Commissioning Consent: An Investigation of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, 1886-1889

by

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Abstract

The 1880s were turbulent years in the Dominion. Under the auspices of the National Policy, Canada was in the midst of a social and political ‘transformation.’ The social and cultural aspects of this transformation became a source of public debate as the ‘Labour Question’ and the relations between labour and capital reached a high mark of political and economic significance. Waves of strikes and the emergence of large international labour organizations challenged many liberal Victorian ideas about a strictly limited state. Many looked upon the federal government as responsible not only for economic growth, but also for protection from the more pressing problems of industrial life.

The Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour is a testament to not only the turbulent economic relations in late-Victorian Canada, but the emergence of the Canadian state’s active role in social relations. Its very title envisioned a dual role for the Canadian state: to “promote the material, social, intellectual and moral prosperity” of labouring men and women, and to improve and develop “the productive industries of the Dominion so as to advance and improve the trade and commerce of Canada.” However, this thesis argues that the Labour Commission was more subtly designed to enhance the prestige of the Canadian state and install Ottawa as an authority on, and mediator of, industrial relations in Canada.

Attention to the formation, activities, and impact of the Labour Commission suggests that, rather than an exercise in addressing a mounting social polarization between “labour” and “capital,” the Commission lends insight into the emergence of a Canadian middle class. It was a carefully-constructed exercise in the assertion of middle-class cultural hegemony whereby such values and understandings as respectability, morality, manliness, worth and expertise were naturalized. In the process, the tension between labour and capital was diminished and in its place were developed visions of social reciprocity and mutual interest. It is in this way that the Labour Commission was an exercise in ‘commissioning consent’: it placed oppositional voices and wrenching exposés about industrial life in a framework that worked to quell rather than stimulate far-reaching critiques of the established order.

The Commission’s formation, methodology and language functioned like an industrial exhibition rather than a pointed social investigation. The evidence presents a thriving economy that had grown exponentially under a wise and paternal government. It also presented a vision of the Dominion whereby the disturbances that occurred between labour and capital could be handled within a conventional language of liberal politics. In addition, social and intellectual elites were fully ensconced in the formation and legitimization of these social and moral understandings. Because it was up to the state to select who would speak for labour and capital, the Commission’s message was not one of class polarization. Thus, exploring who became ‘labour’ and who ‘capital,’ and what sorts of things they said to each other, sheds light on to the emergent strategies of the Canadian state as it sought to understand and influence civil society. The Commission is an indication, even anticipation, of a more activist and energetic state.
Acknowledgements

This piece began when Greg Kealey’s *Canada Investigates Industrialism* was on a reading list for a graduate class I took with Bryan Palmer. My interest in the philosophy of language has always fueled my interest in history. Having to read extracts from the Labour Commission in those heady days of course work, wherein I championed the ‘language turn’ for anybody who would listen, led me to wonder what the voices of workers were actually saying in this unique source. However, the transformation from moderate to acute interest and the culmination of a dissertation on the Commission was as much a personal journey as an academic endeavour.

There are many people I would like to thank in the odyssey that is this dissertation. I will start with my family. My parents have shown great patience in their son who is the first formally-educated member of the family. In particular, I would like to mention my father whose interest in books and ideas continues to be an inspiration. I am sure he would be surprised to learn that the stories and books he received from his father, my namesake, led, in part, to my interest in history. I will also mention my wife’s family whose support and patience have been much appreciated over these years.

There are many people for whom I owe an intellectual debt. I would like to thank Dennis Miller and Sheryl Groeneweg for years of late night debates about literary theory and criticism. My intellectual development and approach to history was formed amidst our continuing friendship. I also owe a great intellectual debt to Robert Goheen, a former instructor turned friend, who helped me grapple with writing history and staying true to where I want to be in the philosophical scheme of things. I similarly owe a vast intellectual debt to my supervisor Ian McKay. His continual belief and interest in this work has inspired me when I needed it most. His knowledge of Canadian history and skills in directing my own writing/understanding of the subject were invaluable in the completion of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank ‘the girls:’ Sheryl, Avery and Darcy. Sheryl’s belief and patience in me was integral to the completion of this work. She not only knew when I needed to figure things out on my own, but also when I needed a push. More importantly, she has given me the source of my inspiration. Looking at our children while completing this work has made me realize what everything is really ‘all about.’
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A Note on Terminology and Abbreviations

“Labor” and “Labour” were both used in Canada throughout the period studied by this thesis. In quoting from original sources, I adhere to the form used in them; in all other instances I follow the contemporary Canadian usage, i.e. “labour,” “the labour commission.”

Abbreviations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLU</td>
<td>Canadian Labor Union</td>
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<td>CHR</td>
<td>Canadian Historical Review</td>
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<td>CSMIOQ</td>
<td>Commission on the State of Manufacturing Industries in Ontario and Quebec</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCB</td>
<td>Dictionary of Canadian Biography</td>
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<tr>
<td>GC</td>
<td>Government of Canada</td>
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<td>JAM</td>
<td>John A. Macdonald Papers</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCPC</td>
<td>Judicial Committee of the Privy Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>L/Lt</td>
<td>Labour/Le Travail (initially Labour/La Travailleur)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>Library Archives Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Public Inquiries Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>PWA</td>
<td>Provincial Workmen’s Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCRLC</td>
<td>Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTA</td>
<td>Toronto Trades Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTLC</td>
<td>Toronto Trades and Labor Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTU</td>
<td>Toronto Trades Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>WLCA</td>
<td>Workingmen’s Liberal Conservative Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
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Chapter One

The National Policy, the Social and the State

The 1880s were watershed years in the history of Canada. Cotton factories, coal mines, and railways all announced the arrival of a long-anticipated Age of Industry, as did a regime of protective tariffs under the National Policy of 1879. A “Great Transformation,” many historians have argued, that would change the Dominion irrevocably from the 1880s to the 1920s was palpably underway. Although a far cry from the world records established by Canadian economic growth in the early twentieth century, the patterns of the 1880s were nonetheless encouraging for those who dreamt of a Canada dotted with smokestacks and criss-crossed with railways. After herculean feats of finance and political negotiation, and back-breaking labour in the forests of Ontario and the mountains of British Columbia, the country at last had a transcontinental railway. An industrial heartland had clearly emerged in the region

1 For general economic histories of Canada see William Marr and Donald Patterson, Canada: An Economic History (Toronto, 1980); W.T. Easterbrook and Hugh G.J. Aitken, Canadian Economic History (Toronto, 1956). Some historians would date the emergence of industrial capitalism early in the century with the construction of the Lachine canal or the General Mining Association in Nova Scotia. The decades before the Commission have also been referred to as Canada’s period of industrialization due to the impact of the National Policy on the Canadian economy. For a critical view see Tom Naylor, The History of Canadian Business, 1867-1914, Vol. 1 and 2 (Toronto, 1975). For the purposes of this thesis, I mean by industrial capitalism, the development of large scale manufacturing industries in the Dominion that resulted from the government’s intervention in the economy through the National Policy.

2 See Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (New York, 1944). Polanyi posits an international economic transformation during this period. However, the notion that Canada underwent an ‘industrial revolution’ has been subject to debate. For example, see Kris Inwood and Ian Drummond, “CHR Dialogue: Ontario’s Industrial Revolution, 1867-1941,” CHR 69, 3 (1988), 283-314. Another work that focuses on the United States posits that nineteenth century industrialization in that country was a cultural extension of feudalism. See Karen Orren, Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States (New York, 1991).
stretching from Windsor to Quebec City, with Ontario and Quebec accounting for 82% of the total value of manufacturing output by the end of the century.3

The social and cultural implications of such a transformation were only slowly becoming evident. As Greg Kealey remarks in his pathbreaking collection *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, “[t]hese were indeed years of heated religious strife, of increasing sectional tension, and of remarkable feats of railroad building, but they were also the years in which Canadians began to cope with the meaning of their emerging industrial society.”4 For Canadian historians as well as commentators in the 1880s, one of the more significant effects of this transformation was the rapidly changing, multidimensional relationship between labour and capital.5 Many were fully seized with the implications of the “Labour Question,” especially in the wake of massive strikes in North America in the late 1870s and the emergence of new, more inclusive labour organizations in Canada in the 1880s.6 Although most Canadians endorsed a mid-Victorian liberal ideal of a strictly limited state, they also expected the federal government to facilitate economic growth and, to an extent, to protect the country from

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some of the more pressing problems of industrial life. They imagined a dual role for the state, and herein lay the roots for the decade’s most original contribution to state formation and social reform in Canada: the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor, which convened in 1886 and reported in 1889. (It will henceforth be referred to as the “Labour Commission” or simply “the Commission.”) This thesis is about this famous Commission. It seeks to understand its formation, activities, and impact. It proposes to re-read the evidence and Reports of the Commission not so much as evidence of a mounting social polarization between “labour” and “capital,” but more as an indication of the emergence of a Canadian middle class. Paying close attention to the cut-and-thrust of debate and the ways in which a particular language of reform came to dominate this famous event in Canadian history, this thesis sees the Commission as a carefully-constructed exercise in the assertion of middle-class cultural hegemony, one which naturalized such values and understandings as respectability, morality, worth and expertise. Relations of subordination and domination were naturalized in the discussion of labour and capital, in ways which underwrote the cultural primacy of the middle class and (ironically enough) relegated workers to the periphery of the “Labour Question.”

Designed to “promote the material, social, intellectual and moral prosperity” of labouring men and women, and to improve and develop “the productive industries of

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7 Of course, this ‘problem’ also included a host of other issues such as, for example, the morality of women workers, the education of children, housing and temperance.
the Dominion so as to advance and improve the trade and commerce of Canada,” the Labour Commission was more subtly designed to enhance the prestige of the Canadian state and install Ottawa as an authority on, and mediator of, industrial relations in Canada. It sought to undertake the seemingly contradictory missions of publicizing the many problems of “capital” and “labour” in the 1880s, while maintaining and legitimating traditional relations of subordination and domination. Understanding how, through the device of the Labour Commission, the Canadian state became a mediator of labour and capital — focused on the material, social, intellectual, and moral improvement of labouring men and women as well as that of the Dominion’s productive industries, trade and commerce, and thereby successfully massaged social tensions — is the purpose of this work.

The Commission proclaimed in its very title that it was going to focus on “Labour” and “Capital,” categories which one might imagine referred straightforwardly to “employees” and “employers.” And it culminated in the release of two reports, conventionally associated with the “labour” and “capital” factions on the Commission.

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8 The title of the Commission is provided in the Order of Council presented in the beginning of the Report(s): “... a Royal Commission shall be issued for the purpose of enquiring into and reporting upon the subject of Labor, its relation to Capital, the hours of labor, and the earnings of laboring men and women, and the means of promoting their material, social, intellectual and moral prosperity, and of improving and developing the productive industries of the Dominion so as to advance and improve the trade and commerce of Canada; also, of enquiring into and reporting on the practical operations of Courts of Arbitration and Conciliation in the settlement of disputes between employers and employees, and on the best mode of settling such disputes; also of enquiring into and reporting on the expediency of placing all such matters as are to form the subjects of such enquiry under the administration of one of the Ministers of the Crown.” See GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 1.

9 It should be noted at this early stage that much information concerning the procedures of the Labour Commission is missing from the Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. Much material of this type was lost in the fire which swept the Parliament Buildings in 1916.
Yet on closer examination, the Commission paradoxically complicated and subverted the very dualism inscribed in its title. While seeming to offer support to a starkly polarized vision of Canada in the 1880s, it in fact demonstrated how relations of social reciprocity subtly influenced many witnesses. In gesturing to an alarming polarization, of the sort stereotypically associated with Britain, it also reassuringly demonstrated not only that such evils were distant from Victorian Canada, but also that the state was on the *qui vive* with respect to any of their early manifestations in the Dominion. The Commission, one might even say, functioned rather like an industrial exhibition, demonstrating that Victorian Canada, under a wise and paternal government, had grown exponentially but safely under the National Policy. Its minor disturbances could be handled within the conventional language of politics and its social and intellectual elites were fully abreast of the situation. Its overall message was not one of class polarization but of class reciprocity and harmony, one it achieved by rigorously selecting out certain industries and people for the bulk of attention. Thus, if the Commission is legitimately mined for evidence of the social tensions that stemmed from large-scale industrialization, this thesis argues that it was much more concerned with ‘managing dissent,’ placing oppositional voices and wrenching exposés in a framework that worked to quell rather than stimulate far-reaching critiques of the established order.

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10 There is little information available that clearly outlines the procedure that went into naming the commission. Only one document in the Macdonald Papers sheds some light on the issue. Macdonald’s justice minister, J.S. Thompson, made suggestions based on American examples in Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New Jersey. See JAM, LAC, J.S. Thompson to Macdonald, 2 September 1886, 124830. In the absence of this information, and as the several cases in the United States suggest, the names of these commissions of inquiry into labour and capital were likely drawing upon the conventional liberal political economy of John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith.
It was up to the state to select who would speak for ‘labour’ and ‘capital,’ in what amounted to an official representation of Canada’s industrial transformation. Exploring who became ‘labour’ and who ‘capital,’ and what sorts of things they said to each other, allows for new analytical insights into the emergent strategies of the Canadian state as it sought to understand and to influence the civil society upon which it relied. The Commission was an early manifestation of a more activist and energetic state.

Three theorists — Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas — have influenced my inquiry into this Commission. In particular, Habermas’s notion of the public sphere and its relation to language and power suggests the principles and ideas that initially drew me to Gramsci and Foucault. In this thesis, and following upon the work of Walter Adamson, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has two related definitions: “First, it means the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society. Here it is understood in contrast to the concept of ‘domination’: the state’s monopoly on the means of violence and its consequent role as the final arbiter of all disputes.” Gramsci’s insight is that only weak states need to have frequent recourse to force or the threat of force implied in their relations of domination. Second, hegemony means the ability of a social group or class to transcend its immediate economic interests to generate “a common intellectual and moral awareness, a common culture.”

The means by which dominant groups rule, particularly the bourgeoisie, rests upon their taking into account “the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which

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hegemony is to be exercised.” A ruling class wins popular consent to its political and economic rule by utilizing ‘common sense’ to exert cultural, moral and ideological leadership over allied and subordinate groups. To understand how it does so, it is essential to study the politics of language. As Peter Ives remarks, “Gramsci understood that it is only within structures of language that subjects define their interests and make decisions about what they want, and what they speak and write about.”

Although often set up as an alternative to that of Gramsci, Michel Foucault’s work can be seen as complementing its main themes and adding conceptual rigour to its linguistic insights. This work on the relations between language and political power has, to various degrees, influenced much historical writing in this area. Foucault’s body of work is, in general, centered on the link(s) between language, knowledge and power. Concerned with the rules and practices that produced meaning in different historical periods, Foucault used the term discourse to describe a group of associated statements and understandings which provide a language under which a subject can be discussed. It should be acknowledged that Foucault’s thoughts on the relation between language and power changed over the course of his writings. As David Couzens Hoy remarks:

13 Common sense for Gramsci referred to broad and agreed upon conceptions of the world. These conceptions, in turn, contribute to “people’s subordination by making situations of inequality and oppression appear to them to be natural and unchangeable.” See Forgacs, *A Gramsci Reader*, 421. On the other hand, Perry Anderson argues that Gramsci’s dichotomy of force and consent is far too simple to comprehend the diversity and complexity of motives and behavior encountered in the politics of everyday life. See Perry Anderson, “Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review* 100 (November 1976-January 1977), 41, fn.8.
During the archaeology phase his own remarks suggest he is describing how linguistic structures are the conditions for the possibility of what can be known. In the genealogical phase his focus is less on language alone than on the connection between discursive disciplines and social power. In his last writings he says that neither language or power was ever his true concern, but instead, that his interest all along had been in how human subjects and their historically variant subjectivities are constituted either by unthought social practices and discourses or by not completely thought-out ethical self-fashionings.¹⁶

Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality’ as the underlying rationality between a governor and a subject addresses much of the same set of issues as Gramsci’s “common sense.”¹⁷ However, if language both constructs and is constructed by discourse, as Foucault argues, how can historians understand the social and cultural nuances of common sense?¹⁸ Put differently, what is so common about common sense?

Habermas completes the theoretical trio whose work has shaped my approach to the Commission. His work in philosophy and social theory has extensively dealt with the relation between social structures and language.¹⁹

¹⁶ David Couzens Hoy, “Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?” Jonathan Arac (ed.), After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991), 27. Hoy’s reference to “not completely thought out self fashionings” is, I believe, analogous to what I shall refer to as “assumptions” that are ‘naturalized’ in language.


¹⁸ Foucault refers to the ability of language to construct and be constructed by discourse as the ‘reciprocities of discourse.’ For an extensive discussion on the relation of discourse and language see his chapter, “The Discourse on Language” in Michael Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (New York, 1976), 215-237.

¹⁹ For example, his largely unnoticed work Legitimation Crisis addressed the theory behind how a particular social vision achieved legitimacy such that it becomes hegemonic. See Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston, 1973). For a rather philosophical approach to the primacy of language in determining subjectivity see Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Cambridge, 1992). For a recent discussion in the context of democracy and the law see Jurgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms (Cambridge, 1998).
the Public Sphere, Habermas explores the status of public opinion in the context of representative government. The public sphere is an imagined space or a virtual community “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society within the state.” The public sphere began to emerge in the eighteenth century, beginning in coffee houses and literary societies. It was closely tied to the growth of newspapers. It was based on the notion that all citizens were equal participants in open debate. However, the public sphere underwent a transformation that correlates with the development of social welfare, the growth of culture industries and the evolution of large private interests. After this transformation, the public sphere became a field of competition among class-based interests, changing from a forum for public debate to a competitive market. In this market, the press and broadcast media were no longer organs of public information and debate but rather became technologies for managing consensus and promoting consumer culture.

In Further Reflections of the Public Sphere Habermas argues that the demise of the public sphere also witnessed the construction of public debate, animated by “opinion-forming associations” such as voluntary associations, social organizations, churches, sports clubs, groups of concerned citizens, grassroots movements and trade unions, all

20 Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Cambridge, 1991), 27. Habermas pays particular attention to the transition from negative liberalism to positive liberalism in the context of state formation within the public sphere: “as soon as the state itself became to the fore as the bearer of the societal order, it had to go beyond the negative determinations of liberal basic rights and draw upon a positive directive notion as to how “justice” was to be realized through the reasoned interventions that characterize the social-welfare state. Thus, the state charged with social obligations (sozialpflichtig) had to watch out that the negotiated balance of interests stayed inside the framework of general interest.” Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 224.

21 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 226.
designed to counter or refashion authority. These “opinion-forming associations” manipulate the public, manage views, foster political theatre and convey “authorized opinions.” They construct visual displays of “showy pomp” and “stage display” that are used by those in authority to assert dominance or entitlement. As the bourgeois make public their vision of social order they articulate their interests in such a way as to stifle public debate and forward a vision of social order compatible with their interests: Habermas claims that “even arguments are translated into symbols to which again one cannot respond by arguing but by only identifying with them.” Although Habermas has been criticized for overstating the “free flow” of ideas, these further reflections suggest he was keenly aware of the complicated interplay of coercion and consent that Gramsci was attempting to analyze via the concept of hegemony. He reveals himself acutely conscious of the ability of a ruling group or class to incorporate the interests and views of other segments of society into their own vision of the social order, thereby expanding its own political and cultural power. Moreover, as Harold Mah points out,

22 Jurgen Habermas, “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” in Craig Calhoun (ed. and trans.), Habermas and the Public Sphere (Cambridge, 1992), 245, 195, 206.

23 Habermas, “Further Reflections on the Public Sphere,” 178.


25 Other works address this process as well. One that deserves mention in this context is Noam Chomsky’s work on the relation between corporate interests and the media in North America. In Peter Wintonick’s work on Chomsky it is argued that an intimate relationship among the state, corporate elites and the mass media work together to achieve the consent of the “masses.” Even though media outlets compete with each other and attack corporate and government malfeasance, they also fix the premises of discourse and interpretation by relying on advertising revenues and information from government, corporate and “expert” sources. See Peter
historians were responsible for misinterpreting Habermas as a scholar who had “spatialized” the public sphere, supposedly conceiving it as a “space or domain of free expression and argument that is accessible by any group.” However, Mah argues, by conceiving of the public sphere in this way, historians have neglected to address the underlying implication that the public sphere should create a unitary ‘public,’ ‘mass’ or ‘collective subject’ from disagreeing social groups: “the inherent tendency of the public sphere when transformed into an apparent mass subject is to collapse back into a spacialized image of conflicting groups.” Mah argues for a reading of Habermas that emphasizes that the public sphere is embedded in a discourse of ‘rational modernity,’ where individuals are able to put aside self interest and social identity: “[t]he public sphere ... organizes the terms of modernity into a narrative in which persons coming from diverse social backgrounds, with different social interests, set aside their specific loyalties and interests to engage as abstract individuals in strictly rational discussion and debate.” In other words, groups that enter the public sphere are forced to adhere to other conditions, becoming not only a unitary ‘public,’ but also representations or “narrow expressions of social particularity.”

In essence, upon entering the liberal public sphere, one is expected to jettison particular identities, grievances and values, and embrace a more abstract universalism.

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26 Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000), 154.

27 Ibid., 155.

28 Ibid., 181.

29 Ibid.
— or pay the price of being construed as narrow, marginal and naive. In the case of the Commission, “capital” and “labour” were seen, not as diametrically opposed classes with irresolvable differences in perspectives and interests, but as expressions of particular social groups, whose reciprocal interests were most visible to the neutral and beneficent state. Although the Commission began with the “capital/labour” dualism, it actually worked incessantly to show that such categories could be easily blended into a pervasive liberal ideology. Individuals appeared before the Commission, not types or groups or collectivities. So constructed, these witnesses shared with the commissioners many elements of a common individualist ontology and sociology. It may seem surprising that over a thousand witnesses could be interpreted as developing something of the same approach, but it becomes less so when one reflects on the rigour with which opposing viewpoints were marginalized, the selectivity with which the witnesses and commissioners were themselves put forward, and the particular knowledge-generating strategies adopted by the Commission. In essence, the Commission was about the generation of a form of liberal utopia, wherein seemingly insurmountable social barriers and conflicts were overcome through appeals to commonsense.\(^{30}\) It created an artificial space and time in which individuals could describe, seemingly without fear or favour, their own particular insights and experiences of life in a fast-changing capitalist society. Yet the very construction of that space and time, and the ways in which a language of

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\(^{30}\) This theme is explored by Jennifer Marotta who notes this very phenomenon in her reading of the legal columns in the *Family Herald and Weekly Star*. See Jennifer Marotta, “A Moral Messenger to the Canadian Middlemost: A Reading of the Family Herald and Weekly Star, 1871-1914,” Ph.D. Thesis, Queen’s University, 2006, Ch.4.
liberalism was deployed within it, meant that the upshot of this utopian egalitarianism and respect for the “capacity to judge” of witnesses was the confirmation of inegalitarian relations and of the discursive superiority of one vision of reality over others. Witnesses and commissioners alike were seen to share many elements of a ‘common sociology’ — in part because, under conditions of liberal hegemony, many of them very likely did; but also through the elaborate construction of the event itself, with respect to the kinds of witnesses called and their treatment on the stand.

In order effectively to ‘mediate’ labour and capital, John A. Macdonald’s Conservatives required a tried-and-true strategy that would be perceived (and accepted) as a legitimate “medium for bringing about a specific result.”\(^{31}\) The royal commission appears to have been Macdonald’s preferred “medium” for investigating the progress of industrialism and, by proxy, the relations of labour and capital in the Dominion. Five royal commissions were appointed to look into labour/manufacturing matters between 1880 and 1895, four of which were assembled in the 1880s by the Conservatives.\(^{32}\) This frequency was due, in part, to the fact that royal commissions (like the Labour Commission) work very well in relation to the dynamics of the Canadian political landscape: they travel extensively and thereby appear to address regional differences in the effort to establish national priorities; they build and reinforce a vast network of

\(^{31}\) This definition of mediate is taken from Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble (eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary* 2nd ed. (New York, 1996), 898.

\(^{32}\) In 1882 a commission was assembled to “enquire into the working of mills and factories in the Dominion and labour employed therein;” two commissions were assembled in 1884 one addressing manufacturing industries in Ontario and Quebec the other addressing the same topic in the Maritimes; the Labour Commission in 1886; and finally, a royal commission on whether “the sweating system is practiced in various centers in the Dominion” convened in 1895. The Labour Commission was by far the largest.
‘interested’ Canadians by encouraging their participation in discussions on ‘national affairs’; and, finally, they cater to partisan interests and patronage networks through the selection of commissioners and witnesses. Furthermore, the reports of royal commissions provide ample political fodder for elections and policy development if their findings are consistent with the interests of the executive. Of course, if a given royal commission’s findings are not in accordance with a particular political agenda, the government of the day is under no obligation to enact any of its suggestions.

The royal commissions appointed to look into industrialization in the latter decades of the nineteenth century displayed all these attributes. Four of the commissions assembled by the Tories issued reports that were unsubtle endorsements of the 1879 National Policy. Also, all the commissions acknowledged the potentially distressing impact industrialization was having on Canadian workers.33 Because the Macdonald government was under no obligation to enact any of the recommendations, the abhorrent practices occasionally disclosed in the Labour Commission were not readily abolished. Even the many concrete suggestions for improvement were generally ignored. Ultimately, “not a single important measure on behalf of the industrial worker was placed on the Dominion’s statute books.”34 In fact, the only tangible result of the

33 Potential is the key word here as many of the reports claim that the negative impact of industrialization associated with Britain and the United States had not (yet) occurred in Canada.
34 Bernard Ostry, “Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour in the 1880s,” The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science 27, 2 (1961), 141. However, Ostry’s conclusion is not without its problems, as he overlooks the significant changes made in Nova Scotia with respect to mine safety, the extension of the franchise to miners and arbitration. Thus, if “the Dominion’s statute books” include those of the provinces as well as the federal government, his argument would appear to be overstated.
Labour Commission, the largest and most expensive royal commission assembled in the entire century, was the establishment of Labour Day as a national holiday.

Why then would a large, expensive and relatively “ineffective” commission be of any interest to Canadian historians? For many, the Labour Commission is an unrivaled source that discloses the views, beliefs, values and opinions of no fewer than 1,723 nineteenth-century Canadians. Seldom does the past leave such detailed and accessible records on the views and beliefs of ‘everyday’ citizens. As Greg Kealey notes, “[t]he warmth and humanity of these ordinary Canadians reflecting on their lives and the society around them make the commission documents come to life. The interviews with them are almost unique in allowing us to enter their intellectual and cultural world.”

Fernand Harvey claims that the testimony “leaps before the eyes of the sociologist and the historian. Here is living testimony saved from oblivion by the magic of stenography; the words of workers and employers which still echo in our ears a century later. Such sources when they exist are rare in history. For Quebec they are without any doubt the greatest surviving oral document on the conditions of the workers of that century.”

Michael Cross claims that “[t]he best single source on the nineteenth century factory is the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in Canada, which reported in 1889. Its two reports and five volumes of evidence provide an unequalled collection of views and opinions on the state of industrial Canada.” As Desmond Morton remarks,

“[t]he volumes of evidence collected ... are the most graphic and detailed evidence we

\[35\] Kealey, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, x.
now have of working and living conditions, attitudes and ideas in the factories, mills and mines of late nineteenth–century Canada. They testify to both the anger and the docility of Canadian workers and to the remoteness of the new kind of employer from the people who worked for him.”\textsuperscript{38} The Labour Commission seemingly provides a detailed portrait of the effects industrialization was having on individual Canadians.

The Labour Commission, while certainly popular amongst social historians focused on the late nineteenth century, offers other avenues into understanding this pivotal period in Canada’s industrial development. In particular, it sheds much light upon the formation of the Canadian middle class. Viewed from the standpoint of an early twenty-first-century historian, the Commission represents an attempt by Canadians to achieve some sort of negotiated understanding of a change that was easily as epochal and radical to them as the advent of the computer and the internet has been to us. The very nature of production, and with it the entire social and economic structure of Canadian life, had seemingly undergone a massive change. People from all walks of life wanted to know what had happened and what they could do about it. Those accustomed to the prerogatives and language of rule sought to negotiate with the understandings of those who were ruled. Labour and capital had conflicting as well as mutual interests in navigating the rapids of this “industrial revolution.” Broad notions of social order, morality and respectability were negotiated in the Commission. And these negotiations afford insight not only into working-class formation, as many historians have noted, but into the formation of the middle class as well. In particular,

\textsuperscript{38} Desmond Morton, \textit{Working People} (Toronto, 1990), 43.
the Commission allows historians a view into how the notions of social order central to middle-class formation obtained general consent of the working class and were, therefore, part of a larger movement of state formation.39

Throughout the 1880s, and in much of the North Atlantic world, the ‘question of the day’ was the Labour Question. Contemporaries viewed this as anything but a set of narrow issues regarding wages, conditions, and trade unions. Rather, the Labour Question was a manifestation of a far-reaching social and cultural transformation. It was written about by a vast array of social reformers, labour intellectuals, journalists and politicians.

The creation of social abstractions like labour and capital was central to the Commission’s attempt to investigate the Labour Question. In fact, neither labour nor capital, ‘employees’ and ‘employers,’ were homogeneous groups. There were distinctions between skilled and unskilled, male and female, blue- and white-collar workers. Capitalist development did not, in fact, create homogeneous classes or “flatten” the economic terrain by uniformly obliterating crafts and imposing a uniform proletarianization.40 The binary terms allowed at best for a certain preliminary understanding of the social terrain. They also proved polemically useful, paradoxically hinting at the fruitful, balanced and ‘nuanced’ mediation through which they could be

39 My discussion on the relation between state formation and the middle class is premised upon Corrigan and Sayer’s argument that state formation and the bourgeoisie are deeply intertwined: “[T]he repertoire of activities and institutions conventionally identified as ‘the State’ are cultural forms, and cultural forms, moreover, of particular centrality to bourgeois civilization.” See Phillip R. Corrigan and Derek Sayer, The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution (New York, 1985), 3.

40 For a fascinating development of this theme, see Robert B. Kristofferson, Craft Capitalism: Craftworkers and Early Industrialization in Hamilton Ontario (Toronto, 2007).
reconciled. It is in this respect that the Labour Commission can be seen as a vehicle of state formation. It constituted a (strictly limited) “public sphere” wherein the tenets of industrialism could be described and debated by a vast number of citizens. By constructing this public space in which people were, in principle, encouraged to ‘make known’ their opinions of the emerging industrial order, the Macdonald government was able both to present a (somewhat misleading) impression of Canada as a country experiencing extremely rapid and thorough-going economic change and to suggest the Canadian state was well-equipped to handle any of its incidentally negative effects.

Suggesting that the Labour Commission constituted an effective vehicle of state formation requires identifying how it achieved consent as the legitimate arbitrator of labour and capital. The institutional prestige of the ‘royal’ commission in Canadian political culture, with its ‘representative’ commissioners and ‘working-class’ witnesses, explains, in part, how the Labour Commission was able, albeit briefly, to attend to larger social tensions. It is for this reason that the Commission is such a rich source for Canadian historians. Yet, such an institutional reading of the Commission’s prestige should not preclude a more searching investigation of the broader parameters of political culture. Part of my analysis shall interpret the Labour Commission more as a ‘text’ than as a ‘source.’ By addressing the Commission as a text I am suggesting that it constitutes a specific manifestation of power/knowledge relations, through which people acting in an official capacity sought to normalize a given discourse about capital
and labour, men and women, normal and pathological, right and wrong. The Labour Commission affords much evidence on the languages of class through which Victorian Canadians made sense of their daily experiences. It presents the social, political and cultural understandings of these Canadians within the context of their changing industrial world. It also allows a rare opportunity to chart not merely what was said but who was allowed to speak. Not all working-class witnesses were equal in this public sphere. Some were virtually ‘expert witnesses’ in their own right, endowed with authority and permitted to speak openly about their opinions. Others were merely ‘objects of pity’ without discursive rights, victims rather than agents (and even sometimes appearing anonymously). Others still were relegated to disclosing ‘just the facts,’ in conformity with the commissioners’ a priori estimation of their worthiness. A close reading of this text discloses much about the implicit politics of respectability and authority that not only informed the relations of labour and capital during this important decade, but were also central in achieving consent within Victorian Canada more generally.

In many ways, the Labour Commission not only captured, but also created, knowledge about the relations of labour and capital. Parties with a deep interest in the Labour Question — trade union leaders, workers, foremen, owners of factories and

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41 I should also mention my interest in the British traditions of discourse analysis in the work of Norman Fairclough and Stuart Hall. In particular see Norman Fairclough, Language and Power (New York, 1989) and by the same author, Critical Discourse Analysis: A Critical Study of Language (New York, 1995).
42 The power and ideological implications of class is the subject of Gareth Stedman Jones’s popular work, Languages of Class. Here, Jones addressed the political and discursive conditions and the political rhetoric of class. See Gareth Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982 (Cambridge, 1983).
social reformers — were assembled for its purposes. Their discussions open windows onto employee/employer relations, the standard of living, and the beliefs of individual Canadians. Yet these empirical data are often read naively, without due regard to how intensively they were mediated by the process that generated them. The commissioners were endowed with their own attitudes and values about social order that invariably influenced the tenor of the evidence. They were in a position of authority to determine what was “pertinent” information based on a collection of pre-determined conditions such as respectability, morality and expertise. This grid of assumptions and values was not simply “imposed” upon witnesses. They were, in a real sense, negotiated during the hearings of the Commission. Whether working-class or middle-class, witnesses described their respective positions in Canada’s social-political order in such a way as to obtain legitimacy for their positions by appealing to broadly-supported notions of truth, order and common sense.

The Labour Commission, in many respects, can hence be seen as a public space where social tensions were resolved through reasoned discussion or, in Habermasian terms, a public sphere where matters of general interest were institutionally guaranteed. By extension, the published testimony of the Commission is both a reflection of the ideological dynamics inherent in ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ as well as a reinforcement of those relations as they were captured in the prestige of a large-scale, formal, state investigation. Addressing the Commission as a text, then, means identifying how relations of power were naturalized in these discussions on labour and capital and, by analyzing this language, ‘denaturalizing’ its tacit ideologies and its assumptions. This
helps us grasp how the state could legitimize relations of subordination and domination through the device of the royal commission — and provide insights into this aspect of Canadian political culture that may be useful in many other periods.

**Background: The National Policy and the Effects of Industrial Growth**

The sheer complexity of the relations linking the state, labour and capital in the decades leading up to the Commission cannot be understood without reference to the National Policy and its social, economic and political impact. While the “success” of the National Policy is a subject of historical debate, it is not a coincidence that the industries which received the most attention and representation in the Labour Commission were also those that were most clearly the Policy’s beneficiaries. Protectionist tariffs, immigration policies and extensive railway construction were the key ingredients of the National Policy.

Political debate about tariffs was a central feature of the Dominion for decades prior to and after the election of 1878, but it was amidst this election that the ‘protectionist’ component of the National Policy came to the fore.43 Macdonald’s Conservative Party won the election of 1878 on a platform of economic protectionism, one envisaging a tariff structure protecting goods that were, or could be, manufactured in the Dominion. Consistent with the principles of protection, the tariff schedule admitted some things free (unmanufactured wool, raw cotton, machinery for woolen

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43 Tariff structures remained relatively stagnant in the years leading up to the election. Easterbrook and Aitken claim that “the average duty of all imports stood at about 20.5%, a slight increase since Confederation but scarcely a significant move to protection.” See Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 392.
and cotton mills, steel and animals for stock) and charged a duty on other items (agricultural implements, bricks, carriages, wagons, and railway cars, iron, paint, refined sugar, and woolen clothing). Agricultural products were protected by specific duties: those covering wheat, butter and cheese, for example, all increased, with obvious effects on working-class urban workers. In fact, inflation was a particular preoccupation within the “public discussion” that was the Labour Commission.

Manufacturing interests were central to the National Policy. Peter Waite argues that before 1878 ‘the manufacturers’ — that is, the particular group being catered to by the tariff protectionism — had ‘not been a political force of much significance.’ Yet after the severe international economic downturn of the 1870s, many Canadians responded favourably to a strategy that seemingly offered industries security and workers prosperity. As Easterbrook and Aitken argue,

it was becoming apparent that a more rapid rate of industrialization was essential if progress was to be made with plans for a better balanced, more diversified and more tightly integrated economic development. Without a strong industrial base there could be little hope of lessening Canada’s dependence on external conditions for her prosperity. This feature of the national policy was a program of economic nationalism, one in which railways and steam ships, tariffs and industrial development, and the wheat of the prairies formed the essential elements of a structure that had been evolving since at least as early as the mid-nineteenth century.

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45 Waite, Canada 1874-1896, 103.
47 Easterbrook and Aitken, Canadian Economic History, 393-4.
An important point in favour of the amended tariff structure was a projected increase in
government revenues. The bulk of federal revenues were derived from tariffs, “and with
renewed plans for transcontinental railway construction with its heavy financial
demands, tariffs and railways became inseparably linked in a programme of western
expansion.”

The National Policy, and in some measure Confederation itself, was designed to
establish a strong national economy that would promote the interaction of Atlantic,
Western and Central Canadian markets through extensive railway networks. As
Easterbrook and Aitken remark, “[p]romoters and politicians alike, whether in Canada
or in the Maritimes, realized the railway was certain to cause profound changes in the
directions of trade and the location of production.”

Douglas McCalla argues that “in
mid-nineteenth century Canada, railways were the major collective economic project of
leading elements in the provincial business community and of the provincial
government, and they were thus a central element in the state-making process.”

The construction of a railway linking the Maritimes and Central Canada was an explicit term
of Confederation – an economic union that was seen as a viable solution to economic
pressures stemming, in part, from strained relations with the United States. As Toronto
industrialist Isaac Buchanan observed, central Canadian business was compelled to

48 Ibid., 394.
49 Ibid., 370.
50 Douglas McCalla, “Railways and the Development of Canada West, 1850-1864,” in Allan Greer
and Ian Radforth (eds.), Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada
(Toronto, 1992), 192.
“find markets for our industry and an outlet for our trade through an intimate and indissoluble union of all the provinces of British North America.”

Railways had long been a staple of Canadian politics — Francis Hincks’s Guarantee Act and the Municipal Loan Fund Act had provided state backing for private industry in Central Canada, for example — but in the 1870s and 1880s the rail boom continued on a much larger scale. The initiative to extend the railway across Canada’s expansive West was a great and profitable undertaking ridden with scandal and corruption. In 1876 the Intercolonial was (finally) completed linking the Maritimes and Central Canada. The road cost a total of $34,363,896 and was financed entirely by the federal government with the assistance of an imperial guarantee. The more renowned rail project was, of course, the construction of a transcontinental linking Central Canada with the Pacific coast. While a transcontinental line was certainly a priority for the newly established federal government, it generated much interest from a particular “capitalist” group. As Easterbrook states, “there was, ... one group of capitalists who had been involved in the transcontinental project from the beginning and who still had a large stake at seeing it carried through to completion under their management.” Because of the sheer size and political significance of the Western railway project, “the interests of the Grand Trunk Railway and of the new Dominion of Canada were therefore in

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51 As noted in Greg Kealey, *Canada’s Age of Industry, 1849-1896* (Toronto, 1982), 32.
52 Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 411.
53 Ibid., 413.
principle identical, at least in so far as the need for transcontinental expansion was concerned."\textsuperscript{54}

The state played a major part in the railways’ story, especially in facilitating their initial funding, but in a myriad of other ways as well, through the legislature, the law, the actions of politicians and officials, and through the efforts of municipalities. In the process the state itself was much changed, notably in the context of public finance.\textsuperscript{55}

While Dominion revenues increased, massive railway-related debt burdens were assumed by the federal government. By 1873, the Dominion had committed itself to expenditures of $30 million for construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.\textsuperscript{56} Although the pledge to build the transcontinental railroad was made in 1870, Canada was better able to support its construction by 1880.

Immigration completed the troika of National Policy objectives. In addition to implementing homestead legislation enabling European settlers to obtain land cheaply, the federal government funded a vast media campaign in Britain and the European Continent to promote immigration to Canada. The government in Ottawa wanted immigrants to populate the prairies and the growing industrial sector needed workers to accommodate its expansion. Yet, in spite of this vast effort, overall immigration to Canada in the late nineteenth century was fairly minimal. “In spite of federal land policies, railway construction and immigration propaganda, a population of some 3,600,000 in 1871 had increased to barely 5,370,000 at the turn of the century. An average

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 413.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
annual rate of increase from 1.61% in the 1870s dropped to 1.13% in the 1880s and in the last decade of the century to as low as 1.06%.”

It was only after the new century dawned that immigration in Canada began to have a sizable demographic effect. For example, including immigration statistics, Canada’s population increase in the 1901-11 period surpassed that of 1871-91.

Between 1861 and 1891, 1,485,851 immigrants entered the country. As many or more quickly left. As Easterbrook and Aitken explain, “heavy emigration, approaching two million, much of it Canadian-born, indicated that Canada had unwillingly become a temporary residence and a vestibule for settlers whose final destination was the United States.” The last three decades of the century saw the most migration out of Canada. “Between 1840 and 1930,” for example, “9,000,000 Quebecers left their homeland. The vast majority of these emigrants, ranging from two-thirds in some years to four-fifths in others, were French Canadian.” As Linteau, Durocher and Robert argue in the case of Quebec, a large number of people (entire families more than individuals) left for good to work in the textile mills of the United States. A similar situation was unfolding in the Maritimes. As Judith Fingard notes, the region was losing much of its human capital

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57 Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 395. The population of New Brunswick in 1861 was 252,047; by 1891 to had grown to 321,263 for a difference of 69,216. In 1861 the population of Nova Scotia was 330,857; by 1891 it had grown 450,396 for a difference of 119,539. The population of Quebec in 1861 was 1,111,566; by 1891 it had grown to 1,488,535 for a difference of 376,969. Finally, the population of Ontario in 1861 was 1,396,091; by 1891 it had grown to 2,114,321 for a difference of 718,230. See M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Cambridge and Toronto, 1965), 14.

58 Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 400.

59 Ibid., 395.


61 Linteau et al., *Quebec*, 28.
with many of its residents coming to “the realization that local opportunities were not attractive enough to encourage young people to seek their living in the region.”

Throughout the 1850 to 1900 period, the Canadian economy was vulnerable to global economic activity. This vulnerability was, of course, a major factor in the implementation of protective measures. Scarcely a decade in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not shadowed by the prospect of economic depression. As Easterbrook and Aitken observe, “the whole period up to 1896 was one of periodic and prolonged slumps interrupted by brief periods of recovery.” The most acute slump took place in the period proceeding tariff regulations from 1876 to 1879. In fact, some historians have argued that the Mackenzie government lost the 1878 election for the Liberals because of these “bad times.” British and American protectionism obviously had a significant impact on the Canadian economy but these countries also invested in Canada. Between 1867 and 1900, foreign investment in Canada grew from $200 million to $1.305 billion.

Obviously the National Policy occupied a central role in Canada’s political and economic climate throughout the 1879 to 1896 period. The extent of its impact on the Dominion is a subject of historical debate. The Rowell-Sirois Commission of the 1930s, for example, concluded that the National Policy was a failure. Settlement of the West did

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63 Easterbrook and Aitken, Canadian Economic History, 392.

64 Waite, Canada 1874-1896, 92.

65 Linteau et al., Québec, 61; see also R.T. Naylor, The History of Canadian Business II (Montreal, 1997), 70-77.
not occur on a grand scale for at least a decade and a half. Some historians linked these problems with favorable global patterns. This interpretation has also been challenged. For example, John Dales and Alfred Dubuc argued that the policy restricted economic growth and caused distinct regions of the country to develop differently, concentrating economic power in large Central Canadian institutions. Furthermore, “by supporting uncompetitive industries, the policy sacrificed quality to quantity; if it succeeded in raising overall national income, it was at the price of a drop in the standard of living which, paradoxically, encouraged immigration to the United States.” As Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer argue, “[a]lthough both the 1880s and the 1900s are years of economic growth and the increasing intensification of labor, it is not until the years 1901-11 that one sees the actual rationalization of productive relations, a shift in the character of exploitation, and the... degradation of labor.” That the Canadian economy only began to expand aggressively in the new century seems to add credibility to the interpretation of the 1873 to 1896 period as one of depression and slow growth.

Of course, protective tariffs, railroad projects and immigration initiatives provide only a background to the “great transformation.” National initiatives had a profound effect on the relations between capital and the state as well as the growing class of

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67 Linteau et al., *Québec*, 65.
69 The economic growth I am referring to here is from 1900-1913. As Easterbrook and Aitken argue, “[t]he influx of capital was a basic element in an upward movement which, following the years of recovery, 1896-1901, achieved momentum in 1902-3 and took on the proportions of a boom in the years 1909-13.” See Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 400-1.
labour producers. Attention to the National Policy suggests that an intricate relationship was forming between the state and society as the Dominion government took an active interest in establishing a strong manufacturing base in the country. The dominant involvement of manufacturing interests in the election of 1878 provides ample evidence of this reality. The Dominion’s economic growth under the National Policy was indeed an aspect of a ‘great transformation’ as the development of manufacturing interests were directly tied to rising urban populations, factory production and changing productive relationships. The ‘transformation’ that took place in North America was profound. Yet, it should be remembered that it largely took place in the United States. Easterbrook states that in the latter nineteenth century, Canada’s southern neighbor experienced “a rate of industrial growth sufficient to make the United States the leading industrial power of the twentieth century. Light manufactures, including the processing of food and kindred products, the production of textiles, boots and shoes, kept pace with the more spectacular heavy industries. Mass production and mass consumption quickly became the distinctive marks of the United States economy.” The Canadian government’s many queries into the state of manufacturing in the United States, particularly Massachusetts, suggest that American industrial development also provided a model for the Canadian government in its responses to the Dominion’s own

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70 Ben Forster provides a compelling account of relations between manufacturing interests and the federal Conservatives. See Forster, *A Conjunction of Interests*, 182-200.
71 Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 399.
From the start industrial growth was distinctly uneven throughout Canada’s four founding provinces, the very provinces visited by the Commission. The first thirty years of Confederation passed very uneasily in the Maritimes provinces. Indeed, shortly before the coming of the Commission, Nova Scotians had voted in an anti-Confederation provincial government. The focus of criticism, for the most part, was central Canada. Both the Maritimes and the West attacked its commercial domination of the Dominion. Many Canadians directed their resentment against the federal government, whose policies seemed to favor certain groups and regions and to deny individual provinces the power to work out their own salvation. In the Maritimes, the system of railways that was supposed to open up new central Canadian markets, instead brought in a flood of goods that competed with local manufacturers. The industries of Ontario and Quebec, with larger markets nearer at hand, were able to keep control in their own provinces and to compete successfully in the Maritimes. From 1867 onward, the Quebec and Ontario manufacturers found, fostered, and exploited the eastern market. As William Muir of Montreal, a wholesale clothing dealer, told a parliamentary committee in 1874, “[o]ur business increases with the trade of the Dominion which has increased largely. But one of the principal elements of the increase has been getting the Maritime Provinces as a market. Not less than one third of my own trade is with Nova Scotia and New

72 In 1881, for example, the government appointed the following commission: GC, Commission to Inquire into and Report on the System of Laws Regulating Labour in the State of Massachusetts, Sessional Papers, 16-1883.

73 For a more thorough examination of the relation between railway tariffs and regional economic development see Acheson, “National Policy and Industrialization in the Maritimes.”
Brunswick.” Conversely, Maritime coal producers felt shut out of Central Canadian markets, with their product rarely reaching places west of Montreal.

Nonetheless, although it still lagged behind central Canada, there was substantial industrial development in the Maritimes. In the 1880s, for example, cotton textile manufacturing boomed in the two major industrial centers of the region, Halifax and Saint John as well as smaller cities such as Moncton, Milltown, Yarmouth and Marysville. However, it was not long before this industry was swallowed up by central Canadian interests. By the end of the 1880s, most regional factories were either closed or under the control of the Dominion Cotton Mills Company. As Larry McCann argues, “[t]here was no regional metropolis to unite the regional economy, only limited industrial and financial leadership by Halifax and St. John. Without shared strategies and metropolitan strength, regional industries in the 1890s fell prey (the cotton – textile industry is a telling example) to territorial incursions and business takeovers by central-Canadian enterprise.”

Coal was another industry which increased substantially in the 1880s. The most impressive performance in the decade was that of Springhill mine which provided steady work for 13% of Nova Scotia’s miners in 1881. As metal working grew in the region community development followed in places such as New Glasgow and Sydney Mines. Yet, at the close of the century coal and steel manufacturing would

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also succumb to outside interests and ownership. In general, manufacturing output increased by only 4% over the course of the 1890s, compared to rates in Ontario and Quebec of 21% and 30%, respectively.

Toronto and Hamilton led the way in industrial development in Ontario, Montreal in Quebec (it also emerged as the country’s financial metropolis). The sheer increase in the industrial workforce of these cities was significant. As Bryan Palmer observes, “[t]he industrial workforces of Hamilton, Toronto and Montreal reveal the overwhelming changes that occurred in this period. The industrial workforces of these cities compromised 16.7%, 16.8% and 19.7% of their respective populations by the 1870s.” Closely following these urban centers were communities in southern and southwestern Ontario. Communities like Gananoque, Kingston and Belleville developed foundries, machine shops and agricultural implement manufacturers, largely for local markets. Ottawa’s development was secured in the lumber industry in the 1870s, as five of the Dominion’s largest lumber producers were located in the area. The most impressive rise in industrial development occurred in Cornwall where cotton mills boomed throughout the 1870-1880s. In Quebec, Montreal was strategically located in the hub of the North American market and constituted about 50% of Quebec’s production of manufactured goods. Yet, industry also quickly spread to the suburbs of Montreal – Hochelaga, Saint-Gabriel, Saint-Henri; to other towns in the region such as Valleyfield, Saint-Hyacinthe, Saint-Jean and Sorel; and still further to the Eastern Townships,

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76 McCann, “1890s,” 127.
77 Ibid., 125.
concentrating in Sherbrooke, Magog and Coaticook. The Quebec City-Levis region also saw substantial industrial development. Jacques Hamelin and Yves Roby remark that in the 1861 to 1901 period the value of manufacturing production (in dollars) in Quebec grew by $135 million.\footnote{Linteau et al., Quebec, 120.} As Fernand Harvey remarks, à propos of the expansion of Québec industry: “Montreal produced 51% of all manufacturing in Québec between 1881 and 1901 … Industries were also established in the suburbs such as Hull, Valleyfield, St-Hyacinthe, Sherbrooke, Lévis and Trois-Rivières that totaled 6.8% of the provinces industrial output in 1881. By 1901 industrial manufacturing in these areas rose to 8%.\footnote{Fernand Harvey, “Les Chevaliers du Travail, Les états-unis et la Société Québécoise,” in Harvey, Aspects historiques du mouvement ouvrier au Québec (Montreal, 1973), 51. The translation is mine.}

The 1880s represent the pinnacle of industrial development in the nineteenth century. The large-scale introduction of the machine changed the face of production radically: “productivity increased substantially and craft production gave way to mass production, with a significant reduction in cost.”\footnote{Ibid., 117. The translation is mine.} Ultimately, the machine radically changed the nature and culture of productive relationships and, in turn, larger social structures. As McCann states, “besides further differentiating regional communities along economic lines, and adding more groups and contrast to their social structures, the new industrialism split the working class and increased the disparity between rich and poor.”\footnote{McCann, “1890s,” 122.} As Kealey observes, with regard to the shoemakers in Toronto, “[t]he factory created massive barriers of social distance between owner and worker. Most important, industrial capitalism stripped the shoemaker of his most valuable possession – pride in
his craft and in his product.”

The increase in the number of persons involved in manufacturing in Canada was substantial: from 248,042 in 1880, to 351,139 in 1890 and 422,842 in 1900. The advent of the machine and the imposition of the large factory would have radical effects on workers’ lives, ranging from women and children’s entrance into industrial workplaces to the many accidents suffered by poorly-trained workers.

The textile industry provides a useful example of the effects of the machine on productive relations. In Quebec the textile industry established itself in 1873-1874. Under the protective tariff, the industry took off after 1879. Five major firms were established between 1879 and 1884 which led to a crisis in overproduction. In fact, this industry represents one of the first examples of corporate concentration and monopolization in the country. The mills would not locate in Montreal proper but in the suburbs and small towns outside the metropolitan area. Proximity to an abundant rural population available for low-paid work – mostly women and children – was one reason for this pattern; another, according to Jacques Rouillard, was the availability of hydraulic and later hydroelectric energy. In this respect, the textile industry represented the “high-tech” industry of this period. It concentrated production in large factories with access to cheap labour and available energy to run machines. That the textile industry ranked

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83 Greg Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892 (Toronto, 1980), 39
84 Urquhart, Canadian Historical Statistics, 463.
85 Linteau et al., Quebec, 124.
86 Linteau et al., Quebec, 124; Jacques Rouillard, Les travailleurs du coton au Québec, 1900-1915 (Montréal, 1974).
sixth in terms of the value of manufacturing in Quebec by the turn of the century suggests much about the pace of change wrought by large-scale industrialization.\textsuperscript{87} 

The most profound effects of industrialization were felt in the cotton/textile, shoe and iron/steel industries. In the textile industry, the number of establishments in the Dominion increased from 996 in 1870 to 1,835 in 1880 to 3,996 in 1890 and the number of persons employed increased from 7,466 in 1870 to 13,418 in 1880 to 25,491 in 1890.\textsuperscript{88} Linteau \textit{et al.} argue that Montreal and Quebec produced between 60\% and 75\% of all shoes sold in Canada towards the end of the century; the number of establishments grew substantially between 1870 and 1890 while the number of persons employed remained relatively even.\textsuperscript{89} Boot and shoe manufacturing dominated the leather sector of Canada’s economy. In the iron and steel industry the number of establishments grew from 8,091 in 1870 to 10,478 in 1880 to 12,727 in 1890 and the number of persons employed increased from 28,260 in 1870 to 35,206 in 1880 to 45,600 in 1890. These industries were the “cutting edge” industries in this period.\textsuperscript{90}

As factories tended to concentrate hundreds, or even thousands, of workers in one large space the growth of urban areas became a distinct effect of industrial growth. However, it should be kept in mind that most factories in this period were located in communities of less than 10,000. Palmer states, “[b]etween 1850 and 1880 the urban

\textsuperscript{87} Linteau \textit{et al.}, \textit{Quebec}, 124.
\textsuperscript{88} Urquhart, \textit{Canadian Historical Statistics}, 468.
\textsuperscript{89} Linteau \textit{et al.}, \textit{Quebec}, 122. It should be remembered that there were also interpretative issues with the census concerning the definition of what counts as a factory or establishment. For an insightful look into this discrepancy see Kris Inwood and John Chamard, “Regional Industrial Growth During the 1890s: The Case of the Missing Artisans,” \textit{Acadiensis} 16, 1 (1986), 101-117.
\textsuperscript{90} For a classic discussion of steel, see Craig Heron, \textit{Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935} (Toronto, 1988).
population of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec increased from 14 and 15 percent to 27 and 24 percent. Montreal led the way, with a population soaring from 90,000 in 1861 to 140,247 in 1881. In the same years, Toronto grew from 45,000 to 86,500 while the city of Quebec expanded from 42,000 to 62,500.\textsuperscript{91} The most pronounced urban growth was in Ontario where in 1851 the urban population had been 133,463; 30 years later it stood at 375,848. In the Maritimes urban population growth was also significant. “At Confederation, about one of every ten Maritimers lived in a place that was urban in size (at least 1000 people), if not in character. Thirty years later, at the close of the century, the proportion was one in three. The comparable ratio for the Dominion in 1901 was one in three.”\textsuperscript{92} Easterbrook states, “of a population of 3,690,000 [in 1870] more than 80% were engaged in agriculture and extractive activities and most of the remainder were in manufacturing and industry carried on in small, relatively isolated establishments.”\textsuperscript{93} By the end of the century the population of Canada is estimated at 5,301,000; of this number 1,990,162 lived in an urban area, while 3,381,153 lived in the countryside. Yet, there were regional fluctuations in urban populations. “During the decade after 1881, rural population in the five eastern provinces remained almost stationary and even showed a slight decrease in Nova Scotia and Ontario. In contrast, urban population in Nova Scotia increased by 13,450, in Quebec by 121,000, in Ontario by 243,000 for a gain of more than 50%.”\textsuperscript{94}

Urbanization presented distinct problems for working-class people. The biggest

\textsuperscript{91} Bryan Palmer, Working Class Experience, 64.
\textsuperscript{92} McCann, “1890s,” 139.
\textsuperscript{93} Easterbrook and Aitken, Canadian Economic History, 384.
\textsuperscript{94} Edgar McInnis, Canada: A Political and Social History (Toronto, 1969), 406.
challenge of urban living was rent which “... had advanced in all major cities, and ‘to such an extent that a serious burden has been added to those borne by people struggling for a living.’ In Halifax, Saint John, Montreal, and Toronto, rent absorbed approximately one quarter of working class income, in Quebec city one fifth.”95 Considering the substantial increase in urban population, it is not surprising that the Commission focused so intently on urban centers. This constructed interpretation of Canadian society largely neglected the rural majority. The Commission’s focus on urban centers rather deliberately paints a picture of a ‘modern’ urban Dominion and presents, therefore, a skewed view of Canadian society.

The National Policy had limited effects on the Dominion’s economy in the latter years of the nineteenth century but it was, albeit tacitly, a central feature of the Labour Commission. The implementation of protective tariffs did foster industrial, especially manufacturing, development. The construction of railway networks was a vast undertaking that was, in principle, designed to open markets for central Canadian and Maritime manufactures. The result was the centralization of manufacture in Ontario and Quebec and distinctly uneven industrial development in the Maritimes and rural parts of upper and lower Canada. Finally, immigrants were starting to arrive in large numbers in Canada — although admittedly many were bound for more permanent abodes in the United States. In spite of the limited impact of the National Policy, certain industries thrived in this period such as cotton/textile, boot/shoe and coal. The phenomenal growth of textile and shoe industries and the migration of people to urban centers to work in

95 Waite, Canada 1874-1896, 177; see also GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 116.
these factories creates the impression that these were the ‘high-tech’ industries of the period. Not surprisingly, they were also the primary focus of the Labour Commission that, for the most part, took evidence from factory workers in urban centers, many of whom were involved in the textile/cotton industry. The Commission appears to be a cog in a larger effort to highlight the modernity of the Dominion. Rather than address the much larger rural population and more traditional industrial concerns (such as mining and fishing), the Commission highlighted the accomplishments of the new industrialism in Canada. It portrayed a modern industrial country with up-to-date social problems.

Background: Class Formation, the Social and the State

Many Canadian historians have discussed the Victorian period as one in which workers became aware of their own interests and began to form powerful organizations to fight for them. Yet, at the same time, it was also a period in which those who were neither large-scale employers and/or financers on the one hand, nor wage workers on the other, began to sense they were a “middle class.” Whether through labour organization or involvement in social benefit societies, the social landscape of the Dominion was changing in tandem with economic growth and set the stage for the tensions of labour and capital. Furthermore, the state was central to how these tensions were managed. Political parties were courting votes from workingmen, arbitration and other proposals for labour legislation were publicly debated, and large scale inquiries into the relations of labour and capital were occurring internationally. The commission of inquiry became the favoured tactic for the Macdonald government not only to inquire
into the ‘success’ of the National Policy, but also into subjects central to the relations of
labour and capital such as the condition of factories and the employment of women and
children.

Labour organization steadily grew in the latter half of the nineteenth century and
boomed in the 1880s. Many union organizations made significant inroads to workers’
lives. By the 1860s United States-based international unions were making significant
inroads in the Canadian trade union movement. Not only were British and American
immigrant workers bringing ideas of labour organization to their respective workplaces,
but American unions were also signing up Canadian members. For example, in 1861,
Montreal moulders joined the US National Moulders Union; Toronto and Hamilton
moulders followed suit soon afterward. Typographical workers were also exemplars of
this trend. For example, “[i]n the middle of the 1860s, there were Canadian unions of
printers at London, Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Saint John and Halifax.”

By the end of the decade many of these organizations would be affiliated with the
American based National Typographical Union. The American shoemakers union, the
Knights of St. Crispin, had developed 327 locals by 1870, 16 of which were in Canada.

Such cross-border relationships were in the interests of Canadian workers for many
reasons. As Desmond Morton points out, “[b]oth American and Canadian strikers

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96 Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada* (Montreal, 1967), 22. There is much
literature on trade unionism in Quebec. See Fernand Harvey, *Aspects historiques du mouvement
ouvrier au Québec* (Montreal, 1973); Fernand Harvey, *The History of the Labour Movement in Quebec,
Arnold Bennett (trans.)* (Montreal, 1987); Jacques Ferland, “Syndicalisme ‘parcellaire’ et
syndicalisme ‘collectif:’ Une Interprétation socio-technique des conflits ouvriers dans deux

97 Desmond Morton, *Working People* (Toronto, 1990), 18; for a sound account of the Knights of St.
Crispin see Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 37-52.
regularly found themselves displaced by workers recruited on the other side of the
border.”98 Also, many Canadian workers went to the United States when work was
scarce at home. Being a member of an American union could help them in their search
for work. More importantly, as Stuart Jamieson points out, American unions played a
dominant role through “extensive aid in money, personnel, and experience [that] served
to expand Canadian unionism more widely and rapidly than it could have done on its
own resources.”99

The internationalization of Canadian labour in this period was not uniformly
accepted. In Quebec, for example, important elements of the Church, the government,
employers and wage earners were opposed to an American presence in labour
organizations and advocated separate French-speaking Catholic trade unions. Under the
influence of Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal, some union leaders with international
affiliations were denied a Christian burial. In 1886, Cardinal Taschereau issued a
mandment, based on a decision from the Vatican, telling Catholics to leave labour
organizations, such as the Knights of Labor (hereafter referred to as the Knights), or
suffer being denied the sacraments. While this period has been described as the
internationalization of Canadian labour, some historians note that “it would … be a
mistake to suppose that the internationals, in the 1860s and 1870s, carried all before
them. They made little impression in the Maritimes, and very little in Quebec; and
throughout the country workers continued to form purely local or provincial unions.”100

98 Morton, Working People, 17.
99 Stuart Jamieson, Industrial Relations in Canada (Toronto, 1957), 30.
The history of the union movement from the late 1860s to the 1880s is usually told in terms of pivotal struggles such as the nine hour struggle, and the emergence of a central labour movement. On the international scene as well as in Canada, Donald Creighton states, “[t]he growth of national unions, the spread of urban trade councils or assemblies, were prominent features of the movement in both the new and old world. Political and social reforms, as well as industrial protections and mutual benefits, were all included in the varied programmes of these working-class organizations.”

This period also saw unionism in Canada stray out of the trade or craft mode. For example, in 1871 the Toronto Trades Assembly (TTA) was created which combined many trades under one body. One year later the TTA’s success became apparent when building, woodworking, metal and carriage-making trades combined under its banner. That same year the TTA was instrumental in the nine hour struggle which quickly spread to communities throughout Ontario — as the Nine Hours League in Hamilton demonstrated — and Quebec. But more important, these events pepper the 1870s and 1880s, suggesting much about an apparent fast-growing antagonism between labour and capital.

In the early 1870s, when the night compositors of the Globe, inspired by the shortage of skilled labour, asked for an increase in wages and a shorter work week from the paper’s owner and legendary Canadian Liberal George Brown, the latter conceded. When the less skilled job printers asked for the same, they were refused and a strike

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soon developed. In an effort to break the strike, Brown assembled an impressive group of employers who became known as the Master Printers Association. This association set about dismantling worker’s organizations by mounting an extensive propaganda campaign. For example, a piece in the Globe claimed that, “[a]ny attempt on the part of the Employees to dictate to them in what way, or to what extent they shall lawfully use their own resources is not only an unwarrantable interference with the rights of others, but a very transparent attempt to introduce amongst us the Communistic system of leveling.” On April 15, 1872, 10,000 workers representing the Iron Moulders, Bricklayers, Masons, Cigar Makers, Varnishers and Polishers, Knights of St. Crispin, the Typographical Union and the Bookbinders Union rallied in Queen’s Park. At this rally, one militant called for political action: working men “should select those who would go and fight their battles in parliament.” The next day the police arrested 24 members of the TTA’s strike committee on the charge of criminal conspiracy; one of these men, John Armstrong, would later become a commissioner on the Labour Commission. The conspiracy charge stuck because of a loophole in Canadian common law: in England, unions had received relief from a common law which deemed combinations for the purpose of demanding higher wages or shorter hours illegal. No such provision existed in Canada, meaning that, according to Canadian common law, the strike was illegal. The arrested men went before Justice McNab and were found guilty of being members of a

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102 Brown’s implicit preference of the skilled workers over the unskilled could also be attributed to other tacit social understandings about the differences between strata of workers, which we shall explore later in this thesis.

103 Globe, April 3, 1872.

104 Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 30.
criminal body.

Shortly after the arrests, the situation in Toronto became more complex. The *Globe*, like its owner, was Liberal. The same day the 24 members of the TTA went on trial, John A. Macdonald — eying this situation very closely in Ottawa — introduced legislation modeled on the British Act of 1871 which made combination for the purposes of higher wages and shorter hours legal. Amidst the Toronto struggle, a workers’ newspaper was created (the funds for which were loaned by Macdonald) called the *Ontario Workman*.105 Of course, not all Toronto businessmen were against the workers. James Beaty, proprietor of the Toronto *Leader*, was behind the nine-hour movement:

…and having the best interests of the mechanics and labouring community at heart, in view of the increased cost of living in their city, he considers that workingmen have rights which he is willing to respect. As in the past, so now, he means to be amongst the foremost to aid the working, industrious, and sober men to obtain a livelihood and independence in Canada, where no one need fail if governed by these cardinal virtues.106

Beaty, a Conservative politician, nicely articulated the contradictory imperatives of his position. On the one hand, he was interested in buying labour power at the cheapest possible rate. On the other, he acknowledged that if Canadian wage rates diverged too markedly from those found elsewhere in the Anglo-American world, levels of immigration to Canada would suffer:

[w]e are at present only just budding into life as a manufacturing city, and it is as well that masters and workmen should thoroughly understand each other – understand that wages to be paid in Toronto must be commensurate with those of and in the United States and

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106 *Leader*, March 18, 1872.
England for the same sort of work, and that the hours constituting a day’s work shall be in Toronto similar to those elsewhere.\textsuperscript{107}

For many commentators, labour, capital and the state all had similar interests. They were all mutually interested in the betterment of the Dominion. One needs not look far to see the stirrings of the National Policy in Beaty’s sentiments. Immigration, a dominant component of the Policy, could only be accomplished if the conditions for the recruitment of much-needed skilled labour were present. Bernard Ostry claims, “[Macdonald] could hardly be expected to ignore the attempts to maltreat the skilled labour essential to the success of the [National Policy]. Brown’s action may have been legal but such tyranny could not be allowed to deprive Canada of the labour force it needed.”\textsuperscript{108} The 1872 Typographical strike thus exhibited a conjunction of class and political interests, with labour, capital and the state each negotiating new roles in the social and political world. Macdonald, who lost the election of 1873 for other reasons, would be known as the “workingman’s friend” by the close of this confrontation.

The trade union movement reached a peak in 1872. The Trade Union Act meant that a qualified legal status had been attained and a worker, H.B. Whitton, had been elected to the Dominion Parliament. The Nine Hour Movement had mobilized a pioneering labour leadership or ‘Junta’ — Greg Kealey’s term is borrowed from the British experience — capable of forcing the issues of working people into a Dominion-wide forum. One important manifestation was the creation of the Canadian Labor Union (CLU), whose constitution proclaimed:

\textsuperscript{107} Leader, March 27-29, 1872.
\textsuperscript{108} Ostry, “Labour in the 1870s,” 108.
The working men of the Dominion of Canada, in common with intelligent producers of the world, feel the necessity of co-operation and harmonious action to secure their mutual interests and just compensation for their toil, and such limitation of the hours of labour that may tend to promote their physical and intellectual well being.\textsuperscript{109}

The Junta effectively took control of central Canadian labour activity in the early 1870s. Their demands were extensive, including restriction of child employment, reform of prison labour, controls on immigration, the establishment of a Bureau of Statistics, and the expansion of the franchise. All these issues remained in the public forum (particularly among other social reformers) well into the 1890s; they were also well documented in the Labour Commission.

The labour movement suffered from the economic downturn of the 1870s. In many instances, many of the successes of the early 1870s, such as wage gains and shorter hours, were attacked by employers who, sometimes, went so far as to try to wipe out the unions themselves. As Bernard Ostry remarks, “the economic depression which hung over the industrial world, threatening and dampening all enterprise and flooding the urban centres with goods few could afford, was taking its toll in Canada.”\textsuperscript{110} The labour movement continued but its numbers diminished significantly. In 1876, the fourth delegation of the CLU meet in Toronto and consisted of only 25 delegates. In spite of the economic depression that was gripping the Dominion, the 1870s were instrumental in providing the basis for the continuation of working-class formation that would inform the relations of the state, labour and capital for decades. This period saw the emergence


\textsuperscript{110} Ostry, “Labour in the 1870s,” 125.
in the labour press of a sound comprehension, and subsequent critique, of productive relationships. As one correspondent in the *Ontario Workman* declared, “I do not care whether it calls itself trade union, Crispin, international or Commune; anything that unites labor in order that they may put up a united front to face the organization of capital – anything that does that, I say, honour to it!”¹¹¹ This sentiment would ultimately find fuller expression in more expansive labour organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the Provincial Workmen’s Association (PWA) in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Manufacturing groups and business organizations also learned important lessons in the labour issues of the 1870s and, in conjunction with the state, ran an effective campaign against union organization. For example, the *Toronto Mail* made employees sign an agreement which stated: “I will not belong to the Typographical Union, Knights of Labor, or any trade organization whatsoever, so long as I am employed in said office.”¹¹² Of course, labour had learned important lessons as well, particularly about the effectiveness of the strike against rising costs of living, monopolies and business combinations.

Labour organizations were very active in the 1880s. The decade’s frequent strikes added a heightened tension to the conflict of labour and capital. Strikes occurred in all the provinces visited by the Labour Commission: in Nova Scotia there were coal miner strikes in Sydney and Stellarton; painters and bakers went on strike in Halifax. New Brunswick raftsmen and printers stopped work in Saint John. In Montreal strikes were

¹¹¹ *Ontario Workman*, January 2, 1873.
frequent, involving shoe lasters, stove workers, cigar makers, cotton workers, printers, railway workers and ship labourers. In Quebec City there was a printers’ strike; in St. Hyacinthe textile workers did the same. In Ontario, furniture workers went on strike in Chatham; moulders, stove mounters and telegraphers struck in Hamilton; streetcar workers, female shoe operators, freight labourers and building trades workers in Toronto; workers at the Canadian Locomotive Works in Kingston; and textile workers in Cornwall all did the same. As Bryan Palmer remarks of the 1880s, “some 425 known strikes occurred, 1883 and 1886 being the highwater marks of confrontation. Ten cities accounted for 73% of these struggles, with Toronto replacing Montreal as the capital of conflict: 122 of the 425 strikes of the 1880s, or 29%, took place in the Queen city.”

Craft workers led most of the strikes (61%), and unskilled labourers and operatives — their numbers swollen by the women and children newly involved in factory labour — were involved in 39% of battles in the decade. “In a brief ten years,” Palmer remarks, “the number of strikes across the country almost doubled and the number of unions increased almost five times.”

An indication of the formation of the working class in the 1880s was the establishment of large unions. The Knights showed the most impressive rise in membership in the decade. Kealey and Palmer attribute much significance to the growth of the Knights and the formation of the working class: “there has been no moment in the experience of North American labor that weighed so heavily on the collective mind of

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the working-class movement in the years 1900-30 as that of the Knights of Labor
upsurge in the 1880s.” 115 What makes the Knights such an interesting study is the fact
that they allowed membership for the unskilled when most unions were still oriented
around a particular skill. 116 Founded in the United States, the Knights did not have much
presence in the Maritimes. Their impact in Ontario and Quebec was much more
significant. The Knights were strongest in urban centers like Hamilton and Toronto
which boasted -- in the peak year of membership, 1886 -- 2,200 and 5,000 members
respectively. In Montreal, the Knights enjoyed a membership of about 2,500 in 1887. The
most impressive numbers came from smaller towns where the Knights fared very well:
of the almost fifty towns with a population of at least 3,000 in Ontario, thirty eight (81%)
had a local assembly. As Kealey and Palmer state, “between 10 and 80 percent of all
workers in particular cities and towns … became Knights of Labor.” 117 In Quebec the
Order made rapid progress, “partly perhaps because the organization changed its ritual
and procedure in response to objections from Roman Catholic authorities.” 118 As Kealey
and Palmer remark, “[t]he rise of the Order was intimately related to the economic and
political developments of the period; it was an implicit component of that
‘manufacturing condition’ that came into prominence in the late nineteenth century

115 Admittedly, the growth of the Knights of Labor throughout North America was very
impressive. However, this statement is rather ambitious as the Knights did not necessarily
influence Canadian workers in the Maritimes or in all regions of the United States. See Kealey
and Palmer, Dreaming of What Might Be, 3.
116 The PWA also allowed women in their organization but their numbers were small and
confined to particular ‘spheres.’
117 Kealey and Palmer, Dreaming of What Might Be, 90-1.
118 Ibid., 34.
...”

The Labour Commission would feature Knights as commissioners and hear many more as witnesses.

In the Maritimes, the Provincial Workmen’s Association (PWA) gained the support of many mine workers. The PWA, established in 1879, has been described as both an industrial and a general union. That glass blowers, iron workers and boot and shoe workers were, briefly, part of the organization suggests a general orientation to the PWA. Yet, because the PWA was headed by miners largely oriented to mining issues, the union had a sporadic and limited impact on other industries. While historians disagree on the power dynamics of the PWA, it is clear that the organization played a significant role for Nova Scotia workers: in 1884 it had 1,860 members in good standing; in 1888 3,000 men claimed some connection to the PWA; while in 1895 there were 16 lodges with 1,416 members in good standing. The most impressive expansion of the PWA’s membership in the nineteenth century came in the early 1880s when seven lodges on mainland Nova Scotia were joined by nine lodges in Cape Breton. The PWA was a successful organization for miners who used the organization to achieve their demands: “Westville in 1881 had a strike (small and successful) and a lockout. Stellarton

119 Ibid., 18.

120 A number of strikes were lost by ‘other’ trades in the PWA. For example, a 1904 steel workers strike failed because, according to some accounts, of the ineffectiveness of the association. See also Eugene Forsey, Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto, 1982), 347. It should be noted that almost all steel strikes in this period failed—the PWA was unusual not in its lack of success, but in having ventured to organize a steel mill so early.

121 Harold Logan argues that the PWA was a “conservative organization” run by the Grand Master. See Harold Logan, Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto, 1948). Ian McKay, on the other hand, argues that the Association was not necessarily a centrally run conservative organization. First of all the organization was radical in its goal of achieving “working-class political independence.” Also, according to McKay, members were more informed by local lodges than by their central body. See Ian McKay, “By Wisdom, Wile or War,” 13-62.

122 Logan, Trade Unions in Canada, 170.
in 1882 struck for a 12.5 percent increase, and got it. Spring Hill and three Pictou County collieries got increases in 1882 without striking.”

The 1890 Springhill strike is most acknowledged by historians because of its extensive effects: Church officials, trade unionists and the Orange Lodge gave financial assistance. As Ian McKay states, “[o]ne explanation of this outpouring of public sympathy was the skill with which the lodge used management’s unwillingness to submit the case to arbitration.”

The more impressive achievements of the PWA can be found in its effectiveness in extracting legislation from the provincial government for mine workers: in particular, compulsory arbitration, laws pertaining to mine inspections with workingmen committees, extending provincial suffrage, and establishing schools for instruction.

By 1896, the Grand Council of the Association drafted a resolution honoring Premier W.S. Fielding, thanking him (in the name of the PWA) for the many services rendered the workingmen of Nova Scotia during his premiership. Ultimately, both the Knights and the PWA worked with church, municipal, provincial and federal authorities to advance the cause of Canadian workers.

Besides strikes and agitations, political campaigns loomed large for organized workers. As mentioned, the 1870s began with the Conservative Party as the patron of organized labour. Yet, as the decade proceeded, labour became more and more interested in the Liberals. By the end of the decade the CLU was thanking Edward Blake, a Liberal, for his efforts in the legislative advancement of the movement. In the

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123 Forsey, Trade Unions in Canada, 351.
125 As we shall see, the state also became the sounding board for middle-class social reformers who often used legislation to achieve their goals.
1880s, political involvement seemed inevitable for the ostensibly non-partisan trade union movement. Ostry explains the situation:

On the one hand, Canadian trade unionists agreed not to seek solutions to their problems either by attempting to assume political power themselves or by trying to influence national policy through an open alliance with one of the two major parties. And on the other, the working man was obliged to support a programme directed to limiting the effects of competition in a free enterprise economy at a time when the federal government was intimately involved in completing grand schemes of economic expansion. The trade unions’ demands for improved working conditions for all Canadian workmen could only be made effective by federal legislation; and such legislation was impossible without political pressure from labour itself.126

Organized labour focused its legislative campaign on the federal and provincial governments. Activists promoted an impressive array of far-reaching reforms: the employers’ liability act, amendments to the mechanics’ lien acts, compulsory education, apprenticeship legislation, arbitration boards and the establishment of a bureau of labour statistics. Of course, recognition of their political rights, shorter working days, equal pay for both sexes, expansion of the franchise and graduated taxes were also important concerns for many of Canada’s working people. Ostry also claims that “at the time of the 1886-7 elections [and the formation of the Labour Commission] the most persistent and vocal efforts seemed to have centred around the demand for a comprehensive and strictly enforced factory act and for an end to Chinese and all assisted or pauper immigration.”127

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126 Ostry, “Labour in the 1880s,” 156.
127 Ibid., 143.
Direct political action rose throughout the 1880s as prominent labour figures ran for office on the municipal, provincial and federal level. It became increasingly clear that supporting candidates from the traditional parties in the hopes that the concerns of labour would be addressed was a dead end. As the Palladium of Labor stated in 1884, “where is the advantage to the labouring class of electing a workingman on a Tory or Grit platform? ... It would accomplish no good to elect a workingman pledged to a servile acceptance of the policy of the party leaders.”\textsuperscript{128} In the same year, the Toronto Trades and Labor Congress (TTLC) put their full weight behind reform candidate W.H. Howland for the mayoral race in Toronto with great success. The Toronto News claimed on Howland’s victory that, “[t]his is the first step. Monday’s victory is chiefly useful as showing what can and will be done in the future.”\textsuperscript{129} Kealey and Palmer state that labour’s support of Howland, whose majorities were in the largely working-class districts of St. John’s and St. Patrick’s, accounted for almost half of his majority win.

Similar political action was taking place in other parts of the country. A Woodstock, Ontario Knight wrote Macdonald in 1885 stating he was a Conservative supporter but, “I am also a Knight of Labor and they are getting very numerous and want that we lay aside all politics and work as one man for the man that does what is in the interest of the workingman and mechanic if he is a [Conservative] or [Reformer] that makes no difference to us. We will work for the party that works for us.”\textsuperscript{130} This Knight’s notion of an “us” is indicative of the social divisions that accompanied labour organization,

\textsuperscript{128} Hamilton Palladium of Labor, August 22, 1885.
\textsuperscript{129} News, January 5-6, 1886.
\textsuperscript{130} JAM, LAC, “A Knight of Labor” to Macdonald, February 1, 1886, 205406.
indeed the formation of the working class. They provided the basis for the development of more abstract categories like labour and capital.

A federal factory act, earnestly fought for, remained frustratingly beyond reach. Many forces stood in its way. The first challenge was constitutional and jurisdictional. Even if federal labour legislation had been tabled, it is not likely that the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) would have confirmed its legality.\textsuperscript{131} Provincial governments, particularly those of Ontario and Quebec, had already been actively working on labour legislation in the years preceding the Commission that surely would have affected the contents and jurisdictional authority of any federal Act. The second challenge was the inability of labour to speak with a unified voice. Craft unions and the Knights, for example, differed in their stance on effective political action — the first preferring bargaining with employers, the second favouring a program that included independent political action. The labour movement was politically ineffective. By the end of the 1880s these problems had been addressed, at least to a point, when the TLC and the Knights established annual meetings. This meant that trade unionists could solicit the community instead of a small group of skilled workers. Also, negotiations were carried out between farmers and industrial workers in an effort to unite for

\textsuperscript{131} The JCPC would, in general, only bestow powers over labour to the federal government in cases of emergency or during strikes (the 1907 Industrial Disputes Investigation Act was an example of this arrangement). Labour disputes would, otherwise, be considered a contract issue and under the purview of provincial responsibilities. For an excellent discussion on the ideological implications in sections 91-93 of the British North American Act in this context see Bryce Weber, “The Public, the Private and the Ideological Character of the Division of Powers in Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act of 1867,” \textit{Journal of Canadian Studies} 26, 2 (Summer, 1991), 88-103.
common political action. Unfortunately, the Knights and the PWA did not enter into these kinds of relationships.

Trade unions also began to concentrate their criticisms on specific matters such as immigration and convict labour. PWA militants, for example, frequently addressed these federal issues but their activities and advances usually remained with the provincial government with which they had a record of success. Also, because of jurisdictional uncertainty, it was not altogether clear where labour should vest its energies. As Bernard Ostry notes, “in 1899, the [TLC] recognized the triumph of the provinces over the Dominion in the constitutional struggle between Mowat and Macdonald by electing an executive committee made up of three representatives from Ontario and three from Quebec, the president of the Congress taking the chair. If labour had come to terms with the economic and political system of the country, it had also acquired the basic equipment for future struggles.” The situation by then had clarified, whereas in the 1880s at the time of the Commission it was more uncertain.

Nonetheless, it seemed to many that the ‘legality’ of organization and unionism seemingly fell within the provincial jurisdiction of common-law doctrines of property and contract, as seen in the Toronto Printers’ Strike of 1872. These established a broad framework within which productive relations were organized but, as Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker point out, “employers infrequently resorted to legal institutions to deal with workers’ collective action at the workplace and legal regimes designed specifically to

deal with labour unrest were the exception rather than the rule.” ¹³³ In turn, they continue, the labour market was governed by a doctrine of ‘liberal voluntarism’ which privileged individual contracts largely reflective of the free labour market.¹³⁴ Workers were legally able to combine with others to advance their common interests but employers were, for their part, free to contract only workers who were not part of a combination. In short, they could refuse to hire union members and could fire those who signed union cards. Moreover, the criminal law narrowly confined the scope of permissible tactics open to workers trying to advance their collective interests. Workers enjoyed some rights. Yet “[s]tate enforcement of these rights was highly imperfect …. While some efforts were being made to enhance the state’s capacity to conciliate disputes, there was little willingness to compel employers or workers to participate in these schemes, and the administrative capacity of the state to intervene remained weak.”¹³⁵

The legislative advances that did meet with success were those that addressed hazardous conditions in mines and factories and aspects of the employment of women and children. For example, the 1873 Nova Scotia Mines Act imposed age restrictions whereby boys under ten could not work in mines, women were prohibited from working in mines, and the hours of work for boys under sixteen was limited to sixty a

¹³⁵ Fudge and Tucker, Labour Before the Law, 2.
Similarly, the Ontario Factory Act made it unlawful to employ a boy under the age of twelve and a girl under the age of fourteen; a certificate attesting to a child employee’s age was required for boys between twelve and fourteen and the parents of the child were held liable if their working children did not comply. A maximum sixty-hour week was established for children, young girls and women. Furthermore, employers were required by legislation to keep their factories safe and inspectors were appointed to undertake the enforcement of the Act. Such provincial legislation was only modestly successful.

The rapid establishment of unions and the involvement of workingmen in federal and provincial politics took place in tandem with growing levels of labour conflict. Many in the Knights and the PWA argued for the common interests of labour and capital. Some historians attributed the fall of the Knights to their philosophy of working with employers to achieve gains for labour. As Caroll D. Wright famously observed with respect to the Knights: “[the order] stands today as an organization representing the opposite of the trades-union, and is heading all of its energies to preserve the broad principle of harmonious interworking of all interests, as against the trades-union idea, which comes closer to human nature, of the preservation of individual interests. Which idea will survive and become the leading fundamental element of the future labor organizations is the problem.” Others had little uncertainty which direction was the correct one. As W. Stanley Jevons stated in 1887, “the present

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doctrine is that the workingman’s interests are linked to those of other workmen, and the employer’s interests to those of other employers. Eventually it will be seen that industrial divisions should be perpendicular, not horizontal. The workingman’s interests should be bound up with those of his employer, and should be pitted in fair competition against those of other workingmen and employers.”

Victor Chan’s study of the Knights in Canada highlighted precisely this tension between class conflict and class conciliation:

The Knights tried to satisfy too many social classes that necessarily conflicted with one another. In this feature lay their decisive weakness: it arose from the economic and social conditions of the time when classes were still fluid, when small-scale industry was still predominant, when even the wage system was still “comparatively new;” when, consequently, social antagonisms were not clear cut and the interests of the farmer, the small employer and the wage laborer were held to be more or less identical.

Failing to pay due heed to the complexity of social currents and tendencies in the 1880s, and reading back into them fixed-and-firm class identities that were characteristic of later periods, means running a substantial risk of ahistoricism. With respect to the interpretation of the Knights, and of the Labour Commission, it can lead to a “default interpretation” in which the workers are always (consciously or otherwise) pursuing a class-conflict agenda — or should have been, had they been aware of ‘their interests.’ This thesis argues that the evidence of the Commission sustains a much more complicated and subtle sense of how people, whose ‘interests’ were invariably complex

139 W. Stanley Jevons, _The State in Relation to Labour_, 145.
Manufacturers and other businessmen were also organizing throughout this period. As R.T. Naylor observes, business interests in this period were “powerfully assisted by government policy, both by its presence in the form of high and rising tariffs and by its absence in the lack of enforceable combines legislation.” Naylor goes on to state that business combines, often under the auspices of the Canadian Manufacturers Association (CMA), started with the purpose of tariff lobbying and then naturally moved into an association for normalizing credit offered to customers and to price fixing. The iron and steel industry saw the organization of the Canadian Iron Founders’ Association soon after Confederation. By 1888 there were 18 members from Ontario and Quebec in the Association, with at least 40 outside. Another example of capitalist organization was the Dominion Grocers Guild which began in Toronto and Hamilton (while a similar organization began in Montreal one year later). By 1887 this organization had 95% of the wholesale grocers in Ontario and Quebec under its control and had negotiated with sugar refiners to discriminate in favor of guild members. It was another indication of a growing, if still loose, consolidation of capital.

For many historians, employer interests and organizations as well as labour organization through formal trade union activity have been understood with reference to the formation of the working class. In particular, the ‘Thompsonian’ school of working-class formation proposed that the collective experience of many workers was

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central to the formation of social classes.\textsuperscript{142} In \textit{A Culture in Conflict}, Bryan Palmer addresses the organization of workers in Hamilton and the development of working-class thought throughout the latter nineteenth century. As Palmer remarks, “if there is a central concern of this study it is with the way in which working class culture sustains a persistent protest against industrial-capitalist disciplines and development, enriching the process of class conflict, bringing workers and employers into battle with one another, despite the apparent inevitability of working class defeat.”\textsuperscript{143} An attempt to incorporate a more wide-ranging discussion into the existence of class was undertaken by Palmer and Kealey in \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, a study of the Knights of Labor in Ontario. Kealey and Palmer discovered that the Knights helped construct a culture based not only on examples of class confrontation but also upon understandings of negotiation, harmony and a more egalitarian social order. As they remark:

In the expanding economic context of the 1880s Ontario workers made strides toward unifying their lives as productive men and women and their lives as citizens, family members, neighbors, and advocates of change. A whole series of cultural expressions thus linked up with a class content, and the fragmented and sectional concerns gave way to broader demands that encompassed fundamental challenges to the established order of capitalist society. In whatever area one wants to consider - economic, social, political, cultural – the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor voiced the need to go beyond the existing social relations of production.\textsuperscript{144}

In the 1880s, Kealey and Palmer argue, the lines between labour and capital were rather sharply drawn. For many “Thompsonian” working-class historians, a “persistent protest

\textsuperscript{142} This approach to understanding the working class has received (and deserved) much historical attention. Of his many works addressing the formation of the working class, the one that requires mention is Edward Thompson, \textit{The Making of the English Working Class} (London, 1963).

\textsuperscript{143} Palmer, \textit{Culture in Conflict}, xi.

\textsuperscript{144} Kealey and Palmer, \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, 55-56.
against capitalist discipline” was the basis for an expansive process of experience-based class consciousness. In other words, changing productive relationships promoted a notion of class that framed the entire culture of workers in this period. However, it must be realized that there were understandings of respectability, morality and worth amongst many classes that were not inherently conflictual.145 Moreover, contrary to much in the Thompsonian school, the productive relationships themselves were extremely variegated and complex. If some crafts were extinguished through the logic of capitalist development, as the proletarianization model predicted, many others flourished. The nineteenth-century social world of Canadian capitalism was immensely heterogeneous, and only under protest can it be shoe-horned into a rigid two-class model.

Class analysis has undergone a significant change since the heyday of the Thompsonian school in the 1970s. In much contemporary historical scholarship, class is treated gingerly, if not set aside altogether.146 For those scholars still interested in pursuing the theme of class, one of the most significant new developments has been a

145 Bryan Palmer address the problematic of class harmony in Culture of Conflict via the concept of the producer ideology. This entailed a perspective on productive relationships that saw workers, farmers and small manufacturers bound together as “producers.” Palmer points out that, because of changing relations of production, the growth of urban manufacturing populations, the rise of large-scale factories and the introduction of the machine, Canadians were increasingly divided along the lines of class. Envisioning harmony in these conditions was, ultimately, futile: “Class conflict, we shall see, would prove an acid test that the producer ideology’s manufacturer-mechanic alliance simply could not pass and, abandoned by its social betters, the working class would take the first agonizing steps toward defining its own solutions to the problems posed by industrial capitalism.” See Palmer, Culture in Conflict, 99.

146 The list of recent monographs addressing class in Canadian historiography is rather thin. Very little has emerged in Canadian scholarship in the decade exclusively addressing class formation in the Thompsonian sense. Two that come to mind are Christina Burr, Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth Century Toronto (Toronto, 1999) and David Bright, The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929 (Vancouver, 1998).
close attention to the “middle class.” The Thompsonian mode of class analysis, with its bias toward a “scientific” definition of class based on Marxian economics, has been challenged by alternative notions of culture, gender and ethnicity. As Brian Lewis notes, a similar phenomenon is occurring internationally:

> [t]he stress now is on the fragmented nature of human experience and on differences – of ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, region – as opposed to lumping into broad classes. Class has no particular explanatory priority in social and historical analysis, but is simply one of plurality of oppressions, each rooted in a different form of domination – sexual, racial, national or economic.\(^{147}\)

The word class was used rather extensively by Victorian Canadians suggesting that, like labour and capital, it inherently contained broad social understandings.\(^{148}\) Its existence, even prominence in late Victorian discourse not only warrants bringing class formation back into the foreground of historiographical debate, it also acknowledges how cultural understandings and beliefs permeated the language of labour and capital in this period. Lewis’s work on the middle class in England addresses this issue quite succinctly and is worth quoting at length:

> Class was a linguistic construct that had to be thought, talked, and propagated. It was thus vulnerable both to alternative discourses that might present themselves as superior ways of explaining the numbingly complicated reality that makes up an individual’s existence, and to discursive reconstructions and remodelings of its own internal coherence. This helps move us away from the depiction of a mature class society riding the crest of an industrial revolution and somehow establishing

\(^{147}\) Brian Lewis, *The Middlemost and the Milltowns: Bourgeois Culture and Politics in Early Industrial England* (Stanford, 2001), 5. This may also explain the relative absence of work on the middle class in Canada to date.

\(^{148}\) In the Commission “class” was also used to describe such sentiments as value, worth and quality (eg. the class of goods or class of worker).
itself as a permanent fixture on the beach, and makes us confront the fluidity of the contested language of self-description.\textsuperscript{149}

The plurality that Lewis acknowledges in the concept of class provides a theoretical framework similar to that forwarded in this thesis:

The model I am suggesting diverts our gaze from class consciousness and onto the longer-term civic and institutional framework wrought by the interplay of capitalist and state-building forces. It argues for the (always imperfect) consolidation – through consensus and conflict – of a diversity of political and socioeconomic fractions and discourses behind the “common sense” of liberal capitalism, rather than the imposition of the ideas of one class over another.\textsuperscript{150}

Workers and businessmen undoubtedly pursued different objectives, yet the new approach disallows a strategy of ‘class essentialism,’ in which such objectives can be read off from the objective data of class experience. Rather, the economic processes of nineteenth-century capitalism generated a dynamic language of class, within which forces perpetually constructed and reconstructed themselves, in relationship to each other.

Understanding the relation between (middle and working) class formation and the state is essential to understanding how political structures — such as the royal commission — utilized cultural models to achieve economic and social stability. The Labour Commission has been used extensively as a source revealing the formation of the working class. It has never before now been used as a means to understand the formation of the middle class. In essence, this thesis treats the Labour Commission as a

\textsuperscript{149} Brian Lewis, \textit{The Middlemost and the Milltowns}, 5.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
forum in which class ideas were developed, in ways that often conflicted with any neat binary between ‘capital’ and ‘labour.’ Dividing witnesses into what could be called ‘the working class’ or ‘the ruling class’ -- labour or capital -- does not necessarily do justice to the different backgrounds of many witnesses and the circumstances that brought them before the Commission. Whether a witness saved money, owned property, worked consistently or was married (to name a few variables) could all affect how they were ‘classed’ within the Commission’s ‘language of class.’

This language of class did refer to actual differences among people based upon their roles in the economy. When witnesses discussed their lives before the Commission, they did provide verifiable nuggets of information based on empirical economic realities. Poor workers and wealthy factory owners not only appeared before the Commission but undoubtedly expressed different views of the social and political world. Yet the ‘play of class’ cannot be reduced to such extra-linguistic realities, nor did they eventuate in only two class positions. One worker and another might be very differently classed, even if they both ‘objectively’ filled much the same functions in the capitalist system, depending on their respective attainments of respectability, expertise, and morality. “Capital” and “labour” were never constructed within the Commission as pure essences; they were always intertwined with a diversity of other signifiers.

It is difficult to determine, with accuracy, the extent and membership of the middle class. Like labour and capital, the middle class was not a homogeneous category. Even using occupation and social status is not adequate in defining the ‘middling:’ foremen, managers, brain workers and skilled workers who ran their own businesses
were treated differently by the Commission. Some were perceived to be ‘labour’ and some were ‘capital.’ Indeed, some of the commissioners themselves fell into this “middling” category based on their occupations and social status. What much of the literature reads as a “binary division” seemingly warranted by the Commission’s very title, is here rendered as a much more complex process of class construction. For example, many working-class men appeared before the Commission as ‘experts’ of their own lives and the lives of their communities; they were able to distinguish themselves from other workers, spoke with a sense of authority, and were deferred to by the Commissioners. Conversely, some middle-class men appeared before the Commission as ‘failed experts,’ and came to be treated as men without authority. Some ‘workers’ in the traditional crafts owned their own means of production, employed other workers, and derived some of their income from renting property to them. It is this vast array of ‘liminal’ people, between the worker with no property but her labour-power and the employer living strictly off the labour of others, that the term ‘middle class,’ however controversially, strives to describe.

As we shall see, the Labour Commission’s selection of witnesses was not haphazard. Many who testified were prominent members of their respective communities and were chosen not only for their political affiliation, but also for their expertise and experience in industrial matters. Other witnesses appeared before the

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151 Some of the carpenters who testified in Halifax fit this mould. Many craft unions, for example, included small employers among the skilled workers suggesting that, in many instances, the line between journeyman and master, employee and employer was often blurry. The economic dynamics of industrialism, urbanization, immigration and regulatory legislation and the relation to penny capitalists or small self-employed producers are the subjects of John Benson, Entrepreneurism in Canada: A History of Penny Capitalists (Lewiston, 1998).
Commission as ‘exhibits’ of industrialization, such as the ‘self-made men’ who thrived in industries protected by the tariff. On the other hand, there were sharp distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor. Adherence to broadly-defined criteria of respectability, morality and experience mediated the treatment of a given witness before the Commission and largely determined how his or her words were received. These cultural criteria not only formed the basis of a witness’s expertise, but are central to understanding the Commission as a vehicle of state formation.

Working-class historians have long suggested an intimate relationship between the state and the middle class. However, this relationship has been rather one-dimensional in the context of the relations between employers and employed. In summary, this relationship suggests that the middle class effectively “used” the state to legitimize its commercial interests in opposition to the welfare of other segments of society. For example, Michael Bliss notes of the 1880s that “[m]ore than in any succeeding period, governments were generally friendly to private enterprise, combining generous subsidies with a minimum of social control of business and hedging the Canadian market with substantial protective tariffs.” As Greg Kealey argues, “by 1879 Canadian industrial capitalists had come to dominate the state and

152 The terms ‘Labour’ and ‘Capital’ almost support this one-dimensional reading of class relations with their emphasis on opposition, oppression and domination. But, with all the extensive work that has gone into the working class, it has never been clear to me who exactly was “Capital.” Maintaining a position that, at its core, class is based upon the relation to the means of production does not necessarily oblige one to accept the position that the classes so organized are inherently in a conflictual relationship with each other. It occurs to me upon reading the Labour Commission that social transformations were largely based on mutual understandings and consent.

were able to dictate their self-interested policies in the name of the common good.”

Other writers have argued for a more ideologically-driven synthesis of the state itself: “the commonly held view, presented by the state and by capitalist ideology, is that the state acts simply as a sounding board of all interests in society and that all citizens are responded to equally.” While these analytical perspectives are insightful, the relationship between the state and the middle class needs to be further investigated because of the fundamental paradox these writers have uncovered: “the paradox of the state in capitalist society is that it must strive to maintain its legitimacy and with that the legitimacy of capital by portraying itself as representing the common will of its citizens, while at the same time upholding the right of some to extract the surplus created by others.” And this relation is even more complex than this citation suggests. Care should be taken not to equate the state and capital as two identical entities vying for the same goals.

Scholarship on the middle class is burgeoning in Britain and the United States. The common thread that runs through the literature on the middle class is the focus

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154 Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 16. Of course, asserting that the state was “dominated” may appear strong. Suffice it to say there was much collaboration between the two.
upon occupation and wealth and its relations to other social activities such as social harmony, reform activities, and nation-building. Canadian scholarship on the middle class similarly walks this line. For example, David Burley’s *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario* investigates that town’s self-employed businessmen. He shows how industrialization brought about a decline in self-employment and a restructuring of traditional concepts of wealth, credit and debt, and success and failure. Burley argues self-employment was a measure of a man’s success within the realm of Victorian values; industrialization forced such self-employed businessmen to try and locate themselves in an emerging class system that often contradicted traditional ideals of independence and manliness.\(^{158}\) In *A Sense of Their Duty*, Andrew Holman investigates two small Ontario towns — Galt and Goderich — and uncovers a well-integrated and identifiable group of businessmen, professionals, manufacturers and artisans as well as other white collar workers who became aware of themselves as a distinct stratum of society not only through their occupations but also through their volunteerism and beliefs on moral order.\(^{159}\) For Holman, the industrialized


\(^{159}\) Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal and Kingston, 2000). Palmer reviewed Holman’s work on the middle class rather critically claiming that the latter’s conception of class was not rigorous enough: “if we want to study the ostensibly happy and the supposedly hopeful let us have some rigour that reaches beyond collapsing everything into a rather elastic container, bulging always at the expansive middle.” See Bryan Palmer, “A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns – Review,” *Journal of Social History* 35, 3 (2002), 715-717. However, the ‘container’ to which Palmer refers bulges, in part, because of the little work that has gone into determining exactly who was capital. Palmer’s use of the word “container” is indicative of the rigid categorization that has gone into determining “working class” in opposition to other classes. Surely determining who was middle class requires another methodology. Of course, rigour must be exercised in
workplace and attitudes towards different types of work provided the basis for middle-class development. For example, Holman argues that during the 1850s and 1860s “all kinds of work were equally laudatory and moral;” by the 1870s a new perspective was forming that “drew perceptible lines between manual and non-manual labour.”\textsuperscript{160}

Having defined (and secured) themselves in their respective communities by virtue of workplace roles, the middle class began to broadcast their views on social morality, social responsibility and self-improvement through voluntary organizations and fraternal orders such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). According to Holman, these organizations were powerful forces effecting broad social changes. Social problems, particularly temperance, served to unite the interests of this class as it formed a unified, collective response to protect families and individuals. However, privileging occupation as the precondition for identifying this ‘middling’ group echoes a mode of class analysis similar to that which was proposed by E.P. Thompson.\textsuperscript{161}

For the most part, the history of the development of the middle class in Canada has usually been understood through the surge in social morality campaigns that occurred late in the nineteenth century. For some historians, these reform efforts testified to a broad change in social and political thought in Canada. For example, Nancy Bouchier has investigated amateur sport in this regard. She argues that “middle-

\textsuperscript{160} Holman, \textit{A Sense of Their Duty}, 22-26.

\textsuperscript{161} As mentioned, Thompson’s notion of class analysis was premised on the belief that the experience of class was the basis upon which the working class (and other classes) became aware of themselves. However, it is difficult to substantiate the proposition that occupation (like class) solely provided a social framework that mediated all other experiences. Works on the middle class suggest that other aspects of “culture” (in combination with occupation) are equally viable.
class sport reformers used lacrosse to make their vision of reality credible [which contributed] to the formation of a broader Canadian culture which would buttress their image as natural social leaders.”

Other writers such as Cecilia Morgan have investigated popular “sentimental” narratives (in newspapers and other print media) and discern the lineages of middle-class formation in the context of paternalistic reform movements: “[t]he rescue of workers, Native peoples, the sexually ‘deviant’ and unbelievers whose presence was so often necessary to sentimental narratives were also crucial in the formation of middle-class identity; so too was a tendency to deny the power relations that framed encounters between them and Anglo-Canadian bourgeois men and women.”

Robert Lanning’s discussion of collective biographies argues that these works were portraits of successful Canadians and represented the “embodiment of the normative values of Canadian culture that should be sought, internalized and expressed by persons of all classes.”

The question must then be asked: who was the middle class? Of course, answering such a question poses more problems than it solves. The suggestion that a group of Canadians identified themselves consciously and publicly as a class with any measure of consistency in this period is difficult to substantiate. However, in Imagining the Middle Class, Dror Wahrman follows how the term middle-class (or middle rank, 

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165 The term middle class is mentioned once in the Commission. On the other hand groups such as workingmen or workers were frequently evoked.
station, order) was used and how it changed over time. Wahrman’s survey of pamphlets, newspapers and other print associates a range of attributes within this imagined category. Political circumstances and periods of radical politics were central, he finds, to how the middle class described itself. Yet, many historical works that address the middle class in Canada lack the theoretical rigour that working-class historians applied to their work. It must be acknowledged that ‘the middle class’ and ‘the working class’ are theoretical categories, not homogeneous agents. Their meanings are historically contingent upon time and space, culture, material life and language.

Similarly, the categories of ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ encompassed understandings derived from both the pre-industrial and industrial periods — from artisan workshops and master and apprentice relationships as counterpoised with factory discipline, child labour and impersonal working conditions of the modern era. Put differently, the

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166 Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, 1780-1840* (New York, 1995).

167 Brian Lewis points out that “[t]he considerable growth in the number of studies of the middle classes in the past few years – an attempt to correct the depiction of the faceless bourgeoisie or propertied ranks seen in the great foundational histories fixated on working class formation and lower-class radicalism – is, implicitly or explicitly, a recognition (and in turn a demonstration) that none of these interpretations make sense without a detailed examination of the middle-class role.” See Lewis, *The Middlemost and the Milltowns*, 4.

168 Many historians are questioning conventional categories like “the state,” “labour” and “capital.” These authors view such language as misleading in terms of the intricacies of social power/knowledge dynamics. See Keith Jenkins, *The Postmodern History Reader* (London, 1997); Joyce Appleby, Lynne Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York, 1994).

169 Some theorists see texts as being “intertextual” where they derive meaning in an extensive set of processes that embody complex social relationships. For example, the notion of an apprentice was derivative of a specific pedagogical relation between and employer and an employee. With the onset of factory production, the word apprentice was still actively used to describe the relations of employer and employee but with very different meaning. Thus, using the word to describe productive relationships is intertextual in that it invokes meanings from the past, present and future replete with their inherent power relations and paternal attitudes. For an influential work on this subject see M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Texas, 1981).
answer to a seemingly factual question — “what was it like to be middle class?” — could contain empirically verifiable nuggets of information but it may also be an attempt to construct a certain ‘narrative,’ to put forward a construction of the past, present and future which sustains one’s own sense of self and other in the face of a provocative question. It is clear that, like the working class, a middle class also formed in the late nineteenth century because of the cultural, economic and political dynamics of industrialization. In particular, this middling group appeared because of a particular set of values, a patchwork of ideologies and identities. Understanding the assumptions behind this patchwork is one of the main purposes of this work.

Identifying a group that referred to itself as the middle class in this period has eluded historians. However, attention to social reform movements have provided one means to address the formation of a group that could be considered the middle class. Social reform was intricately tied to the changing political, economic and social environment of the 1880s. For Ramsay Cook and Mariana Valverde, social movements were designed by professionals, charity workers and other members of the bourgeoisie to address the evils of the factory system. As Valverde argues, “industry was seen as needing some form of regulation not because of any contradictions within the economic system itself but rather because extreme exploitation was defined as a social problem, involving the creation of paupers, the breakdown of the family, and a general crisis in

Concerning the relation of language and power in this vein, Norman Fairclough discusses the notion of “enterprise discourse” where the meaning of words have ‘meaning potential’ and can be utilized by elites toward maintaining social power structures through such acts as political speeches. See Norman Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, 112-129.
the cohesion of the social formation.”

A similar reading is evident in Richard Allen’s work on the Social Gospel Movement: “Christian social thought and action which arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century [occurred] in the context of a society becoming increasingly collectivized under the impulses of industrialism and urbanism.” For these authors, “social” movements, class conflict and the factory system were indicative of the economic and political turbulence of late-Victorian Canada.

Contemporary social reform movements in late-Victorian Canada were influenced by religion, class and race. Some social reformers were looking for individual salvation; others were inspired by a notion of collectivized well-being. ‘Scientific’ notions of survival of the fittest and Christian nurture, predestination and individual salvation, revivalism and social gospel changed the way people viewed society, particularly the poor. Furthermore, international literature played a significant part in social reform efforts that were directed toward helping the working class: Henry George’s views on land reform in Progress and Poverty (1880) were a sensation in Britain, the United States and Canada; in 1884 Laurence Gronlund wrote a Marxist critique of industrial capitalism in The Cooperative Commonwealth; Phillips Thompson’s critique of the American political economic system in The Politics of Labor appeared in 1887; and finally, in 1888 Edward Bellamy’s view of a socialist utopia in Looking Backward drew

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170 Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap and Water (Toronto, 1991), 20. This view, in part, may explain why the Commission is hailed as a pinnacle of “Social Progress” in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull.

much attention in industrialized countries. Given such diverse influences, attributing the rise of social reform to a single cause in this period is difficult. Richard Allen states, “the resolution of religious and intellectual problems on one hand, and social and economic problems on the other was proceeding at one and the same time; the one did not give rise to the other, related though they were, and intertwined as they were to become.”

Religion has, and continues to have, an important place among Canadians and has to be addressed in any investigation into social movements in the late nineteenth century. To be “middle-class” was in some fashion also to be a “believer.” Yet the relationship between class and religion was fluid and ambiguous. In the late Victorian period, most people in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were part of the Protestant church (although in all three provinces there were many Catholics.) Conflict between these two dominant faiths was frequent. The Red River rebellion, particularly the execution of Louis Riel, sparked much controversy on the question of religion. In spite of the hostility of the church toward Riel, many in Quebec saw him as a patriot who had sought to defend the rights of a French Catholic population and who was now to be punished not for his offences, but for his faith and his race. Linteau et al. note that the separation of provincial and federal jurisdictions in the British North America Act allowed for denominational divisions; “[t]he areas placed under provincial jurisdiction were to a large extent those in which the church was interested: education, public health, property and civil rights — in short, the areas which most affected people’s daily

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lives.” The English-vs.-French sentiment in provincial and federal politics had the effect of widening the Catholic community to include Acadians and Metis and, as much as possible, controlling their interests. In the period leading up to the turn of the century the main focus of the Catholic Church in Quebec rested in strengthening the clergy. Similarly, as Bernard Denault argues, religious communities were also on the rise. Yet, the policies of the Catholic Church were never uniform. Toward the end of the century the number of bishops and dioceses increased. Since the bishop of a particular diocese played an important role in determining church policy in that community, sectionalism and differences of opinion frequently occurred. For example, ultramontanism (wherein politicians would follow to the letter the doctrines of the bishop in the region they represented, effectively subordinating the state to the church), the acceptance and/or endorsement of fraternal orders such as the Knights and the construction of a Catholic university were just a few topics of large interest and discussion. The Catholic Church was also very active in the popular exhibition of

174 Linteau et al., Quebec, 198.
175 For example, the Acadian community in Chatham, New Brunswick -- where 7 of 10 Catholics were Acadian -- were looking for a bishop in the 1890s. To their dismay an English speaking Irish bishop was appointed instead of someone from their own community. See Léon Thériault, “The Acadianization of the Catholic Church in Acadia, 1763-1953,” in Jean Daigle (ed.), Acadians of the Maritimes (Moncton, 1982), 305-314.
177 Bernard Denault and Benoît Lévesque, Éléments pour une sociologie des communautés religieuses au Québec (Montréal, 1975).
worship in pilgrimages and the celebration of religious holidays. Other forms of organization were also present such as Catholic newspapers, mutual benefit and cultural societies. Many historians also note the anti-liberal stance of the Catholic Church in this period. Ignace Bourget, bishop of Montreal, was very adamant in his condemnation of liberal ideas such as those espoused by the Institut Canadien. Linteau argues, “[t]he church was able to organize its faithful, but its force of persuasion was not enough to stop the social and ideological changes that came with the development of capitalism.”

The Protestant Church was also changing its focus in this period, effecting a transition from individualist revivalism to the Social Gospel. Richard Allen argues that revivalist thought that preceded the onset of the Social Gospel movement was “intensely individualistic.” It classically maintained that social problems could be cured by harnessing individual energies and wills: “[i]t was not that they did not see a social problem, but that they saw it largely resting upon causes that lay within individuals.”

Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario were visited by American evangelists such as Dwight Moody, Sam Small, Wilbur Chapman and Reuben Torrey who held approximately 750 revival meetings in the final decades of the century attracting at least 1,500,000 Canadians. The Social Gospel movement grew out of the revivalism and:

developed under the influences which encouraged a social concept of man and underlined the social dimensions of the Gospel, so that the solutions that appeared to be most useful were those which had an essentially social character. The Social Gospel addressed the whole problem, not just individuals, not just of informal social groups, but of

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178 Linteau et al., Quebec, 204.
institutions and institutional relationships in society. Therefore, it became very deeply involved in virtually every promising reform of the time.\footnote{Allen, \textit{The Social Gospel in Canada}, 5.}

Religion, while certainly omnipresent in late Victorian reform efforts, was not a readily identifiable feature in the Commission’s discussion of the relations between labour and capital. In general, social reform movements were certainly oriented around a religious ethos inasmuch as the church offered a venue where community members could not only worship, but also meet and discuss social issues. However, the reform groups that grew out of this context were predominantly orientated toward more secular concerns or to the pragmatics of rectifying the evils of factory production (child labour, immorality and long working hours to name a few).\footnote{It should be noted that the historiography of religion in Canada is moving away from questions regarding changes in theology or the power of churches in society and is interacting with more contemporary currents such as questions of ethnicity and gender. See Elizabeth Gillian Muir and Marlyn Whitely (eds.), \textit{Changing Roles of Women Within the Christian Church in Canada} (Toronto, 1995); Denise Veillette, \textit{Femmes et Religions} (Quebec, 1995); Sharon Ann Cook, “Through Sunshine and Shadow:” the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930 (Montreal and Kingston, 1995); and P. Travis Kroeker, \textit{Christian Ethics and Political Economy in North America} (Montreal and Kingston, 1995).}

Newspapers and pamphlets, when they bring up the relation between religion and working conditions, are also brief on the topic; what is written is very close to the tone of social reform rather than theology. For example, the \textit{Montreal Gazette} printed a sermon by Reverend George Rogers near the announcement of the Commission: “the working man must be protected from dangerous influences [of private companies] by wise legislation.”\footnote{“Capital and Labor: Sermon by the Rev. Geo. Rogers in St. Lukes Church Last Evening” \textit{The Montreal Gazette}, October 18, 1886.} The \textit{Palladium of Labor} also ran a similarly-argued piece in the
months preceding the announcement of the Commission. In it, Reverend Dr. Burns claimed that “the factory with uneducated, undeveloped children, with wages that forbid wholesome food, that requires long hours so that rest comes not even when labor ceases, is a monstrosity, an insult to Christian civilization.”

Clearly the critique of industrialism behind the works of social reformers was also emanating from the pulpit. There was barely a mention of formal religion in the hearings of the Labour Commission. Of course, to expect a discussion about theology in the hearings of the Commission would seem out of place. The position of religion in the relations of labour and capital appears to have been more tacit; it was inherent in the discussion of social reform and morality campaigns rather than the relation between, say, the church and the workingmen. For example, the Archbishop of Quebec, Cardinal Taschereau, wrote letter to the Commission that was read by one of the Commissioners in Ontario. The letter consists of Taschereau’s opinions on child and female Labor, sanitary conditions in factories, arbitration and strikes: “It is necessary to provide means for the protection of morals in the factories, and outside of them, before entering and going out. It also sometimes happens that employers make an abuse of their authority, and the law ought to be severe.”

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184 “Clerical Labor Reformers,” *Palladium of Labor*, February 27, 1886.
185 See E.A. Taschereau, in GC, *RCRLC*, Ontario Evidence (1889), 368. It appears, then, that religion (if Taschereau is to represent that) was a basis of a broad moral authority in the relations of labour and capital. The community of the local church and its relation to social reform organizations was certainly prominent. Therefore, the relation between the church and the relations of labour and capital was as an inherent moral authority within the social reform movement. Of course, as the literature on social morality argues -- and as Taschereau suggests in his letter to the Commission -- the state and the law should bring about order in the chaos of industrializations based on their moral values and beliefs.
The historiography on nineteenth-century religion and the relations of labour and capital is at present little developed. Lynne Marks has done some work in trying to investigate this omission in *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in late Nineteenth Century Small-Town Ontario*. This book suggests that religion had a different impact on unskilled and unorganized workers in comparison to skilled workers (particularly those involved in the Knights). In summary, Marks’s conclusion is that those “who had bargaining power in the workplace and often had a tradition of organized resistance, more commonly turned to the Knights. Ontario’s more powerless unskilled workers, male and female, were more likely to be attracted to the individual heavenly salvation offered by the Salvation Army.”\(^{186}\) However, the experience of three small Ontario towns opens but a rather narrow if tantalizing window into the relations between the working class and religion in Canada.\(^{187}\) Her suggestion that there was a relationship between skill and religion suggests the cultural rifts that could exist within the working class itself.


\(^{187}\) Of course, determining who exactly was the ‘helpless class’ evoked another moral and respectable dynamic. As Holman notes, the middle class were central in the various charity organizations that were a particular feature in late nineteenth century Canada. However, their views on the deserving and undeserving poor were in sharp contrast: “Victorian commentators viewed the idle poor as an anathema to the proper work ideal, as men and women able but unwilling to support themselves and their children, as anything but ‘respectable.” Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*, 20.
Yet not all historians agree that social reform was an essentially or permanently religious movement. In *The Regenerators*, Ramsay Cook argues that the “manner in which liberal Protestants responded to the socio-economic, scientific, and historical challenges of the nineteenth century resulted in Christianity becoming less rather than more relevant.”\(^\text{188}\) Cook argues that social criticism may have started with a religious sentiment to ‘regenerate’ society but by the turn of the century reformers were more motivated by secular concerns: “[f]rom science and the higher criticism came the demand for a rethinking of theology; the injustices of the emerging industrial capitalist order necessitated a reformulation of Christian social teachings.”\(^\text{189}\) Mariana Valverde, in a similar vein, argues that social criticism was grounded in a religious ethos that gradually came to focus upon secular concerns as embodied in Social Gospel and social purity movements: “while the focus of social gospel activity was the economy and the social relations arising from production, social purity focused on the sexual and moral aspects of social life.”\(^\text{190}\) Social purity was, of course, also directly related to changing relations of production. Its notion of moralizing the nation was similar to the social gospel movement. It “[s]tressed the need to conserve, preserve, and shape human life: to conserve its physical health, to preserve its moral purity, and to shape it according to the optimistic vision shared by all political parties of what Canada would be in the

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\(^{189}\) Ibid., 229.

What surfaces in the many histories dealing with social criticism in this period is an impression that the social gospel and social purity movements had not only a dominant class, gender and ethnic dynamic but also an institutional focus. Many social purity reformers were white, middle-class men and women who were trying both to reflect and create a moral fiber that would ‘strengthen’ Canada. As Holman remarks, “[t]o justify their entry into the field of poor relief, the middle class defined poverty as an addressable problem in society and a responsibility in which all of society should share. […] As founders and leaders of charitable voluntary associations, the middle class was able to publicly promote its own explanation of poverty and solutions to it as natural, rational, and effective.” Many reformers were professionals and managers who constituted a (middle) class seeking to ensure its dominant place in the new social order:

The doctors, clergymen, and women employers of servants did not in any case expect immigrants and prostitutes to live and think exactly like upper-class Anglo-Saxon Canadians. They did want both immigrants and social deviants to embrace the culture and values of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle-class urban Canadians, but this was to ensure the power of the WASP bourgeoisie would appear to legitimate, not to democratize society.

Two social movements that won over many of these people were urban reform and temperance. Urban reform had a particular importance for Victorian Canadians because

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191 Ibid., 24.
192 In the Quebec case a similar group of reformers were arguing for the separation of state and church and “aim[ed] to establish a new set of power relationships that would benefit the peasants and workers” but did not fundamentally challenge society’s socio-economic foundations. See Linteau et al., Quebec, 273.
193 Holman, A Sense of Their Duty, 110.
194 Valverde, The Age of Light, 29.
the city came to represent the evils of industrial society. As Paul Rutherford points out, “[e]ven urban writers admitted that there was a dark side to the city where disease, crime, prostitution, and general misery flourished. In the city all the ills of modern society were concentrated and highly visible. They were convinced that vice was so much a fact of city life that it menaced the national identity.” For Rutherford, moral reform was an experiment in social engineering which attempted to force the city dweller to conform to the public mores of the church-going middle class. The popularity of the reform movement can be seen in the municipal politics of Canada’s two largest cities in the 1880s: in 1885 H. Beaugrand, editor of Montreal’s Liberal paper La Patrie, and in 1886 W.H. Howland, a business leader and child welfare advocate in Toronto, became the mayors of their respective cities as declared reform candidates. The solution to the ‘evil city’ rested in an appeal all levels of government and a bureaucratization of civic duties. Rutherford states:

Reformers demanded the multiplication of bureaucratic structures, special and permanent commissions, advisory posts and the like, to deal in detail with the community. Responding to reform pleas municipal governments created formidable bureaucracies to control police, public health, utilities, parks and recreation, and social welfare. To a degree, this appeared to be a devolution of authority; in fact, it was a centralization of authority in the hands of professionals.

Along with such experiments in turn-of-the-century state formation as the Toronto Harbour Commission and the federal Commission of Conservation, the Labour

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196 Ibid., 445.
Commission was also in the business of commissioning solutions to urban social problems. Urban reform was only one of the many phenomena like civic service reform, the social gospel, and conservation, which together constituted the middle-class progressive tradition in Canada.

Some reform movements targeted temperance as a catalyst toward addressing the problems associated with industrialism. Joseph Gusfield has argued in the American context that members of the middle classes felt threatened by the changes in the social structure wrought by industrialism: “[w]ith the growth of urbanization and industrial work rhythms and the integration of local economies into regional and national markets, it became increasingly vital for those most affected by these changes to develop some control over their lives when all appeared to be in turmoil.”

To Canadian scholars the latter nineteenth century stands as the “second wave” of temperance reform because of the problems associated with urbanization, the industrial economy and immigration. An important dynamic of the Canadian temperance movement was its local/municipal focus. The Canada Temperance Act, also known as the Scott Act, became federal law in 1878 and allowed voters of a city or county to ban -- through a referendum -- the sale and public consumption of alcoholic beverages. This meant that “the prohibition of

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198 Warsh provides a comprehensive account of the historiography of temperance in this respect. In particular see Warsh, *Drink in Canada*, 16-17.
alcoholic beverages was a measure inspired, adopted, and enforced from within the
community.”

Temperance was a heterogeneous and regionally-specific set of movements, yet
one consistent and unifying theme does emerge: the agitation was strongest in places
where rapid growth, urbanization, and the transformation to market agriculture were
most evident and weakest where subsistence agriculture was still important.

“Temperance was rooted in the oldest most populated areas of white society because it
was only there that, as a companion to modernization and business efficiency, the
middle-class basis of temperance had any meaning.”

Interestingly, the federal government’s attention to the temperance issue also assumed a commissioned response:
there was a commission to enquire into the working of the Prohibitory Liquor Law in
the United States that reported in 1874; and a major Royal Commission on the Effects of
Liquor Traffic came out in 1895.

The working Canadians who inhabited the slums and consumed much morality-
compromising alcohol stood at the centre of the efforts of this variegated and vast
reform community. Not all reforming social commentators fit neatly into the confines of
the working or middle class. As many historians have noted, a vibrant labour press and
a score of labour intellectuals contested the views of reformers and were popularizing
their own view of how Canada should respond to the rapid waters of industrialization.

These “propagandists who hoped to alter conditions by rousing the conscience of the

199 Jacques Paul Couturier, “Prohibition or Regulation? The Enforcement of the Canada
Temperance Act in Moncton, 1881-1896,” in Warsh, Drink in Canada, 144.
200 Barry, “Shades of Vice … and Moral Glory: the Temperance movement in Nova Scotia, 1828 to
1848” (MA Thesis, Acadia University, 1983), 65; as quoted in Warsh, Drink in Canada, 17.
nation” recognized the effects of factory discipline on their respective societies and argued for alternatives more radical than those espoused by more “respectable” reform movements.201

Working-class intellectuals got their message out to Canadians through a score of newspapers that emerged in Canada throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Many historians have addressed the development of the labour press in Canada.202 Some have downplayed the importance of “unrepresentative and peripheral” labour intellectuals. They argue that organized labour’s interests were achieved through allegiances with organized political parties. Other historians see this development very differently. Frank Watt, for example, viewed the late nineteenth century, the 1880s in particular, as a time when the working class in Canada became aware of itself and, with the help of the labour press, challenged the existing social order: “[t]he Labor Union and the Palladium of Labor reveal an ideological development from the days of the Ontario Workman. They suggest a radicalism that was in a freely germinating phase during which conceptions drawn from varying and sometimes contradictory sources were seized upon and held as criticisms of and alternatives to the existing order.” 203 Successive studies on the radical tradition since Watt’s pioneering work suggest parallel themes. Russell Hann’s

identification of Canada’s brainworkers, particularly E.E. Sheppard and Phillips Thompson, outlines a similar development. In a period when Canada’s newspapers wore their politics on their sleeves, other periodicals were developing a political vision of society very different from the mainstream. Sheppard’s editorial work at the Toronto News developed into particular and focused hostility toward a host of social and political understandings at that time. As Hann states:

What differentiated the News from its partisan contemporaries was its ideological perspective, rather than its style and format. After the publicity gimmicks died away, the News was radically different from the Mail and Globe mainly for its enunciation of a political course that was clearly independent of Grittism and Toryism. Its politics were concerned not with the practical achievement of power, but rather with the fostering of a new kind of opposition to the basic political, social, and cultural assumptions of late nineteenth century Canadian society.204

Late in the century some apostles of this radicalism would become advocates of socialism.205

When journals devoted to the interests of Canada’s working class began to emerge there was little problem finding writers to fill their pages. Sometimes these journalists would be self-taught workers but more often than not, Hann notes, labour papers were staffed with:

sympathetic journalists who became labour’s intellectuals after observation and study .... Trained journalists rallied to labour’s cause wherever radical workingmen set up labour papers. They exhibited a deep respect for learning by voraciously reading books, essays,

205 For one example see Ian McKay (ed.), For a Working Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay’s writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897-1939 (St. John’s, 1996).
pamphlets, and novels. They demanded and digested a steadily growing
diet of periodical literature in the form of dailies, weeklies, and other
journals.\footnote{Hann, “Brainworkers,” 36.}

Radical thought was rapidly disseminated through alternative labour media. For
example, the editor of the Labor Union stated in 1883, “Henry George’s book Progress and
Poverty is now to be had for 20 cents complete! Buy it; read it; get its truths by heart and
then lend it to your neighbour.”\footnote{Watt, “National Policy,” 17-18.} Nova Scotia’s Trades Journal shared a similar
viewpoint when it stated: “[T]here has been of late years a change of sentiment, as to the
relation workmen bear to their employers, and vice versa; and to make the change more
radical is our aim and effort ....”\footnote{Ibid., 17.} Thus, journalists became veritable experts on the
relations between labour and capital. This was reflected in the Labour Commission
where journalists were not only commissioners but frequently ‘expert’ witnesses. But
were the professional journalists who became labour’s intellectuals part of the middle
class? The social, cultural and economic impact of industrialization was instrumental to
class formation but the lines between the working and middle class are as nuanced as
the labels labour and capital. ‘Working’ and ‘middle class’, like ‘labour’ and ‘capital,’
were contingent upon the context in which these terms were used. If some of this context
was furnished by occupation and lifestyle, it was also strongly influenced by
assumptions about expertise, respectability and morality.

Was there a religious dimension to the ideas of labour intellectuals similar to that
of the intellectuals of the reform movements? Newspapers and pamphlets did address
the relation between workers and the church but it appears that the latter was often perceived to be more a part of the establishment than a force for criticizing and transforming productive relations. In a pamphlet entitled *Address to the Churches* (put together by the Toronto Single Tax Organization, the TLC, the Builders’ union, the Machinists’ union, the Typographical Union and the Toronto Street Railway Employees’ union), these labour reform activists argued that the church itself had failed to live up to its own standards.

You urge us, you plead with us, you beseech us to come and unite with you and to yield ourselves to the claims of religion. A religion that seeks to secure all the benefits and rewards of an advancing civilization [not] to those who bear the burden of begetting and supporting that civilization to the full and overflowing to those, who not merely contribute nothing whatever to its maintenance, but who by their mischievous dog-in-the-manger speculations, often stand in the way of its progress?

Is it not vain to expect men to join with enthusiastic devotion in the propagation of a professed religion that unfortunately ignores the highest claims of religion, that repeats, “Our Father who art in heaven,” but ignores the fatherhood on earth, that initiates its service with “Dearly beloved brethen,” and then splits society into lordlings and serfs, that enjoins honesty and then fosters and rewards despoiling speculators, that with the lips extols peace and unity, love and justice, but, alas! alas! alas! maintains in operation forces that beget hostility and discord, strikes and lockouts, riots and labor wars?²⁰⁹

More mainstream newspapers addressed the relation between the workingmen and the church. Their treatments, while far less scathing, echoed some of this critique. The *Globe* ran an article on “Church Going and Workingmen” just before the announcement of the Commission. It asked, “are workingmen, as a rule, ceasing to have a connection with the Christian Churches?” The newspaper suggested that a gap had emerged between

²⁰⁹ Single Tax Association *et al.*, *Address to the Churches* (Toronto, 1897), 2.
workers and the institutions of religion: “The church, we are assured, is a sort of social club, where religious duties can be discharged with the least possible inconvenience, and where like draws to like.” Furthermore, the article speculates, the message from the pulpit might have lost its importance as workers found “no message for their hearts, and no help to their struggle in life in the lifeless essays that pass too frequently for pulpit oratory.” In a pamphlet written in the 1890s, it appears that the differences between the church, charities and labour organizations were yet to be resolved: “[w]ith the hearty cooperation of the churches of various denominations, all the charitable and labor organizations, and all other societies existing for the purpose of social and moral reform, the Social Problems Association believe that much can be accomplished, which is now left undone because efforts are desultory and sometimes conflicting.”

The relations between the church in Quebec and labour was much more antagonistic, as suggested by threats of excommunication and Bishop Taschereau’s public condemnation of the Knights. On the eve of the announcement of the Commission, the Montreal Gazette ran some editorials concerning the relation between the church, capital and labour. For example, Father Dowd of St. Patrick’s church claimed that “it was, therefore, the duty of all good Catholics in this province to shun the [labour] organization, and if they had joined it to abandon it at once.” Another piece on local sermons by Reverend Rogers, the rector at St. Luke’s church in Montreal, argued that anyone suffering from the absence of a ‘respectable’ work ethic was morally corrupt; poverty was a personal flaw. Worthy workers were not particularly

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disadvantaged by capitalism. As Rogers observed, “[t]he working man has grievances, but he is not oppressed, and he has no grievance to justify hatred, violence or riot. The industrious mechanic of this city has a clean and comfortable home, his table lacks nothing, and he has many of the luxuries of life.” The stormy relations of labour and capital could be contained through an understanding of their mutual interests. Rogers dreamt of “a means of bringing masters and men together on a common platform, and in an atmosphere of friendship and brotherhood, to reason with each other, not only of things that are lawful, but of things that are right, and by mutual concessions to dissipate all strained relations, and to restore the much to be desired prosperity of confidence and happiness of peace.” Furthermore, Rogers advocated that the government assume the role of fostering the relations of labour and capital, similar to many middle-class reformers, though legislation and arbitration: “[t]he workingman must be protected from their dangerous influences by wise legislation.”

If religious certainties were in motion, so too were the age-old verities of liberalism. The writings of Herbert Spencer, although seemingly an endorsement of laissez-faire and competition, became the foci of many controversies, as a result of which they were often cited by leftists and labour reformers. In the late nineteenth century, Spencer argued for an unrestricted market on the grounds that protected industries do not prosper: “our wisest plan is to let things take their own course ... nothing but evil can arise from inequitable arrangements.” After all, the advancements made in society

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211 The quotations in this paragraph all come from The Montreal Gazette, 4, 11, 18 October 1886.
212 Herbert Spencer, Reasons for dissenting from the philosophy of M. Comte, and other essays (1868); see Tim S. Grey, The Political Philosophy of Herbert Spencer (Aldershot, 1996), 39.
were not because of any public interest: “[i]t was not philanthropy which prompted the clearing of wild lands for the purpose of growing food; it was not philanthropy which little by little improved the breeds of animals, and adapted them to human use; it was not philanthropy which in the course of time changed the primitive plough into the finished modern plough. Wishes for private satisfactions were the exclusive stimuli.”213

Yet, Spencer did not overlook the hardships of the capitalist system:

Let no one suppose that … I wish to make light of the suffering which most men have to bear. The fates of the great majority have ever been, and doubtless still are, so painful that it is painful to think of them. Unquestionably the existing type of social organisation is one which none who care for their kind can contemplate with satisfaction; and unquestionably men’s activities accompanying this type are far from being admirable.214

As the most influential sociologist in the Victorian English-speaking world, Spencer attracted a wide audience among all who were deeply interested in the Labour Question. Phillips Thompson, one of the Commission’s most combative witnesses and a major labour intellectual of the 1880s, resisted many of Spencer’s ideas about competition, but he was also deeply influenced by Spencer’s notion of a gradual social evolution and “the idea that the struggle for labor reform would have its outcome in some distant epoch ....”215

For many on the left, an expansion of the state allowed for one way of regulating the perceived chasm between religion and science.\textsuperscript{216} As Elizabeth Wallace points out with respect to the development of the welfare state in Canada, “[t]he theory that the Lord helps those that help themselves was considered appropriate from both a religious and an economic point of view. The assumption, however, that work was available for everyone who wanted it, and those who would not work had no claim on society, largely ignored the special needs of such groups as the old, the widowed, the orphaned, and the mentally and physically incapacitated. It also ignored the new phenomenon of unemployment.”\textsuperscript{217} Many besides the radical Thompson would argue on these grounds for “the extension of the powers and functions of government to include the organization of industry.”\textsuperscript{218}

Historians preoccupied with the relations between employers and employed have generally skirted such questions, viewing social morality, respectability and applied sociology to be topics far removed from their own.\textsuperscript{219} There was undoubtedly a complex relation among social morality campaigns, working-and middle-class

\textsuperscript{216} For an extensive discussion see James T. Kloppenberg, \textit{Uncertain Victory: Social democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920} (New York, 1986); in particular see the chapter “Beyond Kant: Religion and Science in Nineteenth-Century Thought,” 15-26.


\textsuperscript{218} \textit{Palladium of Labor}, January 3, 1885.

\textsuperscript{219} Yet there are significant exceptions in the international literature. Respectability, for example, has been addressed by many authors: Katherine Grier, \textit{Culture, Comfort: People, Parlours and Upholstery} (Rochester, 1988); Paul Rutherford, \textit{A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth Century Canada} (Toronto, 1982); David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth Century New York,” \textit{Social History} 17, 2 (1992), 203-227.
formation, and the state.\textsuperscript{220} In their monumental book on state formation, Paul Corrigan and Derek Sayer argue that these two developments, middle class and state formation, occur in tandem: “[t]he repertoire of activities and institutions conventionally identified as ‘the State’ are cultural forms, and cultural forms, moreover, of particular centrality to bourgeois civilization.”\textsuperscript{221} The late-Victorian period was marked by the rise of a new middle class determined to find order in the chaos of industrial society, as Robert Wiebe disclosed in \textit{The Search for Order, 1877-1920}, a study of U.S. opinion. In this influential work Wiebe argues that American values shifted from local “island communities” to a more national-bureaucratic, “scientifically managed” perspective after the turn of the century. Central to this development was the rise of a middle class made up of new professionals and specialists who developed this vision of American “society” by advocating the need for expanded government control: “the heart of progressivism was the ambition of the new middle class to fulfill its destiny through bureaucratic means.”\textsuperscript{222} Undoubtedly, the interests of the middle class and the state were becoming closely aligned in this period as each had a vested interest in securing a position in the rapidly changing social order of the late nineteenth century.

In their respective works on social reform, Valverde and Cook imply that the state was relatively inactive on the large social issues thrown up by an industrializing Canada. In its place, like Corrigan and Sayer, these authors noted that social reformers

\textsuperscript{220} Robert Lanning claims on collective biographies that the people who undertook the activities of social reform implicate a more complex dynamic in relation to culture and the activities of the Canadian state. See Lanning, \textit{The National Album}.

\textsuperscript{221} Corrigan and Sayer, \textit{The Great Arch}, 3.

\textsuperscript{222} Robert Wiebe, \textit{The Search for Order, 1877-1920} (New York, 1967), 166.
took it upon themselves to clean up the nation. For both Cook and Valverde “the state” was a nascent form throughout much of the 1880s, with many of its present-day functions residing within civil society.\(^{223}\) Valverde suggests that civil society actually took the lead in the development of social morality campaigns: “the various levels of government often lagged behind the initiatives of churches and professional groups. State officials and agencies often worked with or funded private agencies, and the phenomenon of co-optation was not unknown.”\(^{224}\) The working class, industry and nation building were popular concerns in the social reform movement. In fact, in some respects, social morality advocates considered themselves as doing the job of a “nation” which they had created amongst themselves. Valverde argues that many of the voluntary organizations involved in the social morality campaign were “far more concerned with nation-building and even about strengthening the state than the state itself; they often chastised it for not exercising enough power, particularly in the areas of social welfare, health and immigration.”\(^{225}\) Her observation seems particularly pertinent to the Commission, given the salience within it of social reformers of many hues, advancing programs that were ultimately hardly reflected in its meager legislative outcome.

Recent work on the development of the middle class and social morality posits a direct relation between class formation and the state’s place in large-scale economic

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\(^{223}\) The “present day” activities of the state these authors are referring to are the development of broad systems of social welfare. See Cook, *The Regenerators* and Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*.


transformation. It also implies a broad cultural shift in social and political rationale. For example, Holman’s analysis of temperance notes a shift in attitude from those at the beginning of the nineteenth century to the late-Victorian period. In particular, Holman describes how alcohol abuse, initially perceived as an individual moral flaw or character deficiency, eventually became a social problem whose preferred solution, according to the middle class, was legislative. Holman is not the only Canadian historian to note this change. Karen Bridget Murray’s work on unwed mothers in turn-of-the-century Toronto also documents a shift from an approach focused on individual flaws to one that accepted a sociological ontology. Murray notes that for most of the nineteenth century, the issue of unwed mothers was an individual, private affair. However, as Toronto industrialized, this approach was replaced as a network of services (such as religious-run maternity homes) were formed by white, middle-class women. They would eventually be regulated by the provincial government. For Holman and Murray, social reform movements emerged as part of the formation of the middle class in response to industrialization. However, the interests and beliefs of the middle class easily translated into those of the “nation” as their reforming efforts were endorsed by federal and provincial law. As Murray notes,

> Classical liberal sensibilities could not withstand the vagaries of the market, which became increasingly visible in the late nineteenth century Toronto, and other cities, in the context of industrialization and urbanization, as long-held traditions of rural and family life broke down. These changes paved the way for the emergence of a welfare liberal

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226 Temperance efforts in the late nineteenth century resulted in the *Scott Act* which left the responsibility of legally drinking up to the municipal governments, further solidifying local reform efforts and class identities. For more detail on this process see Warsh, *Drink in Canada* and Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto, 2003).
orientation of governing that hinged on the idea that a disciplined and ordered society could be promoted through targeted interventions in the lives of individuals and the economy.  

Similarly, the state played an instrumental role as well. For example, the state was responsible not only for appointing these ‘reformers’ to royal commissions but soliciting their opinion in the witness box on national concerns.

As has been shown, social reform efforts, working- and middle-class formation and other developments all suggest a shift in political thinking in the latter nineteenth century and beyond. The forces of capitalism and industrialization’s many problems forced many Canadians not only to question, but also to reformulate, their political ideologies, norms and values. No longer were social morality, unwed mothers, urbanization and alcoholism (to name but a few) viewed as isolated individual problems. As the negative effects of market capitalism took hold in Canada, a “middling” section of society reconfigured its moral-social rationale and — with the help of the state and the apparent consent of many subaltern groups — assumed some form of responsibility for the direction of their society.

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228 This issue is discussed at length in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: the Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal, 1996).

229 The secretary of the Commission, Alfred Blackeby, is specifically singled out in Andrew Holman’s study on middle-class reformers in Canada. See Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*.

230 Holman notes this development in the context of ‘deserving’ poor relief claiming: “[t]o justify their entry into the field of poor relief, the middle class defined poverty as an addressable problem in society and a responsibility in which all of society should share.” See Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*, 110.
This partial shift from individualism to social welfare is indicative of a broader change in Canada’s political culture, a change that not only saw the formation of the middle class, but laid the foundation for the broad development of the Canadian state. The state’s role as mediator, legislator and regulator of social forces was central to this development whereby class formation — with its elements of social morality and respectability — was also compatible with a program of state formation and provided legitimacy for the development of a particular political order. As the institutions of the state delved into the individual affairs of Canadians, through such devices as royal commissions, they also implicitly and explicitly endorsed the cultural attributes of respectability and morality prized by the middle class. As Corrigan and Sayer argue, state formation occurred within a set of values that were “central to bourgeois civilization.”

My investigation of the Labour Commission is directed toward identifying the politics of this state which, in turning to the device of the royal commission, was invoking a long-standing British tradition of social investigation and activism.

Theoretical Framework: the Public Sphere and the Liberal Order

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231 Corrigan and Sayer, The Great Arch, 3.

Although the Labour Commission has long been a canonized source for working class historians seeking to disclose the “experience” of class consciousness, there are only three works in Canadian historiography that directly discuss the Commission. Greg Kealey’s fine work -- not only in his edited version of the Commission, but also in his thesis and monograph which in part reflected this research – alludes to many important themes, such as patronage and clientelism, ‘partyism’ and the emergence of labour reform.233 Similarly, Fernand Harvey’s thesis and monograph on the Commission together constitute a persuasive portrait not only of the Commission’s work in Quebec, but also of the particularities of industrialization in that province.234 Not all the works that address the Labour Commission directly address questions of class. A much reprinted article by Susan Trofimenkoff on the women witnesses is another important historical work on the Commission.235 Of course, many Canadian histories, ranging from monographs to biographies, cite the Labour Commission in some capacity.236 To my knowledge, it has never been used to understand broad questions of ideology, language and meaning and their relation(s) to social and political culture or to middle-class formation.

It would be fair to say that Kealey’s Canada Investigates Industrialism is an abridged selection of the Labour Commission’s testimony that tacitly comprises an

233 Kealey, Canada Investigates Industrialism; and by the same author The Consolidation of Capitalism, 1896-1929 (Toronto, 1983); Canada’s Age of Industry, 1849-1896 (Toronto, 1982); Working Class Toronto at the Turn of the Century (Toronto, 1973).

234 Fernand Harvey, Révolution Industrielle et Travailleurs (Montreal, 1978).

235 Susan Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One Muffled Voices: Canada’s Industrial Women in the 1880s (Toronto, 1977).

236 Entries of labour leaders in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography often cite the Labour Commission. A detailed list is provided in chapter 4 of this thesis.
analysis of the working class. The purpose of the book, as Kealey states, was to “offer us one road” into the world of workers in this period: “my major priority in editing has been to allow as many Canadian workers and employers as possible to describe their problems. In selecting material for inclusion I have tried to focus on the process of industrialization, giving most consideration to materials describing factory production. The selection is intended to demonstrate the major economic interests of the various regions. In addition, an attempt has been made to select data representing each of the occupations and trades that testified ....” As Kealey points out, his relevant selections constitute about five to eight percent of the original.

Kealey’s selection of testimony is indicative of the theoretical underpinnings evident in much of the work by working-class historians throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Taking their lead from theoretical currents in British and American working-class history, Canadian labour historians were interested in showing the existence of a working-class culture and not simply documenting formal trade union activity or strikes. As Kealey states, “the Labour Commission and similar materials allow us to begin to develop an appreciation of the Canadian working classes which goes beyond the existing patchwork history of trade unions, labour politics and strikes. The men and women who became the Canadian working class possessed a culture which, under the onslaught of industrialism, provided the basis for their increasingly powerful resistance to the kind of Canada their employers wanted to create.” In this work, it was largely left to the reader to piece together an implicit theory of working-class culture and to

237 Kealey, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, xxiii.
238 Ibid., xxiv.
theorize the relationship it was thought to have with workers’ resistance. The evidence of the Commission was trawled for somewhat atypical accounts of acute conflict between workers and their bosses.

Although Canadian labour historiography attained its present dimensions under the sign of “working-class culture,” it has never really completely theorized the culture about which it purports to speak. That is, it has never successfully shown how this “culture” was both distinct from and related to the many other “cultures” visible in Victorian Canada. This thesis will argue that middle-class and working-class cultures were intertwined and always entailed reciprocities with each other. As the middle class rose to a position of cultural hegemony, it was able to articulate its interests in such a way as to incorporate the values and beliefs of other classes and, in conjunction with the activities of the state, was able to obtain legitimacy for its particular vision of a liberal capitalist social order.

Fernand Harvey’s analysis of the Labour Commission focuses solely on the Quebec evidence and, theoretically, advances an argument similar to that of historians of the Anglophone working class. However, in other respects, his analysis of the Commission is also consistent with French-language historiographical currents.239 Influenced to an extent by the “ethnic class” hypothesis influential in the mid-1960s,240

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239 For general histories on Quebec historiography see Fernand Ouelette, Economy, Class and Nation in Quebec (Toronto, 1991) and Ron Rudin, Making History in Twentieth Century Quebec (Toronto, 1997).

240 See Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin, French Canadian Society (Toronto, 1964). Fernand Ouellet remarks in the French Canadian historiographical context that “any investigation of working class conditions and of the development of labour unions that does not take into account both ethnic origin and the place of ethnic groups within the system of production can only mislead the
which posited a large degree of convergence between ethnicity and class lines in Quebec (to simplify: in Quebec, Francophones = workers, Anglophones = bourgeois), many labour historians in Quebec came to believe that “the capitalists and exploiters were nearly all English speakers of British and American origin (French Canadian capitalists being perceived as their agents) and that the working class was made up of a homogeneous group of French speakers.” Some French-Canadian historians have argued for the existence of a distinctly French-Canadian working class. There is, in the literature on trade unionism, evidence both for and against this position. Harvey’s analysis of the Commission argues that the Quebec witnesses disclosed a distinct perspective into the world of the French-Canadian working class and its relation to the Anglophone bourgeoisie:

Insofar as the Québécois evidence is concerned, one can observe certain original characteristics in the reports/ratios of class. In particular, one class was truncated by the superposition and the domination of another, that of Anglophone Canada. Thus, the French-speaking proletariat was dominated by an industrial middle-class with Anglophone majority. The laboring class itself is affected in cohesion by ethnic mixing and a linguistic and cultural dualism which, on this occasion, overrides socio-


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English- and French-language historiographies thus agree: the 1880s were a pivotal decade in the development of large-scale industry. However, there is disagreement about the ethnic dimension of industrialization in Quebec. In Linteau et al.’s magisterial *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, it is argued that British entrepreneurs enjoyed a head-start in industrialization and monopoly capitalism.\(^{244}\) In another work Linteau, Durocher and Robert argue that “[t]he rise in monopoly capitalism in the province further marginalized francophone entrepreneurs.”\(^{245}\) The ethnic-class argument has been — and is being — challenged by francophone historians. For example, Fernand Ouellet has argued on the 1880s: “francophone entrepreneurs were over-represented outside Montreal in enterprises limited to regional markets, and participated in industrial development to their habitually modest degree. Otherwise they would have declined in number as industrialization advanced. Instead their numbers increased along with the average size of their enterprises. Although this produced a few entrepreneurs of great importance in every generation, overall, the place of francophones in the entrepreneurial hierarchy remained largely unchanged.”\(^{246}\) In short, the “ethnic class” argument oversimplifies a much more complicated and variegated pattern.

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\(^{243}\) Harvey, *Révolution Industrielle et Travailleurs*, 262. The translation is mine.  
\(^{245}\) Linteau, Durocher and Robert, *Quebec*, 61-62.  
The Labour Commission addressed French Canada and, more specifically, workers in Montreal rather extensively. The Québec evidence is as expansive as that of Ontario and much larger that that from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Furthermore, some of the Commission’s most controversial evidence, on the physical abuse of child labour in J.L. Fortier’s tobacco factory, came from Montreal.\textsuperscript{247} Nowhere else in the hearings of the Commission were these issues so blatantly and alarmingly obvious. Of course, to suggest that these employment practices only existed in Quebec would be absurd. My investigation into the Commission is not to challenge the “distinct realities” of the Francophone worker in this period. It is, rather, an attempt to grapple with broader implications of culture as they manifest in the language on the relations of labour and capital within the text of the Labour Commission.\textsuperscript{248}

Susan Trofimenkoff’s “One Hundred and One Muffled Voices” is an analysis of the Labour Commission focused quite strictly on the question of gender. Trofimenkoff noticed that when commissioners asked questions of industrial women they invariably addressed issues of morality and water-closets as opposed to pursuing the seemingly more pressing dimensions of the labour question, such as wages, hours, and industrial safety. “One can decipher,” Trofimenkoff argues, “by the very questions asked, the

\textsuperscript{247} Fortier is probably one of the Commission’s most famous witnesses both in the period studied as well as in the historiographical literature. In Montreal, the commissioners publicly fought amongst themselves over Fortier’s testimony. The “labour” group wanted to halt the Commission and investigate further into the “Fortier Scandal.” The “paternalist” group wanted to press on to New Brunswick. The scandal eventually prompted the Federal Liberal party to press the government for legislation on child labour that was never enacted.

\textsuperscript{248} All of the Québec evidence is translated into English in the version of the Commission I have consulted, and indeed most of the bound versions of the Commission held by the Library and Archives Canada. However, I have appended French language evidence for witnesses who were translated when they testified to the Commission (See Appendix 1).
attitudes of the male commissioners towards Canadian industrial women.” In spite of the fact that women made up a significant portion of the labour force in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick (slightly more in Nova Scotia) the opinions of the commissioners as well as other male workers pre-empt the testimony of women. Trofimenkoff argues that the commissioners were not only trying to identify scandal but were consciously grouping the morality of women with the problems of the factory system: “women were both the guardians of morality and the most easily corruptible and the poor were poor because of some flaw, usually a moral one, in their character.” In other words, the male commissioners appointed themselves to a position from which they could “objectively” assess the moral character of women and reach judgments about industrialization and their place in the new industrial order. For example, Judge James Armstrong became embroiled in a libel suit because of comments he made while chairing the Commission concerning the ‘moral standing’ of female workers in a Hochelaga factory: “[t]he judge made a statement to the effect that the girls in the employ of the company were immoral, and the company have brought the action to vindicate the character of their employees, and at the same to clear themselves of what they no doubt consider the implication that the alleged immorality of the girls is due to the conditions under which the company compels them to work.” The judge’s position of assessing the moral character of women in this instance brought the Hochelaga cotton company and its workers together to fight a charge of immorality. As the Canadian

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249 Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One, 2.
250 Ibid., 15. For an excellent work on how the factory was perceived to “corrupt” women’s morals see Carolyn Strange, Toronto’s Girl Problem (Toronto, 1995).
Journal of Fabrics noted: “[t]he course of the company in taking up the cause of the girls is praiseworthy, and it is fortunate that in this case the charge of immorality was sufficiently specific to make it possible to test its truth in the courts.”

It is clear that Armstrong, like many other Canadians interested in women in factories, was equating the conditions of the Hochelaga factory with the morality of its female workers. What is less clear is how the other commissioners more subtly formulated the same association. Ultimately, the commissioners “objectively” articulated an ideology of gender that, in part, explains why the number of women witnesses was so low.

Trofimenkoff argues that the assumptions of the commissioners had the effect of “muffling” the voices of industrializing women: “no one had asked them to inquire into the moral state of Canadian women but they had done so anyway and in the process had muffled not only the women themselves but also the crucial economic and social questions raised by the factory system and by women’s place in it.”

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252 Ibid. It is not clear what Judge Armstrong said to warrant the libel case. Unfortunately, the Judge died before the case went to trial, effectively ending what could have been a very promising commentary on industrial women and morality.

253 I put objectively in quotation here because royal commissions are considered to be at the top of state-sanctioned investigations. One reason for this status is their supposed objectivity or their separation from the Executive in the House of Commons. By not having to answer to the government, it is believed that the investigation is objective, free to determine its own conclusions on whatever subject it is investigating.

254 Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One, 19. It should be noted that “the moral state” of men was also a preoccupation of the Commissioners who were interested in what men did in the way of self-improvement, whether employers were assisting their workers to be “good men” and the moral convictions that led to the success of the “self-made” man. The Commissioners seemed particularly impressed with Charles Simpkins, a “colored” labourer with a family of eight (two children were in school), who was building his own house and getting regular work. See GC, “Ontario Evidence,” RCRLC (1889), 401-402. The manufacture of “good men” was referred to throughout the Commission particularly by employers who often used this notion to justify harsh factory discipline. However, it should be noted that the ideal of masculinity was also propagated by various social elements such as the Knights of Labor. See Helga Kristin
Trofimenkoff does not specifically discuss women’s place in the factory system either, but her concept of muffling alludes to themes beyond women’s “work.” For example, the commissioners were continually asking witnesses to describe the costs of running their households and how inflation was affecting the purchase of provisions. These questions were usually posed to male witnesses who often claimed they could not provide information on how the prices of groceries had changed over several years because their wives bought provisions for their families. Yet, not one woman was asked to come before the Commission to offer her insight into the issue. This exclusion suggests that the gender of witnesses “muffled” not only their insight into the world of the factory but their expertise on any matter discussed before the Commission. Trofimenkoff’s notion of “muffling” is indicative of how women’s morality, water-closets and expertise were a few of the issues raised by the commissioners that evoked an entire world of morality and respectability.

The tenets of liberalism provide a basis for understanding how relations of subordination and domination were naturalized in the Labour Commission’s discussion on labour and capital. I am not alone in suggesting that the social-political philosophy of

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Determining how the workplace constructs gender roles is a theme that has enjoyed much prominence in Canadian historiography. For example, see Bettina Bradbury, “Women’s History and Working-Class History,” *L/Lt* 19 (1987), 23-43. Joy Parr expressed this relation quite succinctly when she claimed, “workplace roles reconstrue manliness and womanliness, remaking the boundaries between family and community, making contingent the authority gender might bequeath.” See Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners* (Toronto, 1990), 10.
liberalism has particular potency in North America. In a recent review of the subject, Ian McKay has similarly claimed that “the liberal tradition has shaped virtually every aspect of modern Canadian social, economic and political history.” Therefore, in the effort to understand how structures of domination and subordination were legitimized in the hearings of the Labour Commission, a look at liberalism is necessary. McKay identifies two distinct periods of “liberal revolution” in Canada that correlate with the nineteenth and twentieth century. Nineteenth century liberalism was about “overcoming the forceful and rooted resistance of those external to the liberal order (such as native peoples, French Canadian Catholics, immigrant groups), responding to the growing demands of those internal to the liberal order but socially marginalized by it (the working class, women), and slowly extending the frontiers of ‘liberal rights’ to encompass excluded groups.” Around the turn of the century liberalism underwent a “far-reaching renovation of ... doctrine and practice.” McKay argues that the twentieth century liberalism included “revaluations of the role of the state in the economic and social order, of the rights and duties of the labour movement, of the position of women as “non-persons” within a liberal order, and of the relationship of scientific expertise to


257 This quote comes from lecture notes and a course outline for “History 873: The Lineages of British Canadian Order, 1900-1929,” Queen’s University, 1. The course statement is closely related to Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” CHR (2000), 617-645.

258 Ibid.
the arts and sciences of government.” The Labour Commission falls in between the development of nineteenth and twentieth century liberal thought as discussions on the role of the state — an attribute McKay associates with twentieth century liberal thought — permeates the testimony of the Commission. In this respect, the Commission can be seen as an anticipation of the kind of liberal understandings that would characterize social debate in the next century. In the 1880s, the notion of a welfare state and a clear view of the responsibilities of the Dominion to protect working Canadians was in the process of being negotiated. The very existence of the Commission is evidence of this negotiation and the changes of the future.

By calling attention to the prominence of “liberalism” in Canadian history McKay suggests that the “nation” nineteenth-century social reformers were “bettering” was an “imagined community” rather than a geographic entity. McKay argues that understanding Canada’s historical development requires a theoretical sidestep: “‘Canada’ should henceforth denote a specific project of rule, rather than either an essence we must defend or an empty homogenous space we must possess. Canada-as-project can be analyzed through the study of the implantation and expansion over a heterogeneous terrain of a certain politico-economic logic. A strategy of reconnaissance will study those at the core of this project who articulated its values, and those insiders or outsiders who resisted and, to some extent at least, reshaped it.” For McKay, the reconnaissance of a national history begins with the simple acknowledgment that

259 Ibid.
specific articulations of Canada constitute “political and socially-specific solution[s] to a series of historical problems.”

By extension the notions of social reform, respectability and morality espoused by the witnesses before the Labour Commission were for the benefit of an “imagined community” of Canada.

Within the Labour Commission, liberal values and beliefs were constantly reaffirmed within the debate on the relations of labour and capital. As reflected in the literature on the formation of the middle class in Canada, the tenets of classical liberalism were challenged in the late nineteenth century. The rivalries and animosities of labour and capital were reworked and reordered to reconstruct the hegemony of the liberal-capitalist system. This reworking was not confined to questions of social reform and morality. It also encompassed much broader social and political understandings. For example, the discussion of rights and freedoms was a notable feature of the hearings of the Labour Commission. However, determining a ‘right’ was a question of contestation and negotiation. Labour had the ‘right’ to organize and capital had a ‘right’ not to employ organized workers as it saw fit.

By so articulating the respective positions of labour and capital as rights, witnesses were appealing to the state to determine who was, in fact, ‘more right.’ In this way, the state — through the Labour Commission — was able to insert itself as a mediator of labour and capital and broker rights claims within an ethos of bourgeois social values. Other understandings surface in the discussion of such distinctions as employee/employer, normal/pathological,

262 Ibid., 622.

263 This reciprocity is similar in theme to the very title of the Commission: a body designed to investigate how the state, through the device of the royal commission, could protect both “labour” and “capital.”
respectable/disrespectable, individual/state, equality/inequality, and right/wrong. These binaries map out the contours of “common sense” and provide an avenue with which to understand the biggest social question of the day: the relations of labour and capital.

If the tenets of liberalism provide a basis for determining common sense, and their articulations entail reciprocities that result in bourgeois hegemony, what is the relationship between political culture and articulation? This question is central to why I choose to interpret the Commission not only as a source but as a text. In contemporary scholarship the negotiation, construction and reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony is achieved through the articulation or re-articulation of various aspects of a culture. The analysis of governmentality — the rationality underpinning the relation between a ‘governor’ and a ‘subject’ — derives from this attention to hegemonic cultural

264 Canadian political culture has traditionally been tied to the early nineteenth century and related strongly to the Loyalist movement, a conservative (British) world view and the eventual transition (the timing of which is subject to debate) to a liberal ethos. See S.J.R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* (Toronto, 1990); Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper-Canada, 1800-1850* (Montreal and Kingston, 2000). The relation of conservatism and liberalism is of particular interest to S.F. Wise who claims: “the English Canadian style and character is not to be understood in terms of the consensus of a triumphant liberalism, but, out of its contradictory heritage, in terms of muted conservatism and ambivalent liberalism, of contradiction, paradox and complexity.” See S.F. Wise, *God’s Peculiar Peoples: Essay on Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Ottawa, 1993), 211. Of course, Québec does not quite fit into this conservative-loyalist mould for fairly obvious reasons. Defining a national political culture in Canada, then, is a rather imperfect process as there are multiple considerations such as region, ethnicity and gender to name a few. Therefore, I shall define political culture in broad terms: at its basic, political culture is a collection of shared assumptions, ideas, beliefs, institutions, customs and values within a society. Robert Lanning adopts a similar definition: “culture, in this instance, is a study of people’s relationships to each other and to institutions, and the standards of character and commitment that those relationships established as normative and valuable to Canadian society.” See Lanning, *The National Album*, 8.

265 An informative discussion on this relation is also in Jennifer Daryl Slack, “The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies,” in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London, 1996), 117. Governance is defined as the multiple forms of knowledge and practice that shape presuppositions about the purpose of governing, how it is to be undertaken, by whom and to what ends. See footnote 3 in Murray, “Governing Unwed Mothers,” 253.
concepts.\textsuperscript{266} Thus, some claim that the power structure of a given society is in a constant state of negotiation. Furthermore, ideology and articulation are fundamental to power relationships that are constantly constructed, torn down and re-constructed through common sense understandings and changing circumstances, knowledge and power plays. For some theorists, the “common-sense” basis for the negotiation between ideology and power relationships is culture.\textsuperscript{267}

It should be noted that addressing social relations of subordination and domination in these terms does not dismiss the impact of economic/material circumstances. In fact the two concepts – language as a system of ‘signs’ deriving meaning from some inherent ideological base determined by one’s relation to the means of production – work quite nicely together.\textsuperscript{268} In particular, theoretical discussion on ideology frequently appears to walk the line between the “material” and the “discursive.” Ideology denotes either an explicit or tacit sharing of certain attitudes, values, assumptions or ideas; or, more often, a covert means of social oppression and exploitation because it offers concepts and categories that distort the whole of reality in a

\textsuperscript{266} The contemporary approach to understanding “government” is influenced by Michel Foucault’s work on “governmentality.” For Foucault, the analysis of knowledge and power links the individual or the “constitution of the subject” with the formation of the state. See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality (London, 1991), 87-104.

\textsuperscript{267} As Norman Fairclough claims, “... the potentially diffuse nature of changes in discursive practices constitute changes in culture ....” See Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, 88. This line of analysis works quite nicely with the notion that articulations of class, morality and rights constitute Canada as an imagined community -- a liberal order.

\textsuperscript{268} As Lawerence Grossberg remarks, “ideology is the naturalization of a particular historical cultural articulation. What is natural can be taken for granted; it defines common sense.” See Lawerence Grossberg, “History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies,” in Morley and Chen (eds.), Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues, 159. See also Bryan Palmer, “Critical Theory, Historical Materialism, and the Ostensible End of Marxism: The Poverty of Theory Revisited,” in Keith Jenkins, Postmodern History Reader, 103-114.
direction useful to the prevailing power. As V.N. Volosinov claims, “every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality. Ideological reality is the immediate superstructure over the economic basis. Individual consciousness is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs.”

In Volosinov’s treatment of ideology, language inherently entails an expansive range of understandings regarding subjectivity, notions of work and leisure, ideas of the state, understandings of gender and many other social phenomena and is, consequently, fundamental to understanding culture.

For many cultural theorists, understanding this relation between language and ideology can only be achieved through the analysis of texts. The term “text” has many meanings among scholars. For some a text is simply spoken or written discourse. For others a text need not be linguistic at all; any cultural artifact – a picture, painting, and a piece of music – can be a text. My interest lies in viewing text as a social space where social processes occur. Specifically, texts represent cognition, representation of the world and social action; they are “part repetition, part creation … [they] negotiate the socio-cultural contradictions and more loosely ‘differences’ which are thrown up in social

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271 M.M. Bakhtin describes the connotative meanings “hidden” in language as “dialogical.” These multiple meanings draw most contemporary theorists to the conclusion that language is a social phenomenon involving institutions, individuals and cultural groups (to name a few). See M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (Austin, 1981) particularly the essay “Epic and Novel.”
situations, and indeed they constitute a forum in which social struggles are acted out.”

In this reading of textual analysis, language -- a social institution in itself -- and discourse play a large part in not only constructing class relations but in constituting cultural categories such as capital and labour or master and servant. Put simply, hegemony is achieved when a particular group articulates its vision of social order within a range of understandings that are based in common sense. If this vision of social order is accepted as legitimate, a social power structure ensues that favors the beliefs and attitudes of that particular group. Analyzing a text, then, means viewing culture as a struggle for meaning within a set of commonsensical or agreed upon understandings (such as rights and freedoms for example). Attention to how social relations were manufactured in language is an important aspect of understanding not only how the text of the Labour Commission functioned as a tool of state formation but how power relations were so naturalized that tensions between employer and employed appeared as a non–ideological ‘commonsense.’ Norman Fairclough proposes a similar method in the term ‘discourse analysis.’ For Fairclough, discourse analysis involves determining how social circumstances are related to language, a process he calls denaturalization: “denaturalization involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures.”

273 The difference between language and discourse is vast for some whereas the two words are synonymous for others. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Foucault used the term discourse to describe a group of associated statements and understandings. This group of associated understandings provides a language under which a subject can be discussed. The relation that Foucault outlines is the one to which I adhere.
274 Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 27.
read as a text, can be seen as one long ideological statement about respectability, liberalism and power. It can also be seen as an element of a wider discourse -- texts that are put to work in a given context, to "construct" the very entities about which they speak.\textsuperscript{275}

The Labour Commission not only provided a space wherein power relations and class identities were realized, but the text of the Commission also represented the manifestation, by many historical actors, of power relations and class identities in general and the relations of labour and capital specifically. Exploring the relationship between labour and capital is a fundamental aspect of understanding the culture from which common sense understandings as well as legitimacy were derived. Furthermore, discerning the relationships among culture, commonsense and legitimacy is crucial to understanding how the Labour Commission was able to appease social tensions by providing a public forum wherein they could be discussed. In the process of investigating these topics, the commissioners often constructed the categories of labour and capital so as to "make sense" of their relations within a tacit framework of respectability and morality. Therefore, addressing the Commission as a text housing a

\textsuperscript{275} The Commission was constantly faced with witnesses who did not necessarily fit neatly into categories such as labour and capital. For example, foremen of large factories were sometimes regarded as employers who were responsible for working conditions while others were absolved from such responsibilities suggesting that other factors (such as respectability and morality) determined whether a witness was capital or labour for the purposes of the Commission. How the state "constructs" the natural world so as to make it comprehensible and governable is the subject of Bruce Curtis’s work on the 1871 Canadian census. Curtis claims: “a census involves the application of what Michel Foucault called “normalizing judgment” to social relations. Censuses discipline elements of the social in order to assign them to their ‘proper places,’ and ‘propriety’ is inescapably political.” See Bruce Curtis, \textit{The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875} (Toronto, 2001), 4.
series of speech acts entails understanding the implicit ‘taken for granted assumptions’ in the language that both reflect and construct categories such as labour and capital, employer and employed, boss and foreman, and foreman and worker.

Uncovering how these distinctions were naturalized in language, and form an ideological basis for “common sense,” requires a methodology that can discern the relationship between language and relations of domination and subordination in capitalist society. Of course, one of the biggest challenges to doing discourse analysis is formulating a sound methodology. A clumsy attempt was made by John Smail in “New Language for Labour and Capital: The Transformation of discourse in the early years of the Industrial Revolution.” In this piece, Smail addressed an 1806 Parliamentary committee investigating the woolen industry in Britain and distinguished two discourses in the evidence: a “corporate discourse” that favoured a traditional artisan ideal and an “industrial discourse” arguing for a repeal of the Tudor trade statutes. Adrian Randall’s response to Smail’s argument correctly claimed, among other things, that the latter’s concept of discourse was lacking in nuance: the attribution of these discourses into two camps Smail describes imposes an unnecessarily rigid dichotomy at the expense of other, more subtle, social understandings. A particular oversight in

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276 Fredric Jameson was particularly concerned with this. In the Political Unconscious, for example, Jamieson argues that all texts are “political” and are, subsequently, cultural artifacts or socially symbolic acts. These “narratives” thus stand as a means to interpret “the problematic of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, or representation, of history and of cultural production ….” See Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious (Ithaca, 1981), 13.


Smail’s approach was the non-existence of reciprocity between discourses and the absence in his work of middling actors who saw merit in both the new and the old order. Furthermore, Smail appears to have simply, and somewhat arbitrarily, imposed one of his two discourses on to the witnesses who gave evidence at this parliamentary committee.

Most proponents of discourse analysis choose a key word or phrase that allows for an analysis of larger social understandings. For example, in his early work on discourse analysis, Herbert Marcuse drew attention to the ways in which managers, educators, experts and politicians developed a “voice of command” that naturalized a set of social understandings. This voice of command was appropriated from advertising -- the syntax is abridged and condensed, giving the language more directness. Marcuse notes, for example, that “you” and “your” were used so frequently that they fix images in people’s minds, rendering them incapable of effectively protesting or refusing the tenets of that which is being said.279 A similar approach is made in Norman Fairclough’s work on the Tony Blair’s speeches. In New Labour, New Language Fairclough displays how the language in Blair’s speeches conceals what the Labour government is actually about. Of particular interest are the ways in which New Labour constructs neo-liberalism and globalization as givens that are taken for granted and assumed.280 For all these authors, identifying key terms allows some insight into the ways language naturalizes implicit understandings that resulted in a particular power dynamic.

My ‘discourse analysis’ methodology has been influenced by these works. It proceeds by identifying key words and then showing how language (pronouns, metaphors and ‘taken for granted’ articulations) reinforced and constructed power relationships between employers and employees as well as commissioners and witnesses. Another method I employ entails discussing binaries such as employer and employee, normal and pathological, individual and state, and, finally, right and wrong. These discrepancies were prominent in the commonsense of social reform in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. These oppositions afford us an opportunity to understand, in part, the rationale of the middle class’s vision of a moral and respectable industrialized society. Furthermore, these binaries in the text of the Commission also provide a basis from which to understand the relationship between bourgeois values and state formation.

This thesis is divided into five more chapters. Chapters Two through Four are an exploration of the Labour Commission as a source; Chapters Five and Six address the Commission as a text. I have split the chapters into this scheme because this thesis is intended to provide a new understanding of the Labour Commission as a historical source that is both empirically aware and critically alert. Chapter Two will address royal commissions in Canadian political culture by suggesting that they combine political posturing as well as the active creation of knowledge about the central features of Canadian society. This chapter will also trace the institutional history of royal commissions, drawing out their deep British roots and noting differences between British and Canadian royal commissions. Macdonald’s extensive use of royal
commissions to investigate the “success” of the National Policy, report on the condition of Canadian workers, and defuse the tensions created by industrialization by displaying a state interested in the welfare of its citizens will also be discussed in this chapter. Evidence suggests that the government was under the impression that industrialism’s hardest problems had yet to surface in Canada. Therefore, I shall also provide a synopsis of the other commissions that looked into industrialization between 1880 and 1895 as well as the political debates that warranted these investigations.

Chapter Three looks at the commissioners appointed to the Labour Commission. The chapter begins with a narrative focused on Macdonald’s announcement of the Commission, reaction to the selection of commissioners, and the interests he was trying to address in his selection of commissioners. This chapter will also address the biographies of the commissioners. The clashes between the “working-class” commissioners and the “paternal” commissioners throughout the hearings of the Commission as well as in the two reports submitted to the government in 1889 have supported a two-class model of the late-Victorian social structure. This chapter will raise questions with regard to how a two-class model has affected historical attention to the Commission and why it is problematic. Macdonald clearly understood that ‘representative commissioners’ would be appointed to the Commission such that diverse interests would be accounted for in its composition. However, determining what each commissioner ‘represented’ (in terms of labour and capital) is not an easy task.

Chapter Four will provide an analysis of the witnesses who testified at the Commission’s hearings. This chapter will discuss the participants in the Commission
within the context of middle-class-formation and patronage. I shall also explore the implications of a definition of middle class and how it compares to other social groups that are frequently noted in late-Victorian society such as labour aristocrats or labour intellectuals. To this end, I have compiled a collective biography of the witnesses in an effort to reach some conclusions not only about who testified, but also about how the Commission compiled statistics and targeted witnesses so as to construct a particular vision of labour and capital and, in the process, a bourgeois vision of the social order. Furthermore, as part of the state-formation agenda of this thesis, this chapter will also discuss the investigative merits of the Commission with respect to the selection of witnesses.

With the “Labour Commission as source” component of this study accounted for in Chapters Two, Three and Four, the last two chapters will explore the Commission’s Report as a text. Chapter Five addresses the power dynamics within the hearings of the Commission ranging from its court-like appearance and procedures to the effects the audience had on the testimony. I also address the parameters of respectability presented in the Commission through close attention to the questions posed by the commissioners. I will examine how ‘expertise’ on the relations of labour and capital was constructed through the answers of witnesses and the questions of the commissioners. Chapter Six further analyzes power metaphors in the language of labour and capital and shows how the Commission actively created the categories of labour and capital for the benefit of the investigation. This chapter will also analyze the ways liberalism permeates the discussion of the relations of labour and capital with respect to the identification of a
social problem and the state’s role in providing a solution. Finally, I target specific key words such as “rights” and “freedoms” in the effort to understand how language is instrumental to understanding the power dynamics of liberal-capitalist social orders such as Canada.

The political and economic environment of the Labour Commission was characterized by a growing social awareness -- a discovery of the social as a category and as a problem. The literature on social reform and middle-class formation in Canada suggests that these movements arose in reaction to effects of industrialization and its impact on the kind of “nation” this group wanted to create. However, how these visions of the Canadian political order were consented to by people not part of the “middle class” presents a more difficult problem. As becomes obvious in the Labour Commission, notions of the “positive” liberal state were not confined to middle-class reformers but permeated many other social strata. In fact, the sheer range of perceptions regarding “state activities” in the Commission anticipates an eventual shift from individual “negative” liberalism to collective “positive” (welfare) liberalism that would occur in the twentieth century. What will become clear in this study of the Labour Commission is the extent to which the novel involvement of workers (and employers) as state “experts,” and the unusual extension of a liberal state into the world behind the factory gates, marks a transition from one form of liberal order to another.
Chapter Two

Canadian Royal Commissions, State Formation and Late-Nineteenth Century Industrialization

[It] is significant that much of the history of Canada could be interpreted through the work of commissions of inquiry.¹

It is doubtful whether any commissions of inquiry ever accomplish any good purpose. Volumes of evidence are taken at great expense, many sessions are held and much money is spent. Then an owlish report is issued, containing solemn platitudes which most people know all about, then the report goes to the waste paper baskets, and the mountain in labor is silent again.²

Almost a century separates these statements. What is interesting is that, although they seem to disagree with each other, both are in some respects “true.” Royal commissions and commissions of inquiry have tackled many of the central issues facing Canada’s social-political order since Confederation.³ In fact, commissions have been employed so often that some commentators refer to Ottawa as a “graveyard of royal commissions.” J.E. Hogetts claims that, “[b]etween 1867 and 1897 the [D]ominion government appointed an average of less than a score of commissions each decade; since 1897, the average has been well above fifty for each decade.”⁴ Such commissions are costly, formal and extensive investigations that solicit information from interested parties, experts and people who have ‘experienced,’ in some way, the subject at hand.

¹ GC, Minister of Supply and Services, Law Reform Commission of Canada (Ottawa, 1977), 11.
³ The only difference between a Royal Commission and a Commission of Inquiry is that the former bears the Royal Seal. Both investigations are vested with the same power to call witnesses and request evidence.
Furthermore, they frequently address issues several times over. Finally, royal commissions are rife with partisan interests, political posturing and legal formality. The information that they collect and the knowledge they generate has had significant influence on governments, policy makers and historians. Such characteristics have meant that royal commissions occupy a central place in many histories of Canadian political culture.

Royal commissions occupy the top tier of state-sanctioned investigations for several reasons. They travel extensively in the effort to address “national priorities” by conducting hearings in different regions. In the process they tacitly promote federalism by seeking out and engaging those on the periphery. They target and create a vast network of ‘interested’ Canadians by encouraging their participation in the discussion of ‘national affairs.’ Finally, they cater to partisan interests and patronage networks through the selection of commissioners and witnesses. Simply put, royal commissions gather a select number of ‘representative’ Canadians with the promise of not only addressing, but also resolving, national issues.

This ‘commissioned’ method of addressing national issues is, in many respects, particularly compatible with the advancement and legitimization of ‘Canadian’ bourgeois beliefs and values. In fact, it was not only the Canadian government that was sanctioning state investigations into the labour question in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The United States and Britain were also frequently assembling

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5 Royal Commissions are created by cabinet on behalf of the Queen or King and are empowered by a Royal Warrant issued in Letters Patent.
6 I put “Canadian” in quotations here not to challenge any notion of national identity but as an acknowledgement of the particularities of Canadian royal commissions.
investigations into the effects of industrialization, child labour and labour unrest. Indeed, large-scale social investigations were the order of the day as “professionals” in Canada, Britain and the United States collected statistics, and wrote and lectured on the Labour Question for the sake of their respective governments. However, there is an interesting discrepancy between Canada and other countries in the kinds of “professionals” who conducted these investigations. In Canada in the 1880s and 1890s, journalists, judges and lawyers, social reformers and even organized workers and labour intellectuals were called into service as Commissioners. Although this gave such state investigations a complex vision of late-Victorian values and understandings, it also meant that they were often well behind the curve in accessing new concepts from social science and statistics. In this case, for instance, although the Commission collected thousands of bits of data about economic life, and put at least some energy into massaging them into patterns, there was no evidence that its data influenced any decision-making body within the bureaucracy or gave rise to a more systematic or rigorous interpretation of the Canadian labour market or the Canadian economy. There was no scope within the Canadian bureaucracy for the scientific analysis of such data.

Commissions offered these ‘intellectuals’ an opportunity to generalize beyond the specific instances about patterns of wealth and poverty in society. Canadian legislators, as well as their American and British counterparts, responded to the debate between labour and capital by commissioning social investigations like the royal commission and, in turn, created a forum in which this debate could occur. In the process the Canadian state, with the consent of the working and middle class, became a
central player in the definition and proposed resolution of the Labour Question. Understanding how the state, through the device of the Labour Commission, was able to manage the tensions between labour and capital in late-Victorian Canada requires an in-depth look at the institution of royal commissions.

Royal commissions and commissions of inquiry have enjoyed much scholarly attention in terms of what they are intended to achieve. In Canadian Politics, Rand Dyck claims that royal commissions “are substitutes for any substantive government action. It is commonly held, for example, that a royal commission is appointed to take the heat off the government in connection with some problematic situation in the hope that by the time the commission’s report is published, the problem will have evaporated.”7 Understanding royal commissions as “substitutes for any substantive government action” draws Dyck to the conclusion that they are a symbolic response to political unrest in Canada. Numerous other commentators, scholars and journalists alike, have similarly criticized royal commissions as ineffective: they shelve problems, postpone action and lack the power to enact their own recommendations. Yet mysteriously governments continue to “commission” them. Why? Arguably even the ineffective and inconclusive commissions generate useful data. And those which focus on highly controversial topics allow Canadians to “have their say” on fundamental issues of the day, thus both providing information to the government about public opinion and allowing rank-and-file Canadians to think they have had some influence over policy. As Neil Bradford claims, “in times of economic crisis or turbulence, when demand for new policy ideas is

7 Rand Dyck, Canadian Politics (Toronto, 1993), 394.
high but the political system’s capacity to supply them is weak, royal commissions have filled the vacuum, clarifying matters for a host of political actors uncertain about their interests and strategic choices in the future.”

James Maxwell goes further. He claims that royal commissions “perform the function of channeling knowledge within society and, to the extent to which the application of knowledge is a method of maintaining a balanced course of change within society, they contribute to change at the societal level.” Maxwell’s often overlooked Ph.D. thesis on royal commissions in Canada addresses many of the themes that have surfaced in more contemporary work on them. For Maxwell, royal commissions do more than symbolic work. They represent the formulation of expert opinion, the relation of public knowledge to governmental policy and provide information for programs of broad social change. Furthermore, royal commissions attain legitimacy because of their supposedly non-partisan “objective,” non-governmental nature and the prestige that accompanies being a commissioner. Even though they cannot force their recommendations onto governments, the information that royal commissions compile inevitably affects how major social issues are addressed: “[i]t appeared to us that royal commissions were intimately concerned with infusing knowledge into the social

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10 Maxwell’s thesis is largely not included in current discussions on royal commissions. Yet, contemporary work on royal commissions and their social/political affects is growing. For example see Jane Jenson, “Commissioning Ideas: Representation and Royal Commissions,” in Susan D. Phillips (ed.), *How Ottawa Spends: Making Change* (Ottawa, 1994).
structure, with creating roles which will handle the new knowledge and in some cases with creating that knowledge.”\(^{11}\)

However, as the Labour Commission suggests, the “knowledge” generated by a Commission often condenses other power relations — those exercised by social reformers over their target populations, men over the morality of women, employers over their union-organizing employees. The ‘social’ information that royal commissions generate is a reflection and a creation of social power relations. Maxwell notes, with respect to class, that “elites utilize royal commissions as one means of maintaining their positions of power and although conditions may change … royal commissions reflect the structure of the larger society.”\(^{12}\) Understanding how royal commissions cater to the aims of the elite requires determining not only how they solicit the opinions of those affected by a particular social problem, but also how this solicitation alleviates the very tensions it is intended to investigate. As Maxwell and others suggest, royal commissions actually define social problems and, in the process, simplify issue(s) by creating a controlled environment wherein the participants most affected are given the opportunity to voice their concerns. In conclusion, Maxwell claims that royal commissions represent the creation and infusion of knowledge into society; they also create roles concerning how to handle that new knowledge and temporarily defuse

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\(^{11}\) Maxwell, “Royal Commissions and Social Change in Canada,” 72.

\(^{12}\) Ibid. The suggestion that royal commissions “reflect the structure of the larger society” works nicely with an interpretation of the Labour Commission as a text. This idea is further developed in chapters 5 and 6.
tensions by allowing the participants (particularly those most affected by the issue) the opportunity make their concerns known.\textsuperscript{13}

Maxwell’s views on the function of royal commissions echo other international work on large social investigations, which topic has received much attention, mostly in the form of a “social control” model.\textsuperscript{14} From this standpoint, social policy is viewed as a product of the values and interests of dominant elites within a class society. Subscribers to the theory of social control argue that the official inquiry functioned to maintain a stable hierarchical society and to legitimate the capitalist social order by validating an existing range of policy options rather than by producing innovative policy solutions. For example, Roger Davidson claims that policy formation and social investigation in Britain involved a process that “incorporated a range of competing elites, including bureaucratic and professional groups whose status and aspirations were less directly and less critically dependent on the imperatives of the market …. [A]n analysis of the rationale and scope of civil intelligence registers the need to recognize the more elitist and manipulative aspects of social reform.”\textsuperscript{15} However, at the root of the social control theory are the notions that class lines are easily identifiable, that state objectives were

\textsuperscript{13} Sam Heakes, a commissioner appointed to the Labour Commission, wrote a Montreal paper claiming that, “[t]here are a number of leading men in the ranks of organized labor who believe that, regardless of persons, the Commission should be made use of as a means of laying the opinions of workingmen before the country.” See \textit{Montreal Daily Witness}, November 19, 1887, 4.


clear, and that policy formation was a strictly top-down process — all assumptions that, as the following chapters will show in detail, are questionable in this case.16

This chapter will address royal commissions in Canada and describe the “symbolic” response(s) to industrialism that occurred in the legislature, and in corresponding commissions, that both preceded and followed the formation of the Labour Commission. Even though no substantive federal labour legislation was enacted in the late nineteenth century, much attention was bestowed upon collecting information on the “labour question.” What purposes did it serve? Three seem particularly important. The first was to provide evidence of the benefits of the National Policy, whose successful impact upon such industries as cotton could be showcased dramatically through the late 1880s. The second was to suggest that the government was listening to working-class and middle-class Canadians as they expressed their grievances and was conversant with the latest language of the Labour Question. A third, more abstract consideration was the larger agenda of state information-gathering. The Labour Commission, the standardization of weights and measures, and the implementation of scientific census taking were all of a piece with the gradual development of a modern bureaucratic state. Royal commissions, like other modes of state formation, discipline the natural world so as to allow governments, researchers and

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16 Davidson argues in the conclusion of his piece that social policy was a top-down process: “the rationale and scope of welfare investigation did not indicate a pluralist structure of social policy, incorporating the popular demands and aspirations of organized labor. It clearly reflected the paternalism of prewar social administration ... rather than as a “class” whose aspirations required a fundamental shift in the ideology and personnel of social-policy making.” See Davidson, “The State and Social Investigation in Britain,” 275.
policy makers the means to ‘understand’ the complexities of ‘the social’ to a specific end.17

State investigations also fit quite well into the perspective of a bourgeois public sphere. Newspapers have frequently been the focus of studies on the public sphere but royal commissions appear to be equally suitable as subjects. Royal commissions create an environment in which select participants — experts, professionals and people who experienced the issue — are encouraged to engage in public debate about complex social issues. In other words, royal commissions bring order to social issues by selecting “representative Canadians” to give testimony. They require witnesses to answer specific questions according to predetermined understandings of the issue at hand. The result is a specific kind of “performance of the social,” a public sphere strictly limited by the preconceptions of those empowered to construct it.

Bruce Curtis’s work on the 1871 census deals extensively with how state-administered investigations assemble information and categorize it according to a political agenda. Curtis argues that state investigations package elements of an issue into neat comprehensible administrative abstractions: they “discipline empirical social relations in order to capture them in the confines of the grid.”18 Curtis notes that scientific investigations such as the census make elements of the world “natural” by

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17 Commissions, like courts, committees and legislatures, could be considered a more ‘formal’ public sphere where rules and regulations affect deliberation amongst social groups. As John L. Brooke remarks, information from this process is fed back into the more ‘open’ public sphere of civil society, “completing a cycling of power and legitimation.” See John L. Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic,” in J. Pasley, A. Robertson and D. Waldstreicher, Beyond the Founders (Chapel Hill, 2004), 210.

reinforcing and utilizing “common sense.” In this light, the inherent state formation agenda in these investigations is clear in that:

... [t]here exists an order of reality, ‘matters of national importance,’ which agencies of the state can know, but which is different from and not accessible by what ‘everyone knows,’ is a radical political claim. In class-divided societies, this claim can sustain the existence of the illusory community in the interests of which agencies of the state and political parties justify their political projects.19

In other words, agents of the state not only responded to, but also in part manufactured, national issues and, in doing so, legitimized their own social values. The (illusory) community that Curtis mentions in the above citation is different from the Canadian population constructed by the census. In fact, the census actively created a “population” by making people fit into pre-determined categories such as ethnicity, religion and gender to name a few. The 1871 census, according to Curtis, represents the first standardized and regulated account of Canada’s population. The categories were determined by experts in such a way that census takers were, for the first time, forced to work within stringent protocols to make the endeavour “scientific.” Of course, as Curtis notes, the “science” of the 1871 census was a thin guise for a project designed to actively create a Canadian population according to, among other things, a “fundamentalist Catholic ethnic-national imagination.”20

For Curtis and other investigators, the implied understandings and methodology of large-scale social investigations entail a complex relationship between power and

19 Curtis, Politics of Population, 308. See also James Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed (New Haven, 1998).
20 Curtis, Politics of Population, 23.
knowledge. Curtis, for example, uses Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’, to address
the relation between power and knowledge of which language (or discourse) is central.
Simply put, the act of ‘governing’ encompasses “the multiple and dispersed forms of
knowledge and practice that shape presuppositions about the purpose of governing,
how it is to be undertaken, by whom, and to what ends.” In large scale investigations
into social issues, this mode of governing entails several presuppositions: Raymond
Williams, for example, notes an ‘identifying position’ that operates from above and
beyond, creates a new economy of sameness and difference in which variation is
deviation. In this frame of reference social investigation encompasses the manufacture
of a position from which social elements can be viewed and understood. From this
position, the census — and the Labour Commission — created a “knowable community”
by standardizing and categorizing various social elements (like labour and capital).

The ‘professionalization’ of knowledge that went into the 1871 census provides a
means of contextualizing the Labour Commission to a limited extent. It must be
acknowledged that the census was a much more coherent, comprehensive, even
‘modern’ investigation. Royal commissions simply do not exercise the same degree of

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22 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York, 1973), 171. In this work Williams refers
to the “naturalization” of a specific “structure of feeling” of English country life that masked
agrarian and industrial capitalism’s dehumanizing and exploitative system of social and
economic relations.
23 Foucault refers to this in his discussion of power consisting of either brute force (which is one
sided and exercised for the sake of control) or power (which seeks the consent of the ruled and
always leaves room counterstrategies). See Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of
Insanity in the Age of Reason (New York, 1988), 84. Furthermore, Foucault notes that power
functions by aligning itself with “truth claims,” thereby legitimizing or justifying itself with
“knowledge.”
analytical rigour. For example, the Labour Commission largely generated impressions on the relations of labour and capital, some quantitative, some qualitative. There is little evidence that these impressions were ever put to work in the implementation of policy, nor that they guided any element of the state apparatus in formulating a disciplined and exacting concept of Canadian society. Moreover, the constitution of nineteenth-century royal commissions reveals an older, more communal method of how to manage power and knowledge than the models familiar from the 1930s on (or those emerging in such nineteenth-century industrial power-houses as Massachusetts). In the Labour Commission, practical experience (and not professional training as an economist or planner) qualified one as a knowledgeable, reliable witness. In fact, the Labour Commission’s expert witnesses were largely a grab-bag of municipal functionaries, earnest social reformers and journalists. Thus, like the census, the Labour Commission manufactured knowledge on the nation (specifically the relations of labour and capital). Yet, unlike the census, this royal commission inadvertently revealed how unmodern the Canadian state was in the way it constructed itself.

Social investigation into industrialization was a distinct feature of the late-Victorian period in the United States and Britain. As many scholars have noted, investigations in these countries displayed a growing trend of identifying and constructing broad social categories so as to “understand” and thereby bring order to the natural world. For example, many addressed categories such as labour, capital, and
the unemployed (these were new social abstractions in the late-Victorian period). Mary Furner notes that in the United States, the state and national governments took the lead in addressing the contradictions of the labour question:

[C]ongressional investigations of the labor question served more than one purpose. Initially, they were political responses that showed concern in times of crisis, placating angry constituents and buying time for evasion for mature deliberation. They also contributed to an assessment of inherited theories of enterprise and government, required in all societies facing industrial transformation. Along with other forms of social criticism, the congressional inquiries of the 1870s to the 1890s subjected the new industrial capitalism to a political and ideological fitness test.

However, a change occurred in American investigations in the 1880s. In the preceding decade, social investigations into the labour question had centered on protecting propertied independence. With the phenomenal rise of labour activism and strikes in the 1880s, “the congressional version of the labor question [changed and began to refer] to the living and working conditions of a class of wage earners apparently locked in perpetual conflict with an opposing class of employers.”

In Britain, alarm about the potential for class war also prompted investigations designed to massage social tensions,

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24 In a later period, there would be extensive exchanges between social experts in Britain, the United States and Canada. As Roger Davidson points out, “Faced with the social strains of a maturing economy and the unrest stemming from the erosion of traditional industrial relationships, British policy makers were eager to monitor overseas legislation (in Canada and Australasia) designed to contain major industrial disputes and to maintain the continuity of essential services and output.” See Davidson, “The State and Social Investigation in Britain,” 248. Furthermore, there was a tradition of academics and intellectuals that devised methodologies on how social investigations should be properly conducted. See Daniel T. Rogers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, 1998).


a role that was bestowed upon local social reformers or elites. As Roger Davidson observes: “[O]fficial investigations during the 1886-1906 period ... underscored the need, in the short term, to avoid drastic and contentious measures in favor of marginal innovations designed to widen the repertoire of relief provisions in the dispensation of local authorities.”27 As he points out, “[m]any investigations, such as those relating to labor unrest, pauperism, vagrancy, and unemployment, while clearly motivated in part by a commitment to monitor areas of social distress and destitution, reflected also a strong concern to identify groups within society for whom the normal controls of the work ethic and industrial discipline were either unacceptable or inoperative.”28 The relations of labour and capital reached a high mark of importance in the late nineteenth century. A distinct feature of these investigations was the construction of broad social categories designed to account for diverse interests, and massage class tension. As Furner notes, these investigations, “located and publicized the new meanings that labor and capital were taking on as social categories, and oriented discussion of the implications of new forms of property and work relations for republican institutions and values, forcing conceptual and political change.”29

There were reciprocities and ambiguities entailed in this scientific ‘systematization’ of the particularities of social life. For example, Curtis notes that many census takers interviewed people about the questions on the census and adjusted the documents appropriately, often leaving detailed notes in the margins. Many Canadians

27 Davidson, “The State and Social Investigation in Britain,” 269.
28 Davidson, “The State and Social Investigation in Britain,” 274. The different attitudes toward the “undeserving poor,” in comparison to the “deserving poor,” would be a classic example.
were not comfortable making their identities fit the criteria provided on the census returns. However, their muted resistance does not make it into the official version of Canada’s population. Royal commissions, in a similar vein, provide an opportunity for dissenter to have their say more openly. Nonetheless, such resisters were often silenced by the commissioners and their testimony largely disregarded. In the Labour Commission, expertise was largely a ‘social’ conception based on ‘practical knowledge’ and contingent on the commissioners and like-minded witnesses. At different times, the testimony of single taxers, social morality advocates, trade unionists, workers, women and children are all present in the testimony. Yet these voices are often muted and at times interrupted or derided. By allowing these people the opportunity to voice their opinions in this public sphere, the state was able to appease their concerns under the guise that something was being done.

Royal commissions are specifically constructed investigations that encourage people to make known their concerns, participate and engage with the government in the effort to address a social problem. This process bestows a dominant power position upon the state in as much as it is the body that creates this knowledge, manufactures these social abstractions and disciplines various social elements to a very specific end. However, an array of values and beliefs permeates this “creation of knowledge” and reinforces a particular negotiated vision of social order. Rather than a top-down vehicle of social control, wherein the categories of labour and capital are rigidly enforced and state objectives abundantly clear, the Labour Commission massaged (rather than solved) social tension. The hearings were a negotiation not only between labour and capital, but
also between citizens and a state concerned to appear *au fait* with the Labour Question. They suggested (even if somewhat misleadingly) a reciprocal process through which expertise might be shared and policies discussed. It was in this ability to create a hegemonic sense of a state willing to learn from social realities and respond to its citizens that we can locate the enduring effectiveness of royal commissions as agents of state formation in Canada.

They are indeed part of a venerable political tradition. As J.E. Hodgetts remarked,

> Whenever a problem is encountered, it has become almost routine practice to plead for a royal commission ‘to look into the matter.’ [All] the major social, economic and cultural issues confronting a growing nation have, at one time or another (and often repeatedly), been brought within their terms of reference: transportation, banking resources, dominion-provincial relations, price spreads, future economic prospects, laws dealing with sex and sin, health, taxation, broadcasting, magazines, culture and, bilingualism and biculturalism. In the vernacular: you name it, and a royal commission will have or has had it.\(^\text{30}\)

Canadian governments facing turmoil or controversy have, since the 1880s, found in the royal commission a method for cooling things down and deflecting responsibility.

In fact, royal commissions and commissions of inquiry have so often been employed in Canada that scholars have found it difficult to enumerate them all. Writing in 1964, Hodgetts observed that the total number of royal commissions appointed by the federal government since Confederation was well above 300. A number of authors have compiled similar information: Arthur Harrison Cole listed 82 in 1939; Grace S. Lewis, a

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civil servant listed 100 the following year; Hodgetts’s M.A. thesis listed 276 in 1940; a
decade later Keith Callard listed 328. George Fletcher Henderson’s *Federal Royal
Commissions in Canada, 1867-1966* is the standard checklist for scholars at present.
However, Henderson’s useful list, published in 1967, is not without errors and
omissions. Even in today’s political climate royal commissions continue to address
major concerns for Canadians: health care and Aboriginal peoples are only two of many
examples.

As the title suggests, royal commissions were a British invention that Canada
inherited along with other aspects of its parliamentary and executive apparatus. Yet
Canadian commissions have developed their own “traditions” as well. They typically
involved a greater degree of formality. British royal commissions, like Canadian
commissions, originate from the executive of the House of Commons. The designation
‘royal’ is derived from the Queen’s Warrant which confers power on the commissions as
it also confirms their status at the top of the hierarchy of investigations. Canada has
added accompanying legislation — the Public Inquiries Act (PIA) — which further

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(Cambridge, 1939); Grace S. Lewis, *Dominion Bureau of Statistics* (Ottawa, 1940), 1108-1110; John
Edwin Hodgetts, “Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Canada: A Study in Investigative
Technique,” M.A. thesis, University of Toronto (1940), 137-138; Keith B. Callard, *Commissions of
Inquiry in Canada, 1867-1949* (Ottawa, 1950); George Fletcher Henderson, *Federal Royal
Commissions in Canada, 1867-1966* (Toronto, 1967); Dawna Petsche-Wark, *Royal Commissions and
Commissions of Inquiry for the Province of Upper Canada, Canada and Ontario, 1792-1991*
(Toronto, 1992).

32 For example, the 1881-2 Royal Commission to “enquire into the working of mills and factories
in the Dominion and labour employed therein” is not listed in Henderson’s book.

33 Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?” 476.
establishes a framework of rules within which all royal commissions operate.\textsuperscript{34} The PIA imposes no restraints on the executive, which can create as many royal commissions to examine any subject it sees fit to address. Furthermore, powers conferred by the PIA (such as the ability to subpoena witnesses, call for papers and hear evidence under oath) go beyond the usual powers possessed by British commissions.\textsuperscript{35} In Britain, commissioners do not have these privileges unless they are specifically conferred upon them by a Royal Warrant.

Canadian commissions often have one commissioner whereas British commissions typically employ many.\textsuperscript{36} It is commonly held that British commissions are larger because they are more concerned with giving adequate representation to all interests. The Canadian view that interests are best represented in the witness box rather than on the commission itself appears to be the reason membership is reduced.\textsuperscript{37} The very existence of a witness box suggests another difference between Canadian and British royal commissions. Royal commissions in Canada are usually headed by judges or lawyers; Canadian hearings have a court-like formality unlike the more relaxed atmosphere of those in Britain. In Canada, the commission’s secretary usually determines the pertinence of the evidence, the interested parties are expected to supply briefs outlining their arguments, and these become the basis for questions by the commission. The practice of employing judges on royal commissions undoubtedly

\textsuperscript{34} The first Inquiries Act was passed in 1868.  
\textsuperscript{35} Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 476-477.  
\textsuperscript{36} Of course, there are several examples of Canadian commissions having many commissioners (the Labour Commission being one).  
\textsuperscript{37} Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 477.
explains the stronger legalistic approach in Canadian investigations.\textsuperscript{38} In Canada, royal commissions strive for this legitimacy as “[t]he prestige of the judiciary is high and royal commissions thrive in the reflection of this prestige.”\textsuperscript{39} The judicial composition of Canadian commissions may also account for the fact that Canadian commissioners are usually paid by the government whereas British commissioners are not conventionally paid at all.\textsuperscript{40} Finally, in another departure from British practice, most commissions in Canada — the Labour Commission was an exception — do not publish the reports and testimony in free-standing volumes (although they are generally published in the \textit{Sessional Papers}).\textsuperscript{41}

The type of social problem that results in a royal commission usually falls into one of two categories: unique, non-recurring or conversely, endemic and recurrent issues, “… with which the positive state must perpetually and successfully grapple if economic growth and social stability are to be sustained by collective effort.”\textsuperscript{42} An example of a non-recurring issue would be the 1886 royal commission to \textit{Investigate Irregularities Regarding a Fuel Wood Contract at the Citadel, Quebec City}.\textsuperscript{43} The Labour Commission was very unusual in its nineteenth-century context in the breadth and generality of its organizing focus.

\textsuperscript{38} Hodgetts, “Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Canada,” 25.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}, 26.
\textsuperscript{40} If commissioners are paid it is directly by the Queen as disclosed in the Royal Warrant.
\textsuperscript{41} Publishing the reports verbatim is a British tradition. See Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 485. All of the royal commissions into industrialization I have discussed so far are only available in the \textit{Sessional Papers}.
\textsuperscript{42} Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 479.
This type of investigation can entail a number of functions that are quite useful with respect to the “collective effort” of the state and its citizens. Governments have appointed royal commissions for a variety of reasons: to serve as a delaying measure in an embarrassing political situation, to gather needed information in the face of new problems, to provide a firmer basis for a decision on government policy, to sample public opinion on a potentially delicate political matter before legislation is introduced, to educate public opinion, to adjudicate disputes, and as a response to pressure groups.⁴⁴ Hodgetts claims:

Where it is necessary for the government to sound public opinion before formulating policy in new fields, the use of traveling inquisitors, relying on public hearings, would also seem to be sensible. Supplementing this function and of a particular value in a federally organized state, the royal commission is also a legitimate tool to employ for the purpose of encouraging a public dialogue and preparing the public to accept a new programme. In this sense, royal commissions play an educational role and possibly a public relations function on behalf of the government.⁴⁵

Although royal commissions are often perceived to be carrying out the objectives of the state, they are not accountable to party politics in any formal way. Royal commissions thrive in the appearance of state-sanctioned, institutional clout; they represent a common meeting ground for the best brains in politics, the civil service, and the public at large. In fact, their success depends on the cooperation of all three. As some scholars have noted, royal commissions have been especially successful in bringing the public closer to the government or helping the executive prepare the public for a policy which

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⁴⁴ Henderson, *Federal Royal Commissions in Canada*, xii.
⁴⁵ Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 488.
it thinks desirable. Furthermore, within budgetary constraints, commissions are largely free to devise their own methods of operation. For example, many royal commissions in Canada have often incorporated traveling to different parts of the country in the course of their investigations. As Hodgetts remarks, they “canvas public opinion by traveling across a continent holding public hearings at convenient locations. The cathartic value of this exercise is especially significant in a pluralist society like Canada’s.”

There are many critics of royal commissions. Some scholars “[contend] that royal commissions are convenient devices for shelving problems, postponing decisive action, or providing a pseudo-objective stamp of approval for a line of action to which the government is already firmly committed.” That five commissions relating to the labour question were tabled in the late nineteenth century without any substantive federal legislation certainly creates the impression that they were used as a delaying tactic. The Canadian preference for few commissioners is also criticized by some who think more diverse interests are accounted for in British commissions. Canadian commissions usually employ one commissioner because the “expertise” or pre-conceived beliefs of many commissioners can foster minority reports. However, because the selection of commissioners is the responsibility of the executive, party loyalty usually prevents

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46 Maxwell, Bradford and Hodgetts all agree on this point. In particular see Hodgetts, “Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Canada,” 23.
47 Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 480.
48 Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 480; Rand Dyck claims the Royal Commissions are “[un]intrusive policy instruments.” See Dyck, Canadian Politics, 394. Neil Bradford states that royal commissions “[produce] new ‘action frameworks’ enabling policy makers to bring together the necessary political support and administrative expertise for significant change across a range of policy fields.” See Bradford, “Writing Public Philosophy,” 2.
49 The Labour Commission is an exception to this feature of Canadian royal commissions. Of course, the Labour Commission did submit two reports.
minority reports. While partisan appointments can hinder the investigative process, the
publicity attached to the use of royal commissions seldom encourages the executive to
be too obvious in finding places for political friends.\textsuperscript{50} As Hodgetts argues, “blatantly
partisan appointments are seldom made but, since it must assume responsibility for
carrying out the recommendations of the commission, the executive obviously searches
for persons known to be in sympathy with its general aims.”\textsuperscript{51} Perhaps the most serious
problem with royal commissions, and the most common grounds for critiques of them,
is their absolute lack of power concerning their recommendations:

Royal commissions are short lived and when they have reported they are
no longer on stage to ensure a follow-up on their recommendations or to
force governments to explain why their advice has not been taken. There
is little or no carry-over from one inquiry to another, research is
duplicated and reports may repeat themselves.\textsuperscript{52}

Within the five investigations into industrialism between 1881 and 1895 much
information is repeated. The only federal labour legislation enacted was the Labour
Commission’s recommendation that Labour Day be a national holiday.

\textsuperscript{50} It should be mentioned that Alfred Blackeby was involved with most of the commissions
appointed to look into industrialization during this period. Blackeby, who is featured in the
preface of Andrew Holman’s work on the middle class, was a Commissioner on all the
commissions that preceded the Labour Commission. He was the secretary of the Labour
Commission. His position on the Labour Commission allowed him to review the importance of
some testimony as well as solicit witnesses. Biographical information on Blackeby is provided in
more detail in chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{51} Hodgetts, “Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Canada,” 26. It is fairly clear that most of the
commissioners appointed to the Labour Commission were sound Conservatives. However, by
extension, the witnesses can go through a similar selection process. One of the features of royal
commissions, in comparison to lesser investigations, is that the Royal Warrant prevents the
government from stopping an investigation once it has begun. Consequently, governments
tended to take care in outlining not only the commissioners but the terms of reference for a
commission, as well as a date upon which the Warrant becomes defunct.

\textsuperscript{52} Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 489.
A closer look at the commissions assembled to investigate the labour question in this period discloses a number of important themes concerning the evolution of bourgeois social norms and values in late-nineteenth-century Canada. For example, such subjects as water closets and alcohol consumption were frequently addressed by both the commissioners and the witnesses. For the most part, the commissions assembled between 1881 and 1895 were intended to address the ‘important’ questions concerning industrialization such as the employment of women and children, hours of labour and safety concerns such as ventilation, fire escapes and well maintained machinery. Also, recommendations for inspectors to monitor abuses between employers and employees were frequently suggested. Furthermore, all were in favor of the government assuming some responsibility for correcting the evils of factory discipline. In effect, these commissions constructed labour and capital relations in ways that suggested the state’s centrality, both to the investigation and to the solution of long-term problems. For many of these commissions, such ‘solutions’ incorporated enthusiastic endorsement of Tory economic policy and its positive effects on Canadians and an equally emphatic prescription of state mediation for workers and employers alike.

That the federal government had not yet enacted factory legislation by the beginning of the 1880s was not an indication that it was neglecting the subject. In fact, factory legislation was introduced in three successive sessions of parliament before the announcement of the Labour Commission. The Conservative M.P. from Cornwall, Darby Bergin, introduced factory legislation bills before the House of Commons several times during the 1880s. Bergin’s interest in the fate of working people likely arose out of
events he witnessed in his own riding: “Cornwall’s textile industry doubtless offered examples of why workers badly needed protection from unguarded machinery, unventilated, overcrowded working areas, and an intensive exploitation of women and children.”\(^{53}\) Bergin’s first attempt, a bill to “Regulate the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women” was introduced in 1880. It received a first reading without debate and went no further.\(^ {54}\) Bergin tried again to introduce a bill to “Regulate the Hours of Labor in Workshops, Mills and Factories in the Dominion” the following year. This bill was discussed briefly and then withdrawn as more information was requested. The failed bill prompted Sir Hector Langevin to promise that the government would appoint a royal commission, “so as to be able next Session to meet Parliament, either with a bill, or at all events to co-operate with the honorable gentleman when he brings this modified measure before Parliament.”\(^ {55}\)

There was strong collaboration between the Senate and the House of Commons with regard to the debate on factory legislation. The result of such debates was usually the appointment of a commission to investigate whether legislation was appropriate. For example, in 1882 the Minister of Inland Revenue “introduced into the Senate a bill based on the contemporary British and Massachusetts Factory Acts, and covering such matters as hours of work, overtime, meals and sanitation, and safety, and making provisions for

\(^{54}\) GC, *House of Commons Debates I* (1880), 79.
Several Senators argued that the question lay within the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces and that federal legislation would interfere unnecessarily in the contracts between master and servant. However, the question of jurisdiction easily slipped into the debate on the morality of industrialism, an issue that was directly related to the fate of the nation. Alex Campbell, in a speech summoning middle-class concerns about a strong, healthy, and moral working population, claimed that large scale industrialization affected all Canadians and not only employers and employees, raising

... subjects so important as that ... which go far beyond contracts between master and servant, which in their indirect effects concern the whole community and on which, to a certain extent, and so far as the population in manufacturing establishments go, the future of the country very much turns – whether we shall have a strong, healthy and moral population, likely to be credible to the country or whether we shall have a dwarfed and immoral population and so perpetuate in Canada all the evils which this inquiry has brought out in England and which we are trying to legislate for now.

For Campbell, the implementation of factory regulation was of national concern on moral and ethical grounds. He, and many others, feared that Canada might suffer as had England and America in their respective period of industrial development. Campbell argued that factory legislation was a valid element in any strategy of peace, order and good government. However, the issue was of such importance that "further information" was required; in particular, the Macdonald administration was receiving a

58 GC, Senate Debates (1882), 367-8.
considerable amount of correspondence from employers about the bill. In the end, Aikins decided to withdraw the motion in favor of bringing it up again in a new session of Parliament.

Not by coincidence, further information was assembled through a royal commission charged to Enquire Into the Working of Mills and Factories in the Dominion and Labor Employed Therein in the same year. It was made clear in the report that the “Lukes Commission,” as it came to be known, was intended to address a particular evil associated with industrialization: child labour. “The primary question giving rise to this inquiry is understood to be the employment of young children in mills and factories to such an extent as to warrant the Government in issuing a Commission in relation to the subject.”\(^{59}\) However, the Commission quickly turned its attention to other matters related to working conditions in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The two commissioners, William Lukes and A.H. Blackeby, reported that in the 465 factories that they had visited, they found the employment of children to be “extensive” and “on the rise.” They also reported that female labour was extensively employed in many mills and factories but also in private residences. Concerning the appropriate hours of labour, the commissioners suggested that the “Government might designate what number of hours should constitute a day’s or week’s work, the employees also are in favor of uniformity on this question, especially those who wish permanent location.”\(^{60}\) In summary, women and children were

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\(^{59}\) GC, Mills and Factories in the Dominion [hereafter Lukes Commission], RG 2, Vol. 0170 (1882), 5.

\(^{60}\) GC, Lukes Commission, RG 2, Vol. 0170, (1882), 3.
extensively employed in factories and residences across the Dominion and all parties were seemingly in agreement that the federal government should “step in” to regulate problems such as working hours.

The 1882 Commission can thus be seen as an early indication of a state more actively involved in the industrial life of the Dominion. Concerning the safety of machines and their operators, the report advised direct state action: “[a]s the Government deem it necessary to have their property under inspection the least that can be done (if they cannot make it compulsory) is to strongly advise all users of steam to adopt this course.”\textsuperscript{61} Other passages from the \textit{Report} made it sound as though the commissioners believed such questions as industrial safety lay within the province of many actors in civil society, and not only the state:

\begin{quote}
[w]hile this question, of such vital importance to humanity, is being treated with indifference by the authorities of churches, halls, and our public schools, it certainly cannot be a matter for surprise that manufacturers do not take the lead of equally responsible parties on the question, or that they should be forced to an expenditure which the State, under similar circumstances, does not provide for its subjects.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

Of particular urgency was the question of inadequate waterclosets:

\begin{quote}
A question which demands the immediate attention of the authorities is the inadequate and unsatisfactory provision made to meet the conveniences and common necessities of humanity. That insufficient closet accommodation exists, as a rule, in factories and workshops employing over twenty-five hands, is beyond dispute. The evils arising from such inconveniences are not only superficial and temporary, but it is to be feared, are serious and permanent in their nature.\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, 4.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, 5. As mentioned earlier, these notions of respectability, morality and social order were central features of middle-class formation.
\end{flushleft}
Equally grave was the reversal of gender roles found in certain settings:

We found two or three instances in which the husband reversed the civilized custom by sending the wife and mother to the factory while he attended cares at home. Other instances have come under our observation where the husband and father being delicate, the wife, with a moral heroism and courage, has gone to the factory to provide daily bread for the family.⁶⁴

What had started as an inquiry into child labour, thus quickly and easily expanded to include other seemingly naturally-related topics: morality, safety, water-closets and gender. At stake was the fate of the nation, as viewed from a middle-class perspective that blurred the lines between individual problems, social reform and state responsibilities. The issues central to middle-class reformers were clearly turning up in state-sanctioned “objective” investigations years before the formation of the Labour Commission.

According to the 1882 commissioners, the strife between employees and employers had not yet become a dominant threat to the Dominion. A favorable review of factories and factory workers in Canada was clear: “[w]e are certain that the artificers and workmen in Canada are as intelligent, industrious and sober a people as are to be found in any country. We have invariably noticed that in factories as described above, the operatives are of a superior class.”⁶⁵ The safety problems the commissioners encountered were largely the responsibility of a few small-scale employers: “[t]he rule,

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⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.  
⁶⁵ Ibid., 3 and 5.
apparently, which is observed by employers, is, not how many hands should occupy a
certain room or building, but how many can be got into it.” Poor employment practices
were the exception and not the rule in Canadian factories: “[y]our commissioners are
happy to inform the Government that many of our larger mills and factories in each of
the Provinces visited are being conducted on principles similar to those contained in the
Factory Bill, and are of a superior class.” Finally, the commissioners also recommended
government regulation to mitigate evils associated with child and female labour as well
as regulate the hours of work. The commissioners noted in their report that the ills that
factory legislation was supposed to remedy were already being tacitly rectified thanks to
“good workers” and “sound employment practices.” The commission was also clear that
further investigations were needed in anticipation of the inevitable ‘evils’ of
industrialism in the Dominion: “in deliberation of this question due weight must be
given to the conditions of labor in other countries with whom our workers have to
compete; that careful and reliable information be obtained, not merely as to the hours of
labor, but also to their surroundings, sanitary regulations, earnings, manner and cost of
living, etc.” Social morality and national prosperity were deeply intertwined and, for
the sake of the nation, required consistent attention not only in the form of legislation,
but also through further commissions of inquiry. In the conclusion of the report the
commissioners remarked that the factory laws of England and Massachusetts “are
working smoothly and satisfactorily, and conferring benefits alike on the employer and

66 Ibid., 5.
67 Ibid., 5.
the employee.” 68 The Lukes commission recommended that factory legislation and the
insertion of the state into the affairs of labour and capital were central to national
economic prosperity and that the government should proactively assemble further
information so as to pave the way for future economic growth. Within a year, Blackeby
and Lukes would be once more investigating labour legislation in other countries.

In 1883 the government appointed a Commission to Inquire into and Report on the
System of Laws Regulating Labour in the State of Massachusetts. 69 In spite of its title, the
commission was not confined to North America. Commissioner Lukes was sent to
Europe to investigate labour legislation. He was particularly impressed with Belgium,
which rejoiced in “lowest classes” which were “clean, respectable and respectful, and
are all decently clothed. There are no beggars in fact[,] everyone is found at work.” 70
Lukes’s vision of Belgium’s “clean, respectable and employed” working class was a
reflection of his own bourgeois visions of industrial order. His interpretation of

68 Ibid., 3 and 6.
69 As mentioned earlier, social investigations into industrialism flourished in the United States in
this period. Labour organization, strikes, market fluctuations and other sources of social unrest
were the basis of these investigations that actively and frequently involved the judiciary and
congress. In the United States, a series of inquires were formed to investigate the strikes that
dominated the late 1880s. As Mary Furner notes, “[b]etween 1886 and 1894, several major strikes
cranked up pressure for official action. Working on site, questioning hundreds of employees,
trade union heads, industrialists, and community leaders, the investigators probed for the
approximate causes of each disturbance. In so doing, they created an official record of these
conflicts that laid the basis for an assessment of their causes and consequences.” Furner, “The
Republican Tradition and the New Liberalism,” 208-9. Given the influence of the Knights of
Labor in Canada and the United States and the steady stream of workers who crossed the
border to work in the North Eastern states, it stands to reason that the Canadian government
was interested in the situation in Massachusetts.
70 GC, Commission to Enquire Into and Report on the System of Laws Regulating Labour in the State of
Massachusetts, Sessional Papers, no. 16-1883. These merits of the working classes in Belgium --
respectful, respectable, well clothed and employed -- would be on the agenda of the 1886-1889
Labour Commission as well.
Belgium’s prosperity highlights the positive results of that state’s targeted intervention in the economy. Blackeby, in his investigation in the United States, visited not only Massachusetts but also Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio. Blackeby shared with Lukes a sense that the state could become much more actively involved in industrial life.

Fully realizing the desire of the Government for the welfare of the industrial classes, your Commissioner has endeavored to collect and to present such facts as may be of service in the preparation of a measure which shall be calculated to promote the moral and natural welfare of that rapidly growing class, who are assisting by their labor and skill to build up the manufacturing interests of this Dominion.71

Similar to Canada’s social reformers, Lukes and Blackeby were concerned to establish the existence of “clean, moral and respectable” workers, whose qualities could be safeguarded by legislation. In the reports of the commission, Blackeby and Lukes were under the impression that their work was intended to assist in the eventual establishment of factory legislation. Lukes stated in his report that “I trust that it is sufficiently lucid to enable the Government to see in what respects the same are applicable or otherwise when introducing legislation on this important business in Canada.” Similarly, Blackeby stated that “it is hoped that what has been recorded in this report may be of some assistance in framing a law which shall prove beneficial in its operations to Canadian mill operatives.”72 Of course, no such legislation was enacted at the federal level during this period but the formation of these commissions and the

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
contents of the reports are indicative of the growing concern over the effects factory discipline was having on the morality and respectability of working Canadians.

Other legislative efforts were put in motion in 1883 and 1884. They were apparently thwarted, principally, by partisanship. For example, Leonard Tilley introduced Bill 117 to the House in 1883. This bill covered the employment of children under 12, a 10-hour day (sixty-hour week), sanitation issues (water-closets, overcrowding and regulations concerning cleaning machines) and, finally, the appointment of factory inspectors.\textsuperscript{73} Liberal opposition member and party leader Edward Blake asked the government to define “factory” and disclose other finer points about the bill (such as the number of inspectors to be appointed). In effect, the Liberals stonewalled the motion. The bill was eventually withdrawn pending some amendments. Blake stated upon its withdrawal that “the original Bill was very defective indeed, and I believe that every one of the alterations to be made are not improvements in any shape or way. It is quite clear that these alterations have been made in one interest, and in one interest only.”\textsuperscript{74} Blake was implying that the Conservative government’s bill was drafted under the watchful eye of manufacturing interests in the country.

Another new bill was referred to in the Speech from the Throne in 1884 and, subsequently, introduced in the House but it too was withdrawn without debate. Blake again asked the government about the delay in bringing new information before the House of Commons and inferred that other interests continued to mire the government’s

\textsuperscript{73} GC, \textit{House of Commons Debates} (1883), 827-828.
\textsuperscript{74} GC, \textit{House of Commons Debates} (1883), 1386.
intentions. Tilley responded that indeed outside interests were influencing the introduction of a new bill; however, what Tilley was referring to is not clear. Bernard Ostry claims that such interests were made up of the Manufacturers’ Association or the Trades and Labour Council.\textsuperscript{75}

In 1884, two more commissions on industrialization were launched. They were designed to acquire:

reliable information as to the manufacturing industries in existence in Canada, as regards the number of persons employed, the amount of capital invested, the output thereof, the date of establishment and the progress of the several factories, and, in fact, all particulars that will be of use in aiding the Government in legislation.\textsuperscript{76}

The reports were little more than ringing endorsements of the National Policy. Blackeby was again appointed as a commissioner assigned to address \textit{The State of Manufacturing Industries in Canada} in May of 1884. However, soon after his appointment, Leonard Tilley stated that the commissioner did not have enough time “to permit of his making sufficiently thorough enquiries into the state of the factories in all parts of the Dominion before the meeting of Parliament next year.”\textsuperscript{77} Tilley, therefore, wrote an old acquaintance Edward Willis and notified him of a desire “to collect statistics with reference to the factories in the Maritime Provinces, similar to those Mr. Blackeby was making in Ontario and Quebec, and report to the Government the result of such

\textsuperscript{75} Bernard Ostry, “A Note on Dominion Factory Bills of the Eighteen-Eighties,” 582.
\textsuperscript{76} GC, \textit{Commission on the State of Manufacturing Industries on Ontario and Quebec} [hereafter CSMIOQ], Sessional Papers, 37-1885. Blackeby’s report is pages 4-35; Willis’s report is pages 35-97. The name of the commission comes from letters from S.L. Tilley (Minister of Finance), John J. McGee (Clerk of Privy Council), and J.M. Courtney (Deputy Minister of Finance) that are published in the beginning of the reports.
\textsuperscript{77} GC, CSMIOQ, i.
enquiries on or before the 1st day of January next.” As this letter was dated in September of 1884, Blackeby and Willis were given approximately three months to compile a “sufficiently thorough” review of manufacturing interests in the Dominion, a short period of time for a rather large investigation. Unsurprisingly, they were able, even within this brief window of opportunity, to discover how beneficially the National Policy had worked out for the Dominion of Canada.

The two reports, very different in terms of format and analysis, were quite similar in intent. Blackeby says of Ontario and Quebec that “manufacturers in Canada will be prepared to supply, through the labor of our own mechanics and operatives, all the demands of the market, at a profit alike to themselves and the districts in which they are located.” In fact this expansion in the economy was already evidenced by the fact that “[i]t has been proved that the effect of the change has been to so largely extend the operations of the old established industries that for every operative engaged in manufacturing pursuits in 1878[,] two are so employed now.”

The volatile Canadian economy was subject to periods of recession throughout the latter nineteenth century. Even though the year 1884 was in one such period, Blackeby noted that “[t]he increases in the total number of hands in the factories visited amounts to, as nearly as possible, 100 per cent. The wages have increased 106 per cent.; or, putting it in another way, the wages averaged in 1878, $293.33, and in 1884, $304.53,

an increase of $11.20 per hand.”\textsuperscript{80} Willis reported a similar level of prosperity in the Maritimes: “[t]aking a note of the work done, the indications are plain that there has been, on the whole a marked advance in industrial pursuits, and in material progress generally.”\textsuperscript{81} Willis and Blackeby reported an increase in prosperity for Canadian workers. Willis wrote, “[i]n most cases the wages remain with little or no alteration, conditions to the working force and the introduction of more and better machinery, serving to indicate advancement.”\textsuperscript{82} On the merits of the National Policy the two reports were (unsurprisingly) in total agreement. Willis states,

\begin{quote}
[i]n many of the establishments in the several localities, regardless of their political leanings or their friendship for this or that tariff system, I endeavored to get at the real views of the proprietors as respects the National Policy, which so many throughout the Dominion hailed with delight at the outset, and which, it is asserted, not a few view with dissatisfaction now.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Willis thought his report would rebut such skeptics. Blackeby goes further to claim:

\begin{quote}
The mechanical appliances provided by the factory owners of the Dominion are the best that the skill of man has devised, and there is therefore every reason to firmly stand by the policy which has enabled this skill and this machinery to be brought into active use in our own beloved Canada. If that policy is sustained the future prospects of the manufacturing interests in Canada are assured; periods of dullness, as well as extraordinary activity, may reasonably be anticipated, but the general result must be upward and onward. Take away the reasonable, and, in our trade position, necessary, measure of protection which is now enjoyed, and the effect must be an instant and utter obliteration of a very
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 37.
large portion of the capital now engaged in that pursuit, and disaster, distress and misery to the wage-earning classes.84

These descriptions of the impact of the National Policy were implicitly ringing endorsements of the state’s intervention in industrial expansion. Furthermore, Willis’s attempt to get “the real views of the proprietors,” and Blackeby’s dire vision of Canada without the National Policy as “disaster, distress and misery” displayed quite clearly the relation between the findings of this commission and the partisan interests behind it.85

There was little discussion in national papers of the contents of these reports. As the election of 1886 was approaching, the votes of labouring men and women were certainly sought after and a solid endorsement of Tory economic policy was a means to get them. These commissions were designed to provide political ammunition for Macdonald but they accomplished much more. As Blackeby was a commissioner on all the commissions mentioned so far, it becomes clear that a network of citizens was forming that could be depended upon to foster positive views of Tory economic policy. These “contacts” were continually solicited for information on industrialization by several royal commissions assembled throughout the 1880s. This network of partisan interests would flourish vigorously in the 1886 Labour Commission on which Blackeby served as the secretary.86

86 A cross reference between two commissions (1884 and 1886) shows a similarity in witnesses. Not taking into account the names of establishments (which may change over time or are not always listed) and only the names of witnesses, 19 reappeared in Montreal; 6 in Toronto; 2 in Cornwall; and 1 in Hamilton for a total of 28.
In 1885, Macdonald was looking for support for his party and contended that his government was still considering the introduction of another factory bill. When none appeared, the representative from Cornwall, Mr. Bergin, again brought a bill before the House but withdrew it upon second reading in anticipation of jurisdictional challenges. Later in the same session, Bergin brought forward a revised bill (85) that sparked a debate with opposition member David Mills — the Liberal Party’s constitutional authority — concerning jurisdiction. Mills successfully argued that “the Dominion could [not] legislate in this field by virtue of its criminal power, and contended that the whole matter came under ‘property and civil rights’ and ‘police and municipal regulations.’”

Federal authorities (both Tory and Grit) were clearly side-stepping responsibility for enacting federal labour legislation. Bergin brought another bill before the House in 1886 but it only received a first reading without debate. As Morton comments with respect to Bergin’s efforts:

[his] Conservative colleagues systematically frustrated him with a procession of investigations, consultations with industrialists, procedural delays and, eventually, constitutional obstacles. On the issue of Capital vs. Labour in the 1880s, the Tories had plainly taken sides. Bergin’s defeat in Parliament owed much to his party’s alliance with a new class of investors and manufacturers created by Macdonald’s ‘national policy.’

However, the frustration that Morton attributes to Bergin should be kept in context. As the preamble to his last attempt at introducing a factory bill makes clear, Bergin was

87 Federal v. Provincial responsibility for factory legislation was one among many components of the labour question and other large social issues of the day such as the school question, the Riel rebellion and the Jesuit estates issue. Bernard Ostry, “A Note on Dominion Factory Bills of the Eighteen -Eighties,” 583.
88 GC, House of Commons Debates (1886), 946.
89 Morton, Working People, 41-42.
seeking to forestall future manufacturing problems. Bergin was under the impression, like other members of the Tory party, that the evils of industrialization had not fully surfaced in Canada:

The factory system as it exists in Canada has not, I must confess, Mr. Speaker, up to this hour been productive of very great evils. I am willing to admit that, in many respects it, has been a boon and a blessing to the working classes of this country; but, sir, that it may not become, as in England in times gone by, a blot upon the pages of our history, a crime against our civilization, a shame and a curse, this legislation is now proposed.90

The four royal commissions assembled to “look into” industrialization in the 1880s exhibited all the contradictions that have come to be associated with this type of investigation. These inquiries were initiated under the guise of “looking out” for Canada’s working population; yet, legislators and commissioners alike agreed that Canadian workers had not yet felt the effects of factory discipline like England and the United States. Rather than any empirically-based investigation into the actual conditions of women and children in Canadian workplaces, which were not nearly so benign as these descriptions suggested, the investigations seem to have been more concerned with endorsing the National Policy.

From 1880 to 1886, there were three government bills and four private members bills introduced on the subject of factory legislation with four corresponding royal commissions assembled to look into the subject of industrialization. Despite the fact that no factory legislation had been enacted, Macdonald had taken important steps toward

90 GC, House of Commons Debates (1885), 362.
assembling information on the development of industrialization in Canada. The royal commissions into industrialization in the country had given Macdonald vital information for gauging the balance between the government’s responsibilities to working Canadians and to manufacturing interests respectively. These investigations advised him that the evils of industrialization had not yet affected Canadians as harshly as they had in England and the United States, and that manufacturing interests in the country were thriving. Even more important, a network of Canadians from across the Dominion had now been solicited (several times over) for their opinions on the effects of industrialization. If it ever became politically expedient to mount another commission in order to organize support for the government within civil society, a network was now available through which to do so.

A decade after the announcement of the Labour Commission, another royal commission was assembled to look into the effects of industrialization in Canada. The 1895 royal commission on whether The Sweating System is Practiced in Various Centers in the Dominion (also referred to as the Sweating Commission) was quite unlike the commissions that preceded it. It was evidently inspired by an English inquiry into “sweating system.”91 Chaired by Toronto labour journalist, and outspoken witness in the Labour Commission, A.W. Wright, the report lacked the investigative focus of its predecessors. It even failed to define its supposedly central “problem.” Wright argued, “[t]he words have really no definite meaning, for there are conditions found in all cases in which the term is applied, which are also to be found in numerous other cases to

91 Charles Tupper Papers, LAC, Tupper to J.G. Colmer, November 14, 1895.
which it is not applied.” For Wright, the “sweating system” was simply another way of describing unequal productive relationships. Looking mostly at the textile industry, Wright was largely concerned with the fate of the unskilled (mostly women and children) in Canada’s new industrial order. According to Wright, the “helpless class” was still in need of targeted state intervention. The unskilled were subject to “sweating” abuses from employers:

[a]s has been elsewhere stated there is not in the trades to which I have directed my attention, anything which can rightly be designated as an “apprenticeship system”, and, as has been also stated, the plan of taking in “learners” at low wages or no wages with the understanding that they are to be taught . . . is open to great abuse and sometimes results in great injustice.\(^93\)

A short dialogue is included at the end of the report that clearly reasserts this point:

Mr.Strachan - Is there such a thing in your establishment as learning a girl through two or three years until she knows the trade?
Mr.Love – No.
Mr.Trimble – I have 20 or 25 girls working for me, and not one of them could make a coat right through.
Mr.O’Donoghue – As a matter of fact is there any apprenticeship system at all?
Mr.Trimble – No. We pay just what wages we have to pay a girl.\(^94\)

Yet, in spite of such documentation, Wright’s conclusions on the state of industrialization in Canada were vague. Certainly there were abusive relations between employer and employee. However, they were not numerous enough to cause any national alarm. As had legislators and commissioners before him, Wright concluded that

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\(^92\) GC, Commission to Investigate Whether, and if so, to what extent, the Sweating System is Practiced in the Various Industrial Centres of the Dominion [hereafter Sweating Commission], Sessional Papers, 61-1896, 5.

\(^93\) Ibid., 14.

\(^94\) Ibid., 46.
the sweating system “does not exist in Canada as it does in the United States and Britain,” a finding at variance with the well-documented researches of other investigators, including Mackenzie King and Colin McKay. From 1883 to 1895, commissions of inquiry and royal commissions were consistent in their message that industrialization in Canada had not generated abuses comparable to those found in England and the United States, a finding that reflected their biases as much as it did any empirical evidence.

All the commissions discussed thusfar exhibited many of the characteristics traditionally associated with Canadian royal commissions. For example, most followed the British tradition of documenting some of the testimony. Appendix Three of the Lukes Commission, for instance, is a recorded dialogue between the commissioners and the Toronto Trades Council. Appendix One of Willis’s report on the State of Manufacturing in the Maritimes has many pages of testimony from the witnesses he examined. Finally, the royal commission into the sweating system in Canada includes, as an appendix, a verbatim dialogue between commissioner Wright and a committee of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council as well as some factory inspectors in Ontario. Other similarities exist in terms of who was involved: Blackeby was a member of every commission on the subject in the 1880s; Lukes was on two commissions early in the decade; commissioner Wright, as well as some of the people he interviewed in the

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95 Ibid., 17.
96 See Ian McKay, For a Working-Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay’s Writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897-1939 (St. John’s, 1996), Chapter One.
sweating commission, all appeared before the Labour Commission.\(^\text{97}\) Finally, while several large investigations were commissioned, commissioners and politicians alike were under the impression that the negative effects of industrialization on working Canadians were not yet as pronounced as they were in England and the United States. Given this impression, these reports could be viewed as one long avoidance tactic. They repetitively regurgitated information designed to create the appearance of government thoroughness and concern. However, the absence of any publicity concerning most of the commissions, save the Labour Commission, suggests that creating an image of a ‘concerned’ federal government was not necessarily a priority. It would appear that these commissions were put together as an elaborate state-formation vehicle designed to ‘channel knowledge’ into society, endorse the National Policy, and strengthen links between manufacturers and labour.

All the commissions discussed so far pale in comparison to the Labour Commission. With upwards of 15 commissioners, it was the largest commission assembled in nineteenth-century Canada. The duration, from the announcement of the commission in 1886 to the submission of reports in 1889, was unparalleled.\(^\text{98}\) At $81,718.98 the cost of this investigation also far surpassed any other commission in the century; in fact, it was not until the 1910 Royal Commission on Industrial and Technical

\(^{97}\) Concerning the 1895 commission: Wright appeared before the Labour Commission, as did other members of the Toronto Trades and Labour Council that Wright interviewed in 1895 such as Alfred Jury and D.J. O’Donoghue.

\(^{98}\) Only one other nineteenth-century commission came close and that was the three year royal commission on prohibition in 1892.
that a more expensive investigation would appear. If royal commissions and commissions of inquiry were central to state formation in the late nineteenth century, the Labour Commission stands as an exemplar.

And this exemplary status was suggested by the pomp and circumstance of its birth. Macdonald addressed the Workingmen’s Liberal Conservative Association of Ottawa [WLCA] — and its Francophone equivalent Le Cercle Lafontaine — in October, 1886. A torch light parade, including future commissioners Urias Carson and William Gibson, wound its way from the Prime Minister’s residence to the Ottawa Opera House. The venue was full to capacity; people were turned away at the door. As the Ottawa Citizen remarked: “[a] great many political demonstrations have been held in Ottawa since it became the seat of government, but it is no exaggeration to say that Friday evening surpassed them all alike in regard to the attendance and the enthusiasm displayed.”

Provincial Conservative leader W.R. Meredith, the entire Tory cabinet and Lady Macdonald were present. In his speech Macdonald outlined a broad review of the Conservative Party’s success, particularly the National Policy and its benefits to the Canadian economy: “the policy adopted in 1878, and affirmed in 1882, when we appealed to the people again, has been thoroughly successful.” However, the majority of the speech dealt with labour-related issues: obsolete laws regarding trade unions, the convict labour question and the Chinese labour question to name a few. Macdonald’s

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99 Hodgetts, “Should Canada be De-Commissioned?,” 482. Interestingly, the 1910 commission was on a subject extensively discussed in the Labour Commission.

100 A full description of the event is provided in the Ottawa Citizen, semi-weekly edition, October 11, 1886, 2-3.

conclusion traced the emergence of the Tory/workingman alliance to the craven betrayals of the Liberals.

[w]e legalized Trades’ Unions and have prevented workmen from being arrested and sent to jail as criminals because they belonged to it. We abolished convict labour and the unwholesome competition of that labour with the work of the honest artizans. We have checked and put an end to the overflow of Chinese labour, and we have given a reasonable rate of interest to the workingman, who saves his money, for the savings so deposited with the best security in the world. And in carrying out this policy we have done so in spite of the persistent and constant opposition of those who call themselves reformers.102

Macdonald thus envisaged a Tory/labour alliance that would best the Liberals in the big cities and prove his government’s forward-looking competence.

He showed himself to be in the vanguard of progress with his announcement of a Bureau of Labour Statistics. The request for a such a bureau had been pushed by organized labour for some time. Macdonald saw its establishment as a continuation of the Tory’s pro-labour record: “We propose to establish a bureau of labour statistics. Without such a bureau, without the collection of statistics of labour, no satisfactory solution of the various problems which from time to time arise between capital and labour can be arrived at.”103 The Labour Commission, unveiled in the same speech, was another integral element of the same program.104 Macdonald “propose[d] to issue a

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102 Ibid., 10.
104 This attention to the establishment of a bureau of labor statistics is indicative of the influence of American investigations in Canada. One of the many congressional strike committees in the 1880s, the Blair Committee, in combination with pressure from the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, resulted in many legislative gains made by American labour. One of these gains was the formation of a national Bureau of Labor in 1884. Other achievements
Royal Commission on which the working classes shall be fully represented as commissioners, for the purpose of enquiring into and reporting on all questions arising out of the conflict of labour and capital.”¹⁰⁵ This was to be a most ambitious Commission:

[They will have power to enquire and report on the subject of labour, its relation to capital, the hours of labour and the earnings of labouring men and women, and the means of promoting their material, social, intellectual, and moral prosperity, and of developing the productive industries of the Dominion so as to advance and improve the trade and commerce of Canada; also to enquire and report on the practical operation of arbitration and conciliation in the settlement of disputes between employers and employees.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, a Minister of Trade and Commerce would be appointed to oversee the results of the Commission. Macdonald stressed that workingmen, “not mere amateur workmen but real artisans at their trade, who will bring practical knowledge and long experience in their various employments to the assistance of the Government in the solution of these great and important questions.”¹⁰⁷ The Commission was to have a vast mandate, a representative selection of commissioners and even a cabinet position created to oversee their recommendations.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 22.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Macdonald’s mention of “real artisans” assisting the government toward a “solution” of problems arising from the relations of labour and capital suggested that the Commission could be presented as an attempt to collect accurate information through the judicious consultation with all who had the “capacity to judge.” At least in Macdonald’s rhetoric, “artisans” were placed on a footing of equality with manufacturers, managers, and superintendents.
Despite such a promising start, within two years of Macdonald’s speech it became clear that the Labour Commission was intended to follow in the steps of the commissions that had gone before it. For example, the opinion that factory abuse was not as significant in Canada as it was in other countries is implied in Macdonald’s correspondence with commissioner Freed in January 1888:

I am inclined to think that you are going into this matter too elaborately, that is to say, your visits to so many points [are] unnecessary. The position of the working men as well as of the capitalist must be the same, or nearly so, in all parts of Canada ... An inquiry of this kind in Canada is not like one in England, where one of the most important branches of investigation would be to ascertain the degree of suffering from want of employment among the workmen in the large centers of industry in the Kingdom. Here, thank God, there is no necessity for any such inquiry.  

Since, supposedly, workplace abuses and unemployment were known, a priori, to be problems in other places that little affected Canada, there was little for the Commission to investigate. Notwithstanding the earlier impression of a vast project of labour reform, the Commission now appeared to be a much more contained exercise. Revealingly, at a time when the question of Asian immigration was rocking the British Columbia coalfields and when the labour movement in Winnipeg was starting to agitate on a number of issues, the government flatly refused requests that the Commission investigate conditions in the western provinces: “We are going to close the Commission as soon as possible,” Macdonald wrote in January, 1888. By this time, one and a half years after its announcement, the Commission was already costing much more money

108 JAM, LAC, Macdonald to A.T. Freed, December 20, 1887.
109 JAM, LAC, Macdonald to Scarth, January 26, 1888.
than the Prime Minister had anticipated. Moreover, fighting amongst the commissioners was at its height and the more sensational revelations in Montreal cigar factories were all over the media.

There was an undeniable political dimension to Macdonald’s announcement and the coming of the Labour Commission. Indeed, the reports of all the Commissions appointed by Macdonald bear a family resemblance to each other. For example, as in previous commissions, the positive impact of the National Policy is evident in the two reports of the Labour Commission. As one report states:

The testimony taken sustains a belief that wages in Canada are generally higher than at any previous time, while hours of labor have been somewhat reduced. At the same time, the necessaries and ordinary comforts of life are lower in price than ever before, so the material condition of the working people who exercise reasonable prudence and economy has been greatly bettered, especially during the past ten years.\(^{110}\)

The other report — although ostensibly “pro-labour” — was no less warm in its praise of the National Policy:

Factories of various kinds having been in existence in Canada for many years, but it was not until the impetus given by the protective tariff of 1879 had been fully felt that they became an important feature of the wealth and prosperity of the Dominion. With us the factory system has not grown slowly; it sprang into existence almost at one bound, and was the creature of the legislation adopted ten years ago.\(^{111}\)

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\(^{110}\) GC, *RCRLC, Reports* (1889), 8.

Similarities exist in other areas as well. In many other respects — topics such as morality and water-closets, and foci such as steel, lumber and cotton — the 1889 report merely echoed its predecessors of 1882 and 1885.

At the same time, the 1886-9 Commission did break some new ground. For example, the scope of the Labour Commission was much wider than that of the other commissions. In a circular issued by the Commission to prospective witnesses, an extensive list of subjects was outlined and “considered pertinent.” The end of the circular claims: “Although it is believed that these subjects will fairly cover the field of investigation, it must be distinctly understood that evidence may be taken on any other subject not here enumerated, that may be deemed to come within the scope of these enquiries.” The reports from the Labour Commission were much more wide-ranging than those of the other commissions. Conversely, its legislative mandate was narrower. The establishment of factory legislation, a preoccupation of earlier commissions, was on the periphery in 1889. In its place was an argument for the establishment of a “Labor Bureau:”

Your Commissioners are firmly persuaded that the interests of working people will be promoted if all matters relating to labor and capital be placed under the administration of one of the Ministers of the Crown, so that a Labor Bureau may be established, statistics collected, information disseminated, and working people find readier means of making their needs and their desires known to the Government.

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112 See Appendix two for a copy of the circular issued by the Commission. See GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 5-6.
113 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 6.
114 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 14. For Armstrong report see GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 85.
Clearly, the Labour Commission continued the practice of endorsing government policy and suggesting extended responsibilities for the Canadian state, particularly in the realm of the relations of labour and capital.

All the commissions appointed by Macdonald in the 1880s ‘objectively’ provided him with the knowledge that the National Policy was having a long-lasting and positive impact on the Canadian economy. The principal focus of these inquiries was on the ‘high-tech’ industries of the period — cotton, steel — and not on such massively more important sectors such as mining, fishing, forestry and agriculture.\footnote{The Reports contain only cursory mention of these industries and the evidence does not provide much more insight (although there are some illuminating materials provided by some of the coal-mining witnesses). It was highly revealing that the government did not secure any representatives from the Nova Scotia coal mines, despite Charles Tupper’s deep connections with the industry. The coal miners’ union was known to be tending in a pro-Liberal direction.} In particular, the absence of any sustained focus upon mining in the Commission is suggestive of its regional and political bias.\footnote{The implicit focus (and bias) of the Commission -- to display the National Policy and its positive affect on the Dominion’s economy -- was suggested by the absence of mining. The brief treatment of the mining industry in Nova Scotia, the absence of the Provincial Workmen’s Association in the selection of Commissioners, and the exclusion of British Columbia exemplify this bias. For example, two coal mining accidents occurred in B. C. in the year before the Commission was assembled. In the Reports, a resolution from a public meeting in Victoria that was published in the Victoria Times mentions: “That governmental enquiries should be instituted to prevent, if possible, terrible coal mining accidents, two of which, during the past year, have startled and horrified the Province.” See GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 132. This is the only mention of that province in the Commission.} Indeed, the genesis of the factory and the success of the Dominion reverberates throughout all these commissions. Furthermore, from Macdonald’s colleagues in the House of Commons to his loyal commissioners, all were in agreement that the negative impacts normally associated with rapid industrialization had not affected Canadians as much as they had influenced workers in England and the United States. In fact, the condition of Canadian workers, from wages to their standard
of living, had rapidly improved. Moreover, under the heading “Morals,” one of the two reports of 1889 claims that “[t]he testimony does not sustain a belief that serious immorality exists in Canadian factories in which operatives of both sexes are employed. The proper enforcement of exiting Factory Acts will remove the chief existing causes of complaint.”

The rival report agreed completely: “[t]he testimony on this point proves the moral character of the working women in Canada to be as high as that of other classes.” Thus, the Labour Commission was less an investigation into industrial relations than an industrial exhibition on the accomplishments and, to a much lesser degree, the problems of industrialization.

The Labour Commission can be seen as constituting a new hegemonic strategy. It was structured very differently than the commissions preceding it. There were many commissioners, its hearings went on for four years, and all the testimony it took was published. It overshadowed its predecessors in its attempt to elicit interest and support from civil society. A response to concerns about industrialization, it was also a genuine attempt to create knowledge about the new society Canadians saw evolving around them. Furthermore, the Labour Commission took shape amidst a climate of intense social investigation in the United States and Britain. Like the Labour Commission, social investigation into industrialization throughout North America and Europe forced national governments to confront class conflict and monopoly as prominent features of public discourse, party politics and statecraft. By commissioning investigations into

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117 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 9.
118 Ibid., 79.
social unrest, the state (in combination with the middle class) was able to define the problem, attribute particular meanings to the labour question, and manufacture broad social categories so as to make sense of the issue. This creation of knowledge was also an endorsement of a series of social values that were central to the middle class whose interest in social reform then became the ‘national’ interest. The traditions and “institutionalization” of royal commissions in Canadian political culture, therefore, is a central feature of class and state formation in late-Victorian Canada.
Chapter Three

The Labour Commissioners, Social Investigation and the “Rocks Ahead”

We have rocks ahead and great skill must be exercised in steering the ship.¹

John A Macdonald

The underlying political logic of the Labour Commission, i.e., the solidification of a Tory/workingmen’s alliance, was of central significance to its modus operandi. The four provinces visited by the Labour Commission were all ruled by Liberal (or quasi-Liberal) governments in the late 1880s.² There was mounting provincial resistance to the incursions of Ottawa and, in Ontario and Quebec, the first major steps into factory legislation — steps which promised to ‘provincialize’ the Labour Question by having it brought within the constitutional framework of “property and civil law” rather than “peace, order and good government.” By the mid-1880s Macdonald’s reputation as a friend of the workingman had worn thin. In 1885-86, provincial Liberals were successful in courting the working-class vote. By 1886, labour legislation had been passed in Quebec and Ontario’s Premier, Oliver Mowat, who had been promising a Factory Act since 1884, announced that his bill would become law weeks before the federal election.

Liberal governments in Quebec and Ontario were direct threats to the Conservative Party. Macdonald, ever alert to any provincial resistance to his dream of a centralized constitution, responded by forming the Labour Commission which would show his

¹ Joseph Pope, Selections from the Correspondence of John A. Macdonald (Ottawa, 1921), 386.
² Honoré Mercier, Premier of Quebec from 1887 to 1891, was technically the head of the “Parti Nationale,” which included some dissident Conservatives, but his party quickly reverted to the use of the term “Liberal” after its election.
concern for Canadian workers as well as buy some time before introducing federal factory legislation. The genesis of the Labour Commission cannot be separated from the realities of “competitive federalism” in nineteenth-century Canada.

Federal and provincial party organizations were closely intertwined. The Tories needed a political tactic that would capture votes, augment party discipline, and prove that they were fully abreast of the issues of modern industrial life. Macdonald’s multiple investigations into industrial matters throughout the early 1880s paved the way for the Labour Commission. In a sense, they were dress rehearsals for the main event. A host of Canadians had already been consulted about the positive effects of the National Policy for workers and employers alike. The Labour Commission would build upon these earlier investigations so as to re-forge the relation between workingmen and the Conservative Party by representing a “concerned” federal state wrestling with the ramifications of factory discipline on citizens. The media attention bestowed upon the Labour Commission was far in excess of the commissions that preceded it and is indicative of the escalating social tensions developing between labour and capital. As the Journal of Commerce complained in 1888, “the future of the artisan fills the whole horizon of politics, and no other class is considered at all.”

Provincial governments were introducing factory legislation and challenging the Tories hold on office; Macdonald’s announcement of the Commission was, in part, a response to factory legislation in Ontario and Quebec. As Trofimenkoff claims, the Prime Minister was “not

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anxious to have the provinces establish an undisputed claim for sovereign jurisdiction in the area [of factory legislation].”

This political climate was directly related to the announcement of the Labour Commission. Macdonald’s reputation as a friend of labour, established in the 1870s, was under duress by the 1880s. Macdonald’s 1878 election victory was won on a National Policy platform that made only incidental reference to the Labour Question. While Macdonald certainly voiced a concern for labour interests throughout the 1880s, action to that end was at best lukewarm. Yet a recession in 1884, with its unwelcome echoes of the troubled economic times of the 1870s that had done so much to bring Macdonald to power, prompted many liberal and radical critics to begin talking once again of the evils of protectionism. As Bernard Ostry remarks, “[d]emands for remedial measures which had been heard briefly in the later-seventies and which were muted in better times in the early eighties once again arose....”

To Conservatives and Liberals alike, the ‘working-class vote’ was a highly prized commodity. It could sway pivotal seats in the metropolitan areas. Macdonald himself was well aware of the spectacular political theatre the labour movement could provoke. In 1877, a group of unemployed men had converged on the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa looking for the federal government to relieve them of their plight. Prime Minister Mackenzie was summoned to no avail, whereupon the men decided to “open the door and then boys give three rousing cheers for John A. Macdonald. As soon as the

4 Susan Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One Muffled Voices: Canada’s Industrial Women in the 1880s (Toronto, 1977), 144.
door opened three deafening cheers were given.” Somewhat less jubilant was the scene three years later, when a crowd of 300 unemployed men marched to the Parliament Buildings and demanded to see the Prime Minister. This time they were met by the Dominion police. Macdonald did not address the crowd and only received their petition. The growing awareness of labour’s importance at the polls is exemplified in the way in which the “Canadian working-class had discovered unemployment and had begun to force this new reality of class relations into Canadian political discourse.” By the mid-1880s, Macdonald needed to bolster his image as ‘the workingman’s friend’ lest the federal election be lost to the Liberal leader Edward Blake. As F.W. Watt states, the pretence that the National Policy was intended to promote national unity was evaporating and in its place arose a general impression, not discouraged by the Liberals, that it had in fact merely been designed to favour capital. For example, the ‘black flag’ of unemployment surfaced as a significant social problem in the early years of the 1880s. As Peter Baskerville and Eric Sager argue, “the Conservative party, and John A. Macdonald in particular, made a calculated appeal for working-class votes and linked their national policy to the promise of more secure employment for Canadian

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6 Ottawa Daily Citizen, April 5-6, 1877; as quoted in Baskerville and Sager, Unwilling Idlers, 31.
7 Ottawa Daily Citizen, March 6, 1880; as quoted in Baskerville and Sager, Unwilling Idlers, 33. See also Debi Wells, “The Hardest Lines of the Sternest School: Working Class Ottawa in the 1870s” M.A. Thesis, Carleton University (1982) for unemployment demonstrations in Ottawa during this period.
8 Baskerville and Sager, Unwilling Idlers, 40.
workers.” ¹⁰ David Goutor shows how the Canadian labour movement was increasingly disenchanted with the government’s immigration policies, especially those which had brought thousands of Asian immigrants to Canadian shores as railway navvies in the 1880s.¹¹ When the National Policy did not yield secure employment for Canadian workers, this criticism of Tory immigration policy became ever more emphatic.

In 1886 the Palladium of Labor, the newspaper of the Knights of Labor, addressed Macdonald’s reputation as the workingman’s friend in rather bleak terms: “[i]n short his idea of a model labor organization is a social club and benefit society which leaves such troublesome questions as the rate of wages and the hours of labor to be settled by employers.”¹² The Montreal Daily Witness claimed in the weeks preceding the announcement of the Commission that “Sir John A. Macdonald will, in a general way, deal with the labor bureau question and other matters which are now engaging public attention and which are likely to form an issue in the coming Federal elections.”¹³ It was clear that organized labour was becoming a powerful political force: American Internationals such as the Knights of Labor were growing quickly; the Provincial Workmen’s Association was making significant strides toward organizing workers in Nova Scotia; the Toronto Trades and Labor Council was re-established; and there was a wave of strikes in Toronto in the 1880s.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Knights’ call for a Bureau of

¹⁰ Baskerville and Sager, Unwilling Idlers, 28.
¹² Hamilton Palladium of Labor, Oct. 16, 1886, 1.
¹³ Montreal Daily Witness, September 29, 1886.
¹⁴ Macdonald received several letters concerning the growing strength of the labour movement in the mid-1880s. One letter from a “friend of the Conservative party” who
Labor was answered by the Ontario Liberal government. It had set up a Bureau of Industry with a labour component under the control of D.J. O'Donoghue. Macdonald was clearly up against the political wall. His announcement of the formation of the Labour Commission in October 1886 was designed, among other things, to rescue the Conservatives from impending electoral doom. Kealey interprets Macdonald’s announcement of the Commission as serving many useful functions:

First, it would buy his government time by placing a lengthy investigation in the way of labour’s immediate legislative demands; second, it would stand as evidence of the Tory government’s continued interest in the problems of Canadian workers; and third, it would provide the Party’s formerly faithful trade unionists with patronage appointments that might ensure their support in the forthcoming campaigns.15

The commissions that preceded the Labour Commission made these political intentions, to some extent, easier to achieve.

We must not assume, however, that the Labour Commission was a simple reaction to political maneuvering by the Liberals or organized labour. Preparations were underway months before the formal announcement of the Commission. In the summer Justice Minister J.S. Thompson wrote Macdonald with suggestions for the name of the commission and condensed the scope and title of various factory acts and commissions into the subject of labour and capital in the United States. “If you could select from these

claimed “I am also a Knight of Labor .... We will work for the party that works for us. See JAM, LAC, A Knight of Labor to Macdonald, February 1, 1885. Another letter was from A.B. Ingram who was elected to look into the enactment of factory legislation. JAM, LAC, A.B. Ingram to Macdonald, January 14, 1886. A letter from Samuel Beal warned of strikes in the Grand Trunk shops in Stratford, Ontario. JAM, LAC, Samuel Beal to Macdonald, December 4, 1886.

the phrases which appear best to meet your views there will be no delay or difficulties in naming the Commission.” In reference to a Pennsylvania commission, Thompson suggested “the practical operation of arbitration and conciliation in the settlement of differences between employers and employees.” Concerning the Connecticut Act Thompson suggested, “to collect information on the subject of labor, its relation to capital, the hours of labor and the earnings of laboring men and women and the means of promoting the material, social and intellectual and moral prosperity.” In reference to a New Jersey Act Thompson suggested the following description, “[t]o collect, assist, systemize and present … as statistical details relating to all departments of labor and industrial pursuits in the State, especially in relation to the commercial, industrial, social, educational and sanitary condition of the laboring classes and to the permanent prosperity of the productive industries of the state.”

Macdonald was looking for solutions to the problems facing his administration and the Labour Commission, it was thought, could cover many of the bases. Bernard Ostry claims “the initial impulse behind the Government’s decision to appoint the Royal Commission seemed to spring from the nation’s trade unions.” Organized labour popularized the need for some sort of action toward resolving the evils of factory discipline, unemployment and immigration. Susan Trofimenkoff makes the point that, “because of some labour agitation in the 1880s -- including radical papers, political candidates, and attempts to create national trade union centrals -- the aging Prime

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16 JAM, LAC, Thompson to Macdonald, September 2, 1886, 124830. The quotes in this paragraph all come from this letter.

17 Ostry, “Conservatives, Liberals and Labour in the 1880s,” 142.
Minister decided to establish the enquiry.” 18 Contemporaries were well aware of the centrality of the Labour Question to federal politics. H.E. Clarke, in his recommendation to Macdonald of two commissioners from Toronto, fully appreciated the political impact the Commission was supposed to have:

[w]e want the workingmen who are gradually drifting away from us, and to get them, and keep them, it will be necessary to give much prominence to the planks they favor. I take it the report would favor the National Policy. It would also most likely recommend some mode of arbitration for trade disputes which would be immensely popular with workingmen everywhere. 19

To achieve this end, all of Macdonald’s immense talents as a “political manager” would have to be utilized. The Commission would have to consist of loyal commissioners with a keen knowledge of labour relations. Such men would not only need to endorse the Conservative Party and the National Policy, but also be sufficiently credible in the eyes of the labour movement to undermine skepticism about the Commission’s usefulness.

The construction of the Commission nonetheless taxed even Macdonald’s legendary powers as a fixer. It soon became clear that Macdonald’s control over his commission was limited. The commissioners were appointed not only because of their class ‘positions,’ but also fought openly amongst themselves, in full view of the public, seemingly because they represented conflicting classes. The first ‘industrial’ Canadian royal commission to become a major political spectacle was a mixed blessing for the government. Critics could point to the deadlock in the Commission and its lack of

18 Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One Muffled Voices, 144.
19 Greg Kealey, Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 241.
evident legislative results; those more sympathetic could note that the two separate reports filed by the Commissioners reached strikingly similar conclusions. Macdonald’s selection of commissioners displays not only the merits and demerits of his ability as a political manager, but the hegemonic complexities posed by any ‘handling’ of the Labour Question.

This chapter will provide a biography of the commissioners and the factors that warranted their appointment to the Labour Commission. I shall show that even though the Commission was inspired and assembled for political purposes, the selection of commissioners also revealed how, in this unusual public sphere, the reciprocal ‘social’ interests of labour and capital were also acknowledged. In order to achieve partisan objectives, the federal government needed to appease, not so much “labour” or “capital,” but the growing ranks of the reform-minded middle class.

Attention to other state investigations in Britain and the United States similarly suggest a broad relation between national prosperity and the middle class. Most authors note that state investigations in this period were conducted by a class of professionals who had a profound affect on social policy. Daniel Rodgers, for example, writing of the 1890s, claims that American intellectuals were central to this trend:

The German-trained American economists of the 1890s ... labored, with considerable effect, to graft it onto the more diffuse structures of American state power. From the Senate inquiry into the relations between

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20 I put social in quotation marks here to reflect the fact that the Commission, in name and function, was a public display of the relations of labour and capital. Its composition was intended to imitate broad social categories of labour and capital in a hybrid form so as to identify and address the labour question. However, because the Commissioners were in the position to determine relevant subjects and expertise, their understandings and beliefs dominated the parameters of this public sphere.
labor and capital … to the Industrial Commission of 1898 to 1902 … to the Commission on Industrial Relations of 1912 to 1915, with John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin as one of its key members and a full-time staff of social economists in its service, the development of the modern public investigative commission encapsulates the rise of the professor to the status of expert policy adviser.21

In the British context, Roger Davidson has identified three categories of social investigators in the late-Victorian period: one group which viewed social inquiry from an orthodox Liberal standpoint (who were opposed to any state intervention in industrial affairs); a labourist group who “viewed social inquiry from their perspective as labor aristocrats;” and a third group who can best be described as “progressive,” who proposed various versions of social and welfare philosophy.22 In both the United States and Britain, commentators have contended that a class of professionals were charged with aligning the interests of the nation with the interests of social reform and achieved these ends by working in tandem with governments to formulate social policy. The Canadian situation was somewhat different. In the Dominion, no such large bodies of trained “experts” as yet existed, either within the bureaucracy or in the universities, to add the air of scientific certainty to the government’s agenda. The government pursued middle-class support through other, more ‘corporative,’ means—that is, by the direct recruitment of such people, either as witnesses or commissioners.

Choosing the correct commissioners to head the Commission was essential if it was to have its desired effect of gaining electoral favour for the Conservatives. As Linteau et al. note: “[m]any public officials at the time were businessmen, who regarded changes of this sort as burdens on themselves and thus had little enthusiasm for them. They were interested in labour issues only to the extent that they saw in them the possibility of immediate electoral advantage.”

Macdonald had to balance political loyalty with regional and ethnic representation, as well as somehow mediating the rival claims of “capital” and “labour.” His commissioners were drawn from a carefully considered population of judges, journalists, businessmen, skilled workers and trade unionists – all in a position to develop such an intermediate position.

The flurry of activity which followed the announcement of the Commission was predominantly centered on its composition. It is clear that Macdonald’s primary consideration in the appointment of commissioners was trustworthy loyalty to the Tory party. However, as many historians have noted, other factors were also at play in Macdonald’s selections. For example, the burgeoning political strength of organized labour was reflected in the composition of commissioners. As David Rome remarks in his work on Jules Helbronner, “the commission was remarkable, in relation to other inquiry bodies of the century for the proportion of labor men in its membership. Whereas it is estimated that some 89% of commissioners during the century were from...

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commercial, industrial and professional society, with but 11% from the working society, in this commission half of the membership consisted of workers.”

Like the Commission itself, the appointment of commissioners was decisively a political act; they had to represent both pro-capital and pro-labour elements. Seven of the fifteen commissioners Macdonald appointed were designed to represent ‘labour’ interests. However, given the varied background and at times confrontational relationship some ‘labour’ commissioners had with organized labour, it is not entirely clear how the government decided how these ‘elements’ should be defined and balanced. As in the case of the formation of federal cabinets, other considerations, particularly those of region and ethnicity, were important in Macdonald’s selection of commissioners. Yet, in spite of his efforts, the prime minister and the Tory party were subjected to much criticism upon the initial appointment of commissioners in 1886. Protest about these individuals would force Macdonald to make a second round of appointments a year later so as to assure many Canadians that labour, capital, region and ethnicity were all ‘fairly’ balanced in the Labour Commission.

Criticism about the Commission surfaced within days of its announcement. Edward Blake commented in the Globe in December. He argued that Macdonald “should have apologized for not having done, 20 or 30 years before, all that he claims

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24 David Rome, On Jules Helbronner (Montreal, 1978), 18. Like most other historical treatments of the Labour Commission, the existence of “labour” (worker) and “capital” commissioners is largely seen as a given and is not problematized. Yet, these distinctions are certainly loose. Helbronner, for example, was not a “worker.” He was appointed as a “labour” representative but was a professional journalist. Of course, Helbronner’s allegiance to the cause of labour and the poor in Montreal is without question. On the other hand, his signature is not on the Commission’s “labour” report, but on the “capital” report.
credit for having done in 1872.” The *Montreal Daily Post* ran an editorial within a week of Macdonald’s speech. “A Useless Commission” was particularly critical not only of the Labour Commission but of commissions in general: “[i]t is doubtful whether any commissions of inquiry ever accomplish[ed] any good purpose.” The editorial also suggested that, since information on labour legislation was needed, labour organizations should collectively draft a bill and submit it to parliament. The real intention of the Labour Commission was quite clear:

Boards, commissions and committees are too often, as Jeremy Bentham once said, “only fit to make screens of.” There is no doubt that the proposition to suddenly exhibit a lively interest in the condition of the “workingman” is a political inspiration in view of the general election now impending. We would advise the labor interest not take any “Note at a date” in consideration of electoral support, … a commission of inquiry would prevent anything in the direction of legislation for some time.

The partisan nature of appointing commissioners also drew critical comment in this article: “[w]hat use will there be in appointing one or two Government harpies, in need of a remunerative job, to obtain statistics which can be read any day in the week in various quarters?” Similarly, the *Globe* quoted a Toronto workman: “[i]sn’t it strange ... that in so important and far reaching a question as the conditions of labor, the Government can only find a lot of Tory politicians to appoint a Commission? How do they expect to get anything but a one sided view of the question with such a

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25 *Globe*, December, 1886.
27 Ibid., 2.
Commission as they have appointed?” As another Globe article wryly observed with respect to the formation of the Commission, “the members of the Assembly do not seem to regard the commission as of great importance. One of them, when asked what he thought the commission would accomplish said he didn’t know, but he thought the commissioners would try hard to make a plausible showing for their appointment.”

In late 1886, Macdonald announced to the public that the Labour Commission would consist of eight commissioners: Judge James Armstrong (chair), Augustus Todplay Freed, Jules Helbronner, John Armstrong, Samuel Heakes, Michael Walsh, James Clark and Alfred Blackeby. Based on widespread criticism of these appointees, Macdonald announced the following year another round of appointees largely designed to accommodate class and regional representation. The second round of appointees were largely ‘workers’ John Kelly, William Haggerty, Hugh McLean, William Gibson, Urias Carson, Patrick Kerwin. Two ‘capital’ commissioners were also appointed at this time: Louis Côté and Guillaume Boivin. What follows is a series of short biographies of the commissioners. Even though Macdonald appointed these class, ethnic and regional ‘representatives’ to silence criticism of the commission, their biographies suggest that labeling them as representatives of either labour or capital is troublesome.

28 Globe, November, 24, 1887.

29 “The Labour Commission,” Globe, November 23, 1887, 3. However, not all commentators were quick to criticize. The pro-Tory Montreal Daily Witness claimed that the Commission was the best way to investigate the state of manufacturing in the Dominion: “[w]hat vindicates, perhaps better than anything else, the righteousness of the Government in appointing a Commission that was beyond the intimidation, is the threats of some of the employers to prosecute Commissioners as criminals for expressing themselves on what was brought before them in the interests of their employers, and newspapers as criminals for reporting the proceedings.” Montreal Daily Witness, March 2, 1888, 4.

30 GC, Canada Gazette, Order in Council, December 7, 1886.
As Fernand Harvey claims, the chairman of the commission, Judge James Armstrong, was appointed purely because of partisanship and not because of any knowledge on the subject of labour: “The nomination of Judge Armstrong as the chairman of the Commission was not because of his knowledge on social issues, it was inspired by political motives.”31 In Armstrong’s entry in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Harvey writes, “[n]othing in his background had prepared Armstrong to chair this commission of inquiry. His rural ancestry, his interests in the Montreal-Sorel railway, and his dependence on the Conservative party were scarcely conducive to objectivity, let alone an understanding of the problems of the urban proletariat and the beginnings of industrialization.”32 Armstrong was born in Sorel, Quebec and was the son of Captain Charles Logie Armstrong and Margery Ferguson. Around 1847, Armstrong married Marie-Anne-Charlotte Oliver, the niece of François Boucher, seigneur of Carufel and part of the seigneur of Maskinongé. Armstrong died on November 23, 1888 while the Commission was still hearing evidence.

Armstrong was a lawyer and owned extensive amounts of property in Quebec.33 He was called to the Quebec bar in 1844 and practiced in Montreal for four years whereupon he began acquiring property. In 1848 Armstrong bought the sub-fief of Hope which he held until his death. In 1871 he bought the rental rights to the Sorel seigneury

31 Fernand Harvey, Revolution industrielle et travailleurs (Montreal, 1978), 44. The translation is mine.
33 That he was a property owner became very obvious in the Commission particularly his condemnation of Henry George’s view on land values and taxation.
and in 1885 he purchased the same rights for the Gentilly seigneury.\textsuperscript{34} He spent most of his life practicing as a rural lawyer in Sorel. “In 1864 he was appointed deputy public prosecutor for the attorney general in the district of Richelieu, and in 1867 he formed a law partnership with Charles-Ignace Gill, who later became a judge of the Superior Court.”\textsuperscript{35} In 1871, Armstrong’s life changed significantly when he was appointed chief justice of St. Lucia in the West Indies with the mission to establish a civil law code in that country based on that in Quebec. Successful in St. Lucia, Armstrong wanted to return to Canada and resigned his post in 1881, evidently upon assurances from Macdonald of a similar position in Quebec. Privately bitter when the Prime Minister failed to follow through, Armstrong was too loyal to the Tories to make a public show of his dissatisfaction. Harvey claims that his involvement with the Labour Commission was based on this loyalty: “In the end, his loyalty to the Conservative party was partially rewarded by his appointment as chairman of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor in Canada.”\textsuperscript{36}

Journalists figured prominently in the Labour Commission. When Armstrong died in 1888, A.T. Freed (1835-1924) replaced him as chair. Freed was born in Beamsville, Ontario on October 8, 1835 and married Martha Elizabeth in 1874. He was educated in Dundas and became a printer. He then became a journalist with the Hamilton \textit{Banner} and \textit{Spectator}. In 1859 he worked as a compositor and proof-reader for the \textit{Tribune} in

\textsuperscript{34} I mention Armstrong’s extensive property holdings because there was frequent dialogue, sometimes heated, between he and Single Taxers (or advocates of Henry George’s views on property ownership) in the hearing of the Commission. However, this connection was not made by reporters covering the hearings at the time.

\textsuperscript{35} Fernand Harvey, “James Sherrard Armstrong,” 31.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid}.  

New York; this paper was described as “an earnest advocate of women’s rights, temperance, and the abolition of slavery and capital punishment.” In 1862, he joined the US Army and served during the Civil War. When he returned to Canada he became the associate editor of the Hamilton Spectator between 1871 and 1874. At this point, Freed again took residence in the United States and worked with newspapers in New York, Chicago, Colorado and Philadelphia. In 1881 Freed returned to Canada and became the editor-in-chief of the Spectator until his retirement from journalism in 1894, whereupon he was appointed Inspector of Weights and Measures in Hamilton.

Freed was a dedicated member of the Acadia Lodge of the Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons when working as a printer in Hamilton during the 1870s. Throughout his life he was involved in several social organizations. Harvey states, “he became a member of the Barton Lodge in 1874 and eventually moved through the ranks to become the National leader of that organization in 1907.” Freed was a staunch supporter of the Conservative Party. His correspondence with Macdonald is vast. In 1884 Freed wrote Macdonald on the status of the Hamilton’s Conservative representative Mr. Robinson. His solicitude for the fate of the Tories was clear: “I have long hesitated to volunteer my opinions on the subject though fear that what I believe to be concern for the party’s welfare may really be personal feeling.” In another letter, months before the 1887 federal election, Freed wrote to Macdonald that his wife was ill and should be brought

37 Hamilton Spectator, July 15, 1936.
38 Harvey, Revolution industrielle, 47. The translation is mine. See also Norman Macdonald, The Barton Lodge A.F. & A. M. No.6, GRC, 1795-1945 (Toronto, 1945), 175-179.
39 JAM, LAC, Freed to Macdonald, 6 September, 1884; October 23, 1888; June 11, 1889; December 10, 1889; 1890; 25 June, 1886 to name a few.
40 JAM, LAC, Freed to Macdonald, November 12, 1886, 144008.
to England to see a doctor. Concerning his role in this affair, Freed stated, “I ought to go with her; but I can let her daughter go. If I believed the elections would come upon us within the next three months I would remain at my post.” Freed was recommended for his service on the Labour Commission by former Labour reformer, and Conservative MP, H.B. Witton. The Globe described Freed as “a keen and strong writer, and has a wide and accurate knowledge of public questions.” Unlike most commissioners, Freed was present during all the hearings. His knowledge of certain industries, particularly printing, and his network of acquaintances in Ontario (particularly Hamilton), stand out in the Commission’s proceedings.

Jules Helbronner, one of the best-known Commissioners, was born in France and immigrated to Canada in 1874 where he was soon found work as a journalist. His first job was editing Le Journal d’Arthabaska, a paper whose sole purpose was to get Wilfrid Laurier elected in 1878. Before joining La Presse, Helbronner became affiliated with the Conservative paper Le Drapeau as well as a publication issued by the Montreal Chamber of Commerce, the Moniteur du Commerce. According to some historians, Helbronner was the reason La Presse was turned into a successful paper and profitable business. For some commentators, Helbronner was a champion of labour who “devoted his life to find justice and welfare for the humblest, hardest working, most oppressed and enslaved working woman and working man of his beloved Montreal.” Of course, his interests in

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41 JAM, LAC, Freed to Macdonald, November 12, 1886, 211905; the underlining is his.
42 JAM, LAC, Witton to Macdonald, November, 1886, 10926-27.
43 Henry James Morgan, Men and Women of the Time (Toronto, 1898), 355-356.
44 David Rome, On Jules Helbronner, ii. See also Morgan, Canadian Men and Women of the Time, 453.
the working class of Montreal were well documented in the pages of *La Presse* which “recommends labor organizations; it opposes immigration which will lower wages; it approves Labor Day; it recommends compulsory arbitration or the setting up of arbitration committees; it invites workers to advance their education through evening courses . . . [and advocates] greater harmony between employers and workers.”

Helbronner was responsible for turning this paper into a pro-labour institution. Using his pseudonym Jean Baptiste Gagnepetit, Helbronner “saw journalism as a weapon for the advancement of the welfare of the citizenry, particularly that of the working classes. He campaigned particularly to abolish the burdens which oppressed and discriminated against workers: the corvée, water tax and the poll tax.”

His attacks upon some witnesses before the Commission were harsh and impassioned. Helbronner was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce. As Harvey observes, “[r]emarkable, even as a working journalist he was a member of the Chambre of commerce de Montréal, a paradox that would be unthinkable in our times.”

Macdonald chose Helbronner from a list of names submitted by the Montreal Central Trades Council. His refusal to run in the 1886 provincial elections with Mercier’s Liberal Party was certainly in the Conservative interest, as were his efforts to disrupt an alliance of the Montreal Knights of Labor with the provincial Liberals.

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favour with the federal Conservatives was also displayed through his appointment to report on the Paris Exhibition of 1889.49 For Harvey, Helbronner’s efforts on the Commission were largely responsible for its success in Quebec: “[o]nly one man could and did watch over the specific interests of Quebec until the broadening of the Commission in 1887; that was the journalist Helbronner. It is clear that he was a major and aggressive interrogator of workers, employers and officials who appeared as witnesses and helped elicit a clear and fair picture of work and life in Montreal.”50 In an article in La Presse, Helbronner’s success on the Commission was paramount:

The Commission on labor, on which the Central Council of Montreal was represented by one of its members named at its request, began its work. Badly received in Ontario, the commission arrived in Montreal where the inquiry was prepared very carefully by the Central Council and the various labor associations. Thanks to this work the commission was able to do its work fully and promptly and to bring to light many of the workers’ complaints.51

Helbronner’s knowledge of Montreal and his enthusiasm as a commissioner make him stand out in the Labour Commission. For example, George Muir, a tax assessor, appeared before the Commission where Helbronner grilled him about the increase in rents and property assessments in Montreal.52 Similarly, Charles Lapierre, an accountant in the Water Department for Montreal, was put on the defensive by

50 Fernand Harvey, «Les Travailleurs québécois et la Commission du Travail, » 69; see also David Rome, On Jules Helbronner, 20. One instance came when a number of employees from the Grand Trunk Railway were called and did not respond. Helbronner suspected that they were intimidated by the company and suggested that the Commission hold private hearings which were eventually allowed. See La Presse, Feb. 8 and 25, 1888.
51 La Presse, (1893); See also Rome, On Jules Helbronner, 23. The translation is from Rome.
52 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 258 –264.
Helbronner for increasing water rates in the city. When Pierre Pleau appeared before the Commission, Helbronner had an intimate knowledge of the workings of the factory in which he worked, the region in which the company imported workers (at the expense of Montreal families employed by the factory) and specific injuries to some of the children working there. His role in the Commission, particularly in assembling the Quebec evidence, was invaluable.

As Macdonald promised, representatives of labour were made commissioners in the first round of appointments. John Armstrong was a prominent labour personality in Toronto throughout the latter half of the century. He was jailed by George Brown in the infamous 1872 printers strike in Toronto and was an important personality in the Nine Hours Movement. Armstrong was an officer in the Toronto Typographical Union. He served three times on the International Typographical Union executive and was president of this body in 1878. Always active in the TTLC he became president of that body in 1882. He was continually involved with the Trades and Labour Congress as well. His union legacy in Toronto had many dimensions; upon his death on November 22, 1910, the *Toronto Star* mused that “he was recognized among the women Unionists, many of whom he “organized,” as the handsomest man in the labor movement.”53 Bryan Palmer ranks Armstrong among the prominent labour personalities in the period who

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53 *Toronto Star*, November 26, 1910, 9; Christina Burr mentions Armstrong’s efforts in organizing women workers in *Spreading the Light* (Toronto, 1999), 137. See also Henry James Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto, 1912), 38.
“embraced an amalgam of causes and panaceas as eclectic as their social backgrounds, becoming public advocates of the working class.”\textsuperscript{54}

Armstrong was an ardent Conservative which, in part, explains his appointment to the Labour Commission. He was suggested to Macdonald by Conservative M.P. H. E. Clarke who described Armstrong as a good Tory who “stands up boldly for our party in the meetings of the trade unions.”\textsuperscript{55} Yet he was seemingly never an unconditional Tory. For example, Kealey describes Armstrong as the acknowledged leader of the Tory faction of the TTLC. In 1885, when that body was protesting against Macdonald’s immigration policy, Armstrong suggested sending a representative to England to combat the government’s “misleading propaganda aimed at recruiting British workers to Canada.”\textsuperscript{56} Armstrong also backed workingman candidate John Carter (who ran against Clarke) in the 1883 provincial election.\textsuperscript{57} After being fired from the Conservative Mail, he actually led a working-class defection from the Tories in 1884; yet he was also instrumental, two years later, in securing a \textit{modus vivendi} between the TTU and the newspaper, which suggests a continuing ability to connect with the Party. Armstrong’s appointment gave the Commission a credible labour man, and his appointment “only drew acclaim from the Ontario Labor press.”\textsuperscript{58} His efforts on the Commission were vast and often drew the ire of other commissioners such as Freed and Judge Armstrong. His background and knowledge as a printer put him in a position to corner the many

\textsuperscript{55} JAM, LAC, Clarke to Macdonald, 21 September 1886, 210304-11.
\textsuperscript{56} Kealey, \textit{Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism}, 233.
\textsuperscript{57} In 1894 he unsuccessfully ran for a seat in Toronto East as an independent labour candidate. See Morgan, \textit{Canadian Men and Women of the Time} (Toronto, 1912), 38.
\textsuperscript{58} Kealey and Palmer, \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, 219.
representatives of printing interests who appeared before the Commission to speak on subjects ranging from plate advertising to the place of publication of Canadian textbooks.\textsuperscript{59}

Samuel Heakes, a carpenter from Toronto, was also recommended by H.E. Clarke. Little is known about Heakes save for his union activities in Toronto and Montreal. He worked in Montreal in the 1860s where he began his career organizing workers. He was a founding member of the American Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and was a representative for carpenters in the TTLC. Heakes was the chairman of the TTLC’s platform committee in 1882 and actually drafted the labour candidate’s platform in that election. He also ran for provincial office in 1883 as a Labour candidate in Toronto East. Clarke also noted that Heakes had already “pass[ed] the rigid test of party loyalty.”\textsuperscript{60} Heakes’ reputation among unionists was ruined upon his appointment to the Labour Commission, in part because it was at the expense of the Knight of Labor, Sam McNab. McNab’s Tory allegiances were in question because he had run against the Conservative M.P. Wallace Clement in York West. When Heakes was appointed instead of McNab, the former was relentlessly attacked in labour circles.\textsuperscript{61} When Heakes supported the Tory candidate instead of the Labour candidate in the 1887 election, his favourable reputation among unionists collapsed. Some now called him “Sam Sneakes.”

\textsuperscript{59} This was a particularly important ‘national’ subject for Armstrong who frequently brought it up in the Commission’s hearings.

\textsuperscript{60} JAM, LAC, Clarke to Macdonald, September 1886, 210304-11, as quoted in Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xii.

\textsuperscript{61} Kealey, \textit{Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism}, 395.
Knights’ DA 125. Furthermore, when Macdonald refused to withdraw Heakes’ appointment, Toronto labour leaders were so infuriated that many decided to boycott the Commission’s hearings altogether. After his work on the Commission, Heakes was no longer active in the trade union movement. However, his efforts as a commissioner were noteworthy and frequently promoted the reputation of the workingman. In spite of his reputation in labour circles in Toronto, Heakes’ allegiances were with labour during the hearings of the Commission.

Two Maritimers were named in the initial appointments: a Halifax master carpenter Michael Walsh; and a Carleton, New Brunswick contractor named James Clark. Little biographical information is available about James Clark. He played a minimal role in the proceedings of the Commission. He was charged with only one Appendix in the final report on Child and Female labour, in which he claimed “the employment of children is one of the most important subjects which can commend themselves to the attention of legislative bodies.”62 Michael Walsh was born in Ireland in 1825 where he received a Catholic education. At eighteen he immigrated to Newfoundland. In Newfoundland he met and married a woman from a prominent St. John’s family and had a child. The family moved to Nova Scotia in 1858 and settled in Halifax’s working-class north end in 1864. Walsh gained a reputation in Halifax as a carpenter -- a trade he picked up and eventually mastered. His success in his trade coincided with his reputation in labour circles. As Maria MacInnis states, “[h]e was

62 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 36.
trusted and respected by his peers in the labor movement.”\textsuperscript{63} Ian McKay adds that his involvement in organized labour had a distinct political side.\textsuperscript{64} Harvey states that Walsh’s appointment to the Commission was, in part, because of his reputation in labour circles: “he was considered one of the principal leaders in the Halifax Labour movement at the start of the Labour Commission.”\textsuperscript{65} For some authors, Walsh’s appointment to the Commission was as a regional representative.\textsuperscript{66} Near the end of his life he served as a member of the Board of School Commissioners for the city of Halifax. Walsh died in 1904.

Kealey states that “Walsh’s qualifications for the job [of commissioner] was his personal acquaintance with both Thompson and Macdonald and his concern with ‘the prospects of the party.’”\textsuperscript{67} He was active in the Liberal Conservative Association in Halifax and his relationship with J.D. Thompson was certainly sound.\textsuperscript{68} In his recommendation of Walsh, Thompson discerningly described a man who was both “capital” and “labour”:

\begin{quote}
[he] is a person who I think would be found very well qualified on account of his intelligence, his knowledge of public affairs and his high
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} Sister Maria Berchmans MacInnis, \textit{Keep her Memory Bright: Memoir of a Woman who Worked and Prayed, Mother Mary Berchmans Walsh} (Halifax, 1971), 3-6.
\textsuperscript{64} Ian McKay, \textit{The Craft Transformed}, (Halifax, 1985). Harvey also claims a similar political affiliation: “… Michael Walsh présente le profil d’un labour politician.” See Harvey, \textit{Revolution industrielle et travailleurs}, 58.
\textsuperscript{65} Harvey, \textit{Revolution industrielle et travailleurs}, 297. The translation is mine.
\textsuperscript{66} In \textit{Keep her Memory Bright}, MacInnis claims Walsh was “chosen to represent Nova Scotia.” See MacInnis, \textit{Keep her Memory Bright}, 3-6.
\textsuperscript{67} JAM, LAC, Thompson to Macdonald, July 1886, 124798-124800; Thompson Papers, LAC, Armstrong to Walsh, 17 May 1888, 3158-61 and Walsh to Thompson, 27 May 1888, 2175-3177.
\textsuperscript{68} Walsh’s correspondence with Thompson ranges from 1881 to the mid-1890s. Of course, Walsh must have known Thompson -- who was also from Halifax -- previous to the latter’s stay in Ottawa.
character. Although a master carpenter, and, to some extent an employer, he is not by any means a capitalist. He had some acquaintance with you in the past years in Toronto, and has letters from you dated ’77 and ’78 in reference to the prospects of the party.\(^6\)

Walsh’s background in collecting information for the government did not begin with the Commission; he also played a part in the 1871 census.\(^7\)

One of the most important personalities in the operation of a royal commission is the secretary. As George Henderson remarks on the subject of secretaries to royal commissions, they are “often an expert on the subject of the inquiry, particularly when the commissioners are themselves not experts.”\(^7\) Macdonald chose Alfred Blackeby for this position in the first round. Blackeby’s involvement with four of the five investigations into industrialism between 1881 and 1895, is something of an enigma.\(^7\) That the Tories were responsible for all these investigations suggests much about Blackeby’s prominence in the Conservative party. His reports were always positive in their comments on the Conservative government and, in particular, the National Policy. Yet, despite his party loyalty, he had to lobby hard to become secretary of the Commission.\(^7\) In September 1886 he wrote Macdonald demanding clarification of a

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\(^6\) JAM, LAC, Thompson to Macdonald, 1886, 124798-99.
\(^7\) As Walsh said to Archibald Blue in Toronto: “The reason I ask particularly was because I had something to do with the census.” GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 88.
\(^7\) Blackeby was not part of the 1895 sweating commission. Also, Blackeby is mentioned as chairing a municipal investigation in Galt, Ontario in the introduction of Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal and Kingston, 2000).
\(^7\) JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, August 28, 1886, 209774; September 3, 1886, 209928.
rumor from a St. Thomas paper that P.A. Crosby was to be appointed secretary.\textsuperscript{74} Blackeby’s role in the proceedings of the Commission was largely behind the scenes, although he did ask several questions in one instance.\textsuperscript{75}

Given the appointees partisan relations with the Conservative Party, organized labour quickly protested Macdonald’s initial choices. The Hamilton \textit{Palladium of Labour} commented on the first round of appointments quite extensively and is worth quoting at length:

As we expected it is a purely partisan affair. Of the Ontario men appointed the only man who is not a servile and unscrupulous hack is John Armstrong. His colleague, S.R. Heakes, is a double-faced sneak and schemer of the worst type. Originally a Tory, he has for some years professed independence. He has gained admission to the late Labor Congress on bogus credentials, and by deliberate falsehood and when there did his best to serve the ends of his Ottawa masters. A fitting associate for this easily bribed renegade is A.T. Freed. He has never been anything but a thorough-paced party hack, ready to write anything for or against labor, so that it would suit the temporary interests of Toryism. It confirms our previous estimate of the Commission as a device to bolster up the National Policy and to fool the working class by the empty promise of legislation that will never be undertaken. A set of hireling journalists and renegade workmen who are expected to do the work of the party heeler will never accomplish anything of practical utility towards the amelioration of Labor’s condition even if the government would let them.\textsuperscript{76}

Widespread opposition to the 1886 appointments (particularly in Southern Ontario where Freed and Heakes were openly criticized) as well as regional concerns over the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, September 24, 1886, 210405.
\item \textsuperscript{75} The only time Blackby speaks during the proceedings was on the first day of the hearings in Toronto where he asks Stewart Dunlop some questions on the wages of females and males. GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 47.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Hamilton, \textit{Palladium of Labour}, 11 December, 1886.
\end{itemize}
representation of Montreal or mining interests in Nova Scotia forced Macdonald to make a second round of appointments which were finalized in November 1887.\textsuperscript{77}

As Kealey and Palmer have noted, the strength of the Knights of Labor was displayed in their successful efforts to have that organization sufficiently represented in the second round of appointments,\textsuperscript{78} which was aimed at deflecting the critique of the commissioners as Tory hacks as well as recruiting more worker representation.\textsuperscript{79} These "workers" figured prominently in the second round of appointments. Some of them were appointed simply for posterity’s sake.\textsuperscript{80} For example, John Kelly (a manufacturer from Portland, New Brunswick) and William Haggarty (a teacher from Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia) were chosen simply to bolster the representation of the Maritimes amongst the commissioners.\textsuperscript{81} Printer Hugh McLean was also appointed in the second round. McLean was a well known union personality in London, Ontario. He had served as the president of the London Trades and Labor Council and was also a member of the London Typographical Union. In 1886 McLean was president of the London Assembly

\textsuperscript{77} See GC, \textit{Canada Gazette} 22, XXI (November 26, 1887); GC, \textit{Canada Gazette} 40, XXI (March 31, 1887).

\textsuperscript{78} Kealey and Palmer, \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, 216-218; See also Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xiv.

\textsuperscript{79} Many names had been turned down at this point, one year after the formation of the Commission was announced. An extensive list of names was suggested to Macdonald on several occasions. The Ottawa Workingmen’s Liberal Conservative Association suggested seven in a letter to Macdonald in 1886: See JAM, LAC, 1886, 10932; other recommendations were made by conservatives: JAM, LAC, 1886, 10877. Several second round appointments were selected from this list such as Côté, McLean, and Gibson.

\textsuperscript{80} I put this word in quotation so as to identify the subjective use of the term. Macdonald was actively constructing a ‘balance’ of labour and capital in the composition of the Commission. Unfortunately, his selection of workers also means that little biographical information was available on many of the round two appointments.

\textsuperscript{81} Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xi-xii.; and Harvey, \textit{Revolution industrielle et travailleurs}, 59.
of the Knights of Labor. He was said to have been “strongly recommended by our friends,” in Agriculture Minister John Carling’s letter to Macdonald.\textsuperscript{82} McLean’s presence on the Commission was likely intended to deflect criticism that the Knights were not adequately represented.

William Gibson and Urias Carson were suggested by the WLCA. In fact, their nomination reflected tension within that organization. Gibson, who was suggested by the WLCA in September 1886, was appointed because of his solid Party record. However, two Conservative ministers, W.G. Perