon, & T.E. Weisskopf, Beyond the Wasteland: A Democratic Alternative to Economic Decline (New York: Anchor Press, 1983).
First, I will briefly consider what have in recent years been some of the most common theories about women's position in the work force: labour process theory, and the dual and segmented labour market theories. I conclude that though they have contributed much insight and understanding, these theories cannot provide a satisfactory analysis of job segregation because they see gender relations as a by-product of the dynamics of capital accumulation and restructuring, rather than as a central concern. Instead, I argue that an understanding of women's socially reproductive function is crucial to explaining why they are members of the secondary labour market.

1. The Labour Process
The study of the labour process has revealed that work has become more unvarying and degraded, and that conception and execution have been separated as employers have sought to gain more control over labour processes and workers. As they constitute the majority in the service industries to which these workers are drawn, women are featured prominently in this analysis.

The important distinction to note in labour process theory is that technology and productive capacity have not created alienation. Instead, this state is caused by "the power relations in society which, for example, dictate the ends of productive effort, the use to which technology is to be put, and the very criteria by which some technologies are methodically developed and others left dormant and undeveloped." As Pat Armstrong notes, Harry Braverman has been severely criticised for failing to examine the relationship between work in the home and in the labour force, for separating the analysis of the labour process from class relations and the state, and for ignoring workers' struggles as well as the conflict between men and women in unions. Yet as Armstrong also correctly points out, "Braverman's framework... lays


the basis for an analysis that connects the labour process and the sexual division of labour to the political economy as a whole."^{46}

2. The Dual Labour Market

The dual labour market theory posits that there are two types of jobs for non-skilled workers: jobs in the primary sector where higher earnings and fringe benefits are the rewards, and those in the secondary sector which are low-paid and insecure. As a matter of history, women, racial and ethnic minorities, and workers who change jobs frequently have made up the secondary sector. This division is thought to be beneficial to capital, as the rewards of the primary sector “depend in part on the existence of the secondary sector to take up the variations in demands in the economy, so that this form of labour market segmentation is also a way of dividing the working class and reducing the likelihood of collective action to improve the position of the lower paid.”^{47}

The problem with the dual labour market approach is that it is never shown that women are employed in particular secondary occupations by reason of their “female” characteristics, or that racial minorities are confined to this market because of the colour of their skin. The theory tends to be more descriptive than analytical.^{48} It does not consider the relationship between household and economy, for men or for women.^{49} It is also questionable whether the dual labour market approach extends to the public sector, the site of a significant growth in women’s employment.^{50}

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46. Armstrong, supra, note 45 at 42.

47. R. Brown, “Work” in Work, Urbanism and Inequality in P. Abrams, ed., (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) 55 at 151. As Hilary Wainwright notes, another feature of the dual economy is that the large, corporate, high labour-cost sector comes to depend on, rather than to squeeze out, small firms running on low labour costs, as these firms act as sub-contractors to the large corporations. See H. Wainwright, article “Women and the Division of Labour” also contained in Work, Urbanism and Inequality 161 at 194.

48. Beechey, supra, note 20 at 174; Armstrong, supra, note 45 at 24 and 29; and Barrett, supra, note 18 at 26–27.

49. Armstrong, supra, note 45 at 29.

50. Beechey, supra, note 20 at 179.
3. **The Segmented Labour Market**

As Richard Edwards states, the idea that labour markets treat groups differently needs little new justification. The segmented labour market theory, on the other hand, identifies not two but three separate and distinct segments: the "secondary" market, the "subordinate primary" market, and the "independent primary" market.

The secondary market is made up of workers with few rights, poor pay, insecure tenure, and minimal prospects for advancement. Though it includes many different kinds of jobs, the work in this market almost never requires previous training, education or specialised skills. The voluntary turnover is extremely high, and since employers have little investment in their workers, they feel free to replace or dismiss workers as their labour needs change.

In contrast to the secondary market, primary jobs offer some job security, relatively stable employment, higher wages and greater opportunities for advancement. The subordinate and independent primary markets diverge, however, because of other characteristics. The subordinate primary market has within it traditional working class jobs such as those in mass production. It also includes positions such as lower-level sales and administrative work which are often unionised. In fact, it is unions which often distinguish these jobs from those in the secondary labour market. Yet the subordinate primary market shares with the secondary market a job description that is characterised by repetitive and routinised tasks.

The independent primary market offers more stable employment and relatively higher pay. Three groups dominate the independent primary market: middle-level clerical, sales and administrative staff; craft workers; and professionals. The jobs in this segment are skilled jobs, requiring relatively high levels of schooling or advanced training.

According to the segmented labour market theory, the explanation for this division can be found in the workplace, not in the labour market. The distinct system of control inside the firm underlies each of the three segments. Though racism and sexism are "other" sources of segmentation, they are not specifically integrated into the analysis.

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
Summing up the problems inherent in segmentation theories, Pat Armstrong writes:

"Sex, understood as meaning the position of women, is considered as a basis for segmentation but the sexual division of labour, as well as the interpenetration of household and economy, remain outside the analysis as a whole. The approach, while contributing to our understanding of labour market structures and processes, is partial and undialectical."\(^{54}\)

The "partial" nature of the theory would not necessarily be disputed, for Edwards has written that the segmented labour market approach is "less riveted to the problems of poor and minority workers".\(^{55}\)

4. The Industrial Reserve Army of Labour

Unlike the above labour market theories, the industrial reserve army of labour theory suggests that capital's use of women as a pool of flexible labour, as distinct from a permanent part of the skilled or semi-skilled labour force, depends on the existence of women's domestic obligations, which partially negate their position as wage labourers.\(^{56}\) In addition, the notion that a woman's place is in the home may contribute to a greater vulnerability of women in unemployment. Though the increased participation of women in the work force is no longer as widely believed to be the reason for unemployment among men, it seems that this position is still held in some circles.\(^{57}\)

In agreeing that the 'reserve army' approach has much explanatory value, Barrett has noted that the model helps to identify some mechanisms controlling women's participation in the labour market. However, she argues that it does not explain "why it should be women who necessarily occupy a particular place in it."\(^{58}\) In this respect, it is important to note the role played by both the state and the labour movement in excluding women workers.

Barrett points out that the labour movement's exclusionary practices,

\(^{54}\) Supra, note 45 at 31–32.

\(^{55}\) Supra, note 51.

\(^{56}\) Wainwright, supra, note 47, at 176.

\(^{57}\) M. Feldstein, "The economics of the new unemployment" (1973) 33 The Public Interest 3.

\(^{58}\) Barrett, supra, note 18 at 159.
which defined women workers as less skilled than men, confined women to low paid and insecure jobs, which had the effect of keeping all wages down.\textsuperscript{59} Cynthia Cockburn has also related how "capitalists as capitalists and men as men both take initiatives over technology.\ldots\textsuperscript{60} This need not be a conspiracy, it is merely the outcome of a pre-existing pattern of power." These struggles have a complex, often contradictory nature, which necessitates a more historical and dialectical analysis.\textsuperscript{61}

In considering this history, Jane Ursel argues that the subordinate position of women workers was reinforced by legislation in order to preserve patriarchal relations in the home: "Women's status as a reserve army is dependent upon their marginalisation, and if they became an integral part of the labour force this particular characteristic would be lost."\textsuperscript{62} In effect, women were discouraged from taking 'productive' work and reinforced in their roles as reproducers.

It is social reproduction, moreover, which many writers fail to see as important to capital. As Cockburn notes: "It is clear that capital itself needs the labour force to be reproduced and above all needs our acceptance of capital to be reproduced.\ldots\textsuperscript{63} To the extent that these functions fail, capitalism is threatened." And while our society is slowly moving towards a more egalitarian division of labour, women with paid work outside the home continue, despite these incremental changes, to work under the burden of the "double day".\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, it is these women, together with men and women without these respon-

\textsuperscript{59.} Barrett, \textit{supra}, note 18 at 258. See also Armstrong, \textit{supra}, note 45 at 35.


\textsuperscript{61.} As Ruth Milkman has noted: "While workers as a class do have an interest in building united opposition to capital, individual workers who derive immediate benefits from the segmentation of the labor market will want to protect their relative privilege." (emphasis in original) See R. Milkman, "Organizing the Sexual Division of Labor: Historical Perspectives in 'Women's Work' and the American Labor Movement" (1980) 10 Socialist Review 95 at 104.


\textsuperscript{63.} C. Cockburn, \textit{The Local State} (London: Pluto Press, 1977) at 165.

sibilities, who subsidize social assistance for women who stay home to care for the young, the sick or the old. Though this assistance is a welcome step, it is another example of favouring the traditional division of unpaid labour in the home.65

In order to offset the economic instability that has affected production workers - who are predominately male - married women with young children have become an increasing presence in the labour force: "wives' earnings have become a crucial factor in preserving family income".66 Another trend which has affected women in the labour force is the growth of female-headed households, which has forced many women to struggle to support families through work in low-paid, traditionally female occupations. This development has in turn impacted on other women, who have come to realize that they must plan for the possibility of single-parenthood through greater continuity in the work force. At the same time, many feminists have encouraged women to seek the "independence and self-development that can come from sustained work outside the home."67

The economic restructuring we have experienced, however, has affected women differently according to their class positions, which has increased fragmentation among women workers. Marilyn Power argues that despite continuing problems with discrimination, recently women entering traditionally male occupations have experienced virtually uninterrupted improvement in their economic position. However, for women in poverty, the same period has brought worsening economic conditions, first as inflation has eaten away at welfare

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67. Ibid. at 43.
benefits, and later due to the increased competition for jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder. 68

Yet it is the availability of workers who will act as though they are marginal, not ‘really’ workers, that forms the basis of economic expansion: “Thus we have the contradiction of an economic growth that is based on the lives of women and teenagers as non-wage workers, so that they can properly be considered a cheap and dispensable labour force.” 69

IV. DILEMMAS OF REFORMISM

I have attempted to provide an overview of the nature of women’s oppression as it relates to work, and have endeavoured to situate this oppression within a conceptual framework that explicates its sources. The interaction of the family, the state and the labour market combine

68. Power, supra, note 66 at 45. Note Irene Bruegel’s argument that the continued expansion of parts of the service sector has mitigated the effects of the recession on women’s employment opportunities. See I. Bruegel, “The Reserve Army of Labour 1974–1979” in Feminist Review, ed., Waged Work: A Reader (London: Virago Press, 1986) at 40–53. However, Bruegel maintains at 49 that these women are more disposable employees than men and that “within any given industry or job women, particularly part-time women workers, have suffered from greater rates of job loss than men.” However, some writers have argued that in some situations women are less vulnerable to redundancy than men and more likely to find alternative employment, because of their willingness to work for lower pay and to work part-time. In this regard, see V. Beechey, “Studies of Women’s Employment”, in Waged Work, supra, at 130–159.

As Snell and McIntosh observe, such an argument “implies that during the recession some employers have restructured their labour process in such a way as to create these ‘women’s jobs’.” See “Introduction” in Feminist Review, ed., Waged Work: A Reader (London: Virago Press, 1986) at 5. While there may be some truth to this, it is also the case that recent years have seen the disappearance of many low-paid and part-time jobs in certain labour-intensive sectors such as clothing. See A. Coyle, “Going Private” in Waged Work: A Reader (London: Virago Press, 1986) at 222–237. Moreover, this situation threatens to become worse in Canada with the advent of the Free Trade Agreement, as Charlene Gannage points out in her study of garment workers, see C. Gannage, “Towards an Alternative Economic Strategy: The Case of Women Garment Workers” in M. Gold & D. Leyton-Brown, eds., Trade-Offs on Free Trade: The Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (Toronto: Carswell, 1988) at 394–406.

to marginalize women in the work force. It is their economic instability, moreover, which ensures that social reproduction will continue to occur to be carried out by women. Given this analysis, I would like to reconsider the family, state, and the labour market in terms of where energies should be concentrated in attempting to effect social change. In addition, we need to ask what means should be used, and whether the nature of state power should be accounted for and reform of this power be undertaken.

Engels believed that "the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry." Yet Hilary Wainwright has neatly isolated the problem with Engels' view:

"Sex inequality ... is primarily a result of the sex division of labour among those who rely for their subsistence on their capacity to work rather than on their wealth; it is therefore not surprising that the manifestations of inequality are most apparent within the labour market."

It is important to direct our attention to changing the nature of the labour market for women. If employment opportunities and necessary support services are not made available and specifically addressed to sole support mothers, then for them, a life of poverty becomes more likely. In a recent survey of the Family Benefits caseload, it was found that those sole support parents with no earnings during their first year of receiving social assistance tended to remain on assistance longer than those able to secure income from employment. There are also many problems associated with thrusting a woman back into the labour market after years of caring for young children and receiving social assistance, ranging from loss of job skills to emotional barriers which must be overcome. A strategy which assumes that single mothers should be in the labour market is irresponsible if it does not


71. Supra, note 47 at 163.

acknowledge, and try to alter, the realities of high unemployment and low wages faced by women in the market.\textsuperscript{73}

While aware of its oppressive nature, many feminists have seen the welfare state as a particularly productive site for women's struggle.\textsuperscript{74} McIntosh argues that women need state provision, if the alternative is dependence on men or waged work. In her view, the feminist argument for new forms of interdependence within the community, necessary for the transformation of both the waged and unwaged work systems, requires state involvement for its success.\textsuperscript{75} She does, however, see two limits to state action in the interests of women. First, the long term interest of the ruling class is maintained even though gains may be made where these do not directly conflict with other groups. Secondly, change which fundamentally threatens capitalism will not be permitted by the state.\textsuperscript{76}

Reshaping the labour force and attitudes towards domestic labour are outside the mandate of the Social Assistance Review Committee. Yet if this is the case, then why bother devoting energy to "opportunity planning" if this is exactly the kind of change that is needed if "self-reliance" is to eventuate? In a powerful argument, Felicite Stairs concludes that choice is of paramount concern to women. One manifestation of her position is that all mothers of dependent (including school-age) children should be unconditionally eligible for social assistance. In her view, women must not be forced into a work force where unemployment and poor jobs abound.\textsuperscript{77} While agreeing with her concerns about the conditional and coercive features of social wel-


\textsuperscript{74} Barrett, supra, note 18 at 246-47; McIntosh, supra, note 9 at 282, and M. McIntosh, "Feminism and Social Policy" (1981) 1 Critical Social Policy 32. For a view that opposes state-focused politics, see M. Geddes, "The capitalist state and the local economy: 'restructuring for labour' and beyond" (1988) 35 Capital and Class 85.

\textsuperscript{75} McIntosh, supra, note 9 at 371.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. at 372-73.

\textsuperscript{77} Stairs, supra, note 21. Note also the work of Paula Rochman on the punitive nature of some training programs, see P. Rochman, "Working for Welfare: A Response to the Social Assistance Review Committee" (1989) 5 J. L. & Social Pol'y 198.
fare legislation, I believe a different focus is required. The industrial reserve army theory demonstrates how the state can shuttle women into and out of the labour force to suit its own interests, rather than those of poor women. Accordingly, I argue that it is necessary to depart from the mainstream market.

Before developing this position, however, it is also important to ask to what extent, if at all, McIntosh’s concerns about the state shape our attitudes towards reforming the state. I. Gough writes:

“Once the contradictory nature of the welfare state and its contradictory impact on capitalism is appreciated, then the political strategy of all who work in it or are concerned with it can be refined. The positive aspects of welfare policies need defending and extending, their negative aspects need exposing and attacking.”

Ramesh Mishra asks how we are to separate the “positive” from the “negative”. Though I. Gough would argue that the concept of “human needs” should be used to make this distinction, Ramesh Mishra concludes that the “part-whole” relationship and its implications remains unresolved: “if social welfare is inextricably a part of the larger, capitalist system then its ‘good’ features cannot really be separated from the ‘bad’ ones.”

Given these concerns, it is perhaps appropriate to question whether it is necessary to account for state power. Barrett has put forward several arguments in favour of state reformism. She has pointed out that political and ideological processes are integral to women’s oppression and should be attacked in their own right. This, for Barrett, involves “a systematic attack on the state”. She also notes that the state is not “a pre-given instrument of oppression, but is a site of struggle”. Not only is there the potential to gain much by pressuring the state, but to ignore the state is to countenance the problems inherent in a dual power strategy, and, in any event, it is not at all clear that it is pos-

80. Barrett, supra, note 18 at 246.
81. Ibid., see also P. Corrigan, “The welfare state as an arena of class struggle” (March 1977) 21 Marxism Today 87-93.
82. This issue is taken up later in the paper in the context of decentralizing the state. See the discussion in the text accompanying notes, infra, note 101.
sible to opt out and seek sanctuary in the 'informal' realm. This may not take us very far past Mishra's dilemma, and Gough's depiction of the contradictory nature of the state does not provide any more direction. But it is important to remember that the state only attempts to legitimate the existing social order if it feels that a struggle must be countered. McIntosh has put it most simply: "If welfare payments are used to damp down the fires of working-class protests, they can be seen as an achievement of that protest."

V. BEYOND THE THOMSON REPORT: COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There are several alternatives to the model put forward by the Social Assistance Review Committee in its Report. Most notable among these is the guaranteed annual income (GAI), which was ultimately rejected by the Committee. Myles has neatly pointed out that the problem with a GAI is not the shift away from the universality principle, as many critics have implied. Instead, what changes is that which is universally guaranteed: "subsistence instead of wage replacement". I feel that regardless of the merits or flaws in these types of proposals, it is important to depart from these tinkering models if we are to achieve change. None of the institutional alternatives is able adequately to address the labour market conditions and the nature of work with which single mothers must contend. In addition, all are predicated upon variables such as the availability of affordable daycare, a necessity which none of these models is able to promise. I argue that a departure from this mode of thinking is required.

A community based economic development approach to employment would complement an attempt to influence labour market policy at the national, provincial, and municipal level. Community economic development as a concept is based on the principle of increasing the power of community members in determining local

84. McIntosh, supra, note 9 at 282.
85. Myles, supra note 13 at 94. He goes on to state at 95 that a "GIA is an industrial strategy to encourage the expansion of low-wage, low-skill industries and 'crowd out' high-wage, high-skill industries." See also P. Johnston, "Guaranteed Annual Income in Theory and in Practice" in Report of the Social Assistance Review Committee: Transitions (Appendix G), supra, note 1. [Background Paper for the Social Assistance Review Committee, (1987).]
economic goals and priorities. It is taking the money that would be paid out as social assistance, and re-circulating it among the constituency of the poor. It is paying out several social assistance cheques in advance to a group of recipients so that they can pool their resources and establish a base, rather than simply struggling to subsist each month. The purpose of this development is to expand employment opportunities for people on social assistance rather than helping the individual entrepreneur. A framework of institutional support, such as a community development corporation or a non-profit holding company, is required.86

This is not to suggest that the concept of community economic development, like any other "answer", is not without problems. In its abstract form, the concept has been approved of by a variety of government commissions87, and, most recently, by the Committee itself. In its Report, the Committee recommends that the provincial and federal governments "increase their support for community economic development initiatives in regions of the province with chronically high rates of unemployment."88

Given the context of these endorsements, it is important to question whether community economic development has anything specific to say to women, or whether it will be, like much economic development, harmful to women's interests. In addition, recent economic history should prompt us to ask if community economic development is seen by government as a means of decentralizing and thus popularizing the state, or whether it is simply privatization in another form. Moreover, even if decentralization is the goal, we need to ask whether this is something to struggle for, or to avoid. For this reason, I feel it is necessary to briefly consider privatization as a political and economic condition. I conclude that privatization will not necessarily result from community economic development measures. Based on this assessment, I go on to question whether community economic development is something we would want, and how it might take shape in an urban context.

86. Muszynski, supra, note 73 at 75-76.
87. See Canada, Commission of Inquiry on Unemployment Insurance, supra, note 38; Canadian Council on Social Development, Report on the Feasibility Study and Design of a Project to Develop an Active Inventory of Local Economic Initiative in Canada (Ottawa: CCSD, 1986); and Employment and Immigration Canada, Labour Market Development in the 1980s (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1981) c. 8.
88. Report, supra, note 1 at 269 (Recommendation 88).
VI. CRITIQUING COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
(I) WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

Historically, strategies designed to achieve overall economic growth and increase productivity have proven to be inimical to women. In addition, a substantial proportion of projects at all levels specifically for women suffer from inadequate funding and managerial support. Often higher-level, male management is not fully committed or is insensitive to changing the situation of women.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, Gita Sen and Caren Grown argue that it is necessary to emphasise the political nature of women's development projects. However, because of the large scale and diversity of the women's movement, it is necessary for women to "self-define" for individual initiatives to be successful. Moreover, it is necessary to express this approach openly and uncompromisingly: "the attempt to create a non-partisan framework collapses for lack of any secure and truly representative basis within the community."

Yet in designing community economic development initiatives, there is the risk that just as women have previously been excluded from economic growth outside the home, so will women who may seem less capable be ignored in such endeavours. In short, it is necessary to avoid selecting only the "best and the brightest". This of course is difficult, as it is important that the program be successful in order that it may continue. It can be avoided, however, if programs do not simply duplicate the free enterprise system in a smaller version. The Social Assistance Review Committee's overall goal of integration into the mainstream economy fails to realize that some people are on social assistance specifically because they cannot, or will not, fit into the mainstream of society. Though opportunity planning may not be man-

90. Ibid. at 44.
91. Ibid. at 79–80.
93. Note also that rather than being less threatening, a downsized version of our present system could be more harmful: "Exploitation and brutality are by no means absent from family and community." See D.P. Ross & P.J. Usher, From the Roots Up: Economic Development as if Community Really Mattered (Crouton-on-Hudson, New York: The Bootstrap Press, 1986) at 37.
untary for disabled individuals, the Report notes that the unconditional entitlement of sole-support mothers should be monitored and compared to other jurisdictions where there are conditions to detect differences.94

Community economic development offers people a way around the Committee's conclusion. Women who are seeking an alternative to traditional employment, or who lack employment opportunities, may become "entrepreneurs of necessity".95 This of course must be matched by the political understanding that informs these initiatives.96

(II) PRIVATIZATION AND THE WELFARE STATE

Economically, the 1980s have been characterised by a shift in emphasis towards privatization and deregulation. Instead of playing its historical role of assuming the costs of the unprofitable economic sectors, the state now expects capital to take a greater part in financing and administering these areas. Privatization is seen as the way to change the evaluative perspective of the public sector from social to profit criteria.

Workers are forced to respond to this restructuring, but as Armstrong notes, cutbacks in public sector employment have a differential impact on men and women. Not only have many women found work in the public sector, but many of women's best jobs have been located there.97

It is in this context that the Social Assistance Review Committee recommends the privatization of opportunity planning, and increased

94. Report, supra, note 1 at 233-34.

95. L. Moffat, "Expanding Women's Access to Self-Employment" (Self-Employment Development Initiatives of the Ontario Social Development Council, October 1988) 3 at 5-8. Moffat documents a number of different models and approaches already in existence.

96. As Sen and Grown write: "We in the women's movement need to show by example that it is possible to bring these ethics to the centre of public life. Our own life experiences of powerlessness, cooperation, and nurturance can be enriching to our organisations, and to the world in which they function." Supra, note 89 at 95.

97. Armstrong, supra note 45 at 43. Note also the results of a study conducted by the Social Planning Council, who found that Toronto's female workers aged between 45 and 54 have been "hardest hit" by economic transitions in the city's labour market. See Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, A Statistical Profile of Toronto's Labour Market, 1976-1987 by A. Yalnizyan (May 1988) at 4.
integration into the work force. Moreover, it is to be private capital which fulfills the mandate of job creation previously carried out by government. If this strategy of private-led growth is to be successful, labour costs must be kept down so that capital can accumulate. Without these economic and social conditions, capital argues, there is no incentive to go into business. Because the economy has been restructured in this form, and the state has a specific interest in maintaining the existing order, it will use law to regulate and regularise labour relations in these areas. It is specifically the low labour costs that attract capital to these areas; the state is concerned that unionization and more stringent employment standards legislation would spell an end to an association based solely on profits.

At the same time, there is an increased regulation of those receiving assistance from the state. It is this contradictory dynamic which informs the discussion regarding community economic development. Understanding the move to privatise state services is crucial in order


99. Welfare legislation permits, and in fact mandates, a degree of state intrusiveness that would not be tolerated in any other realm of society. Though the Social Assistance Review Committee avows its opposition to conditions being placed on the entitlement of sole support parents (supra, note 1 at 232), note the Committee’s strong recommendation that men must be forced to support their children financially by women who are receiving social assistance, though they will be given the choice of bringing the application themselves or by the state (Recommendation 250 in Report, supra, note 1 at 488). For an examination of how the state’s welfare policies are more intrusive for women than men, see J. Lewis, “Feminism and Welfare” in J. Mitchell & A Oakley, eds., What is Feminism? (New York: Pantheon, 1986) at 91.

For the opposite, and increasingly popular, position, see L. Mead, Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship (New York: Free Press, 1981). Mead argues at 3 that “the main problem with the welfare state is not its size, but its permissiveness.” However, Reg Whitaker has pointed out the contradiction in the position of writers such as Mead by rhetorically asking: “How is the ideological circle to be squared between rampant liberalism in the economic sphere and rampant statism in other areas?” See R. Whitaker, “Neo-Conservatism and the State” in R. Miliband, L. Panitch, & J. Saville, eds., The Socialist Register, 1987 - Conservatism in Britain and America: Rhetoric and Reality, (London: The Merlin Press, 1987) 1 at 19.
to avoid simple acceptance of the conclusion that the state "ain't around no more to fix our bumps and bruises." As the following section shows, it is necessary to continue our pressure to reshape the form and function of the state.

(III) DECENTRALIZING THE STATE

Decentralization is intended to make the local state more accessible and responsive to the needs of consumers of state services, and in its more radicalised form seeks to introduce an element of 'community' control over the state. One justification for this approach can be culled from the work of Ralph Miliband, who has pointed out that the local state is both agent and obstacle to central control. It remains a power structure in its own right, and therefore able to effect "very markedly" the lives of the people it governs.

Mark Goodwin and Simon Duncan have argued that local economic policy is not, directly, about economic change: "It is about the way in which political demonstration and political mobilisation can support economic change, and thus what kind of economic change this will be." This insight is crucial, for while economic change is often the predominant motivation behind community economic development, these economies can best be distinguished from formal economies by the structural or institutional relationships they engender in people:


101. In this regard, Castells has argued that "the traditional inequality in terms of income, which is inherent in capitalism, is expressed in new social cleavages related to the accessibility and use of certain collective services." See his City, Class and Power, supra, note 15, at 15.


103. M. Goodwin & S. Duncan, "The local state and local economic policy: political mobilisation or economic regeneration" (1986) 27 Capital and Class 14 at 33 (emphasis in original). The authors go on to quote from British local leaders Blunkett and Green, who have written: "It is no accident that the Tories have chosen to launch a bitter and devastating attack on socialist Labour councils; they know that examples of community, enterprise and social ownership and democracy at local levels threaten their restructuring of our economic and social relationships." See D. Blunkett & G. Green, "Building from the bottom: the Sheffield experience" (1983) Fabian Tract at 491.
"informal economic institutions are based on the engagement of people rather than people's anonymity."  
Yet in formulating local economic development policy, it is important to keep Miliband's comments in mind, and not view the state, at whichever level or in whatever manifestation, as relatively unproblematic. This view fails to implement similar change in the state itself. At the same time, the increasingly anti-statist position of some writers is problematic. The dangers in this position are made clear in the writings of Nicos Poulantzas, who offers a convincing critique of strategies that seek to "block" the state, and argues that it is necessary to transform the state.

VII. CONCLUSION
As an ever-increasing proportion of adolescents and women enter the work force, "work places are becoming the centre of social relationships. They are the places where people experience authority most directly and learn the practical realities of collective action." For this reason, attempts to effect lasting and radical change must be centred on work. This energy should not be channelled solely into the workplace, for though it is a crucial locus of struggle, it is not the only

104. Ross and Usher, supra, note 93 at 49. This type of arrangement would begin to address the concerns of people like Josephine Gray, spokesperson for Low Income Families Together (LIFT). She points out that though developing countries may have more poverty in real economic terms, our society is characterised by a "poverty of community" which eventually may prove more difficult to change.

105. Geddes, supra, note 74 at 97.

106. Poulantzas argues against placing oneself outside the state, and "leaving that radical and eternal evil more or less as it is and disregarding the problem of its transformation." He writes that constructing "self-management counterpowers" that seek to "quarantine" the state within its own domain simply leave the state in place: "no attention is given to those transformations of the state without which the movement of direct democracy is bound to fail... the two processes are simply running along parallel lines." See N. Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, trans. P. Camiller (Thetford, Norfolk: Lowe & Brydone, 1978) at 262. Note also his comments in Political Power and Social Classes, trans. T. O'Hagan (London: New Left Books, 1973) at 263.

locus. Moreover, this approach implicitly excludes the participation of unwaged working women in the process and possibly the results of change. However, work, characterized as the social phenomenon which this paper has sought to explore, is increasingly determinative of our relationship to society.

The creativity sole support mothers receiving social assistance must draw upon provides them with the necessary tools to move towards economic dependence. By reinforcing and building upon their efforts through the development of local economic initiatives, poor women can hope to move to a more self-reliant position, rather than accepting the low-paying, insecure and inflexible jobs they are likely to be slated into by "opportunity planning".

Manuel Castells has observed that in the end, if social welfare programs still work, it is because of women's creativity in developing informal, cooperative day care, in shopping around, and in bringing necessary innovations into their work in the home. He writes that "if these women who 'do nothing' ever stopped to do 'only that', the whole urban structure as we know it would become completely incapable of maintaining its functions." It is this resourcefulness and courage that can provide the basis for successful community economic development initiatives, and the important first step to an escape from poverty.


However, I do not accept Magnusson and Walker's conclusion that unrelated struggles of specificity may become "struggles of connection" supra, at 62. Though I would agree that the analysis has to be more comprehensive, a "Gorzian" coalition of interests which fails to recognise the interconnectedness of economic and political power is, in my mind, fundamentally flawed. Gorz and other "critical social movement" theorists do not have a concept of power to guide their work. For this reason, they cannot answer the question of "why": why do women, workers, native peoples, and visible minorities suffer discrimination and exploitation? Why does our environment continue to be allowed to deteriorate when we all know the long-term problems this creates? In searching for a common thread, one is brought back to ownership, and the intrinsic individualism and sense of power embodied in this relationship, and manifested most clearly, though not exclusively, in the workplace.

109. See A. Rauhala, "Study finds women remain stuck on lower work rungs" The Torontol Globe and Mail (22 October 1988).

110. Castells, supra, note 15, at 177-78.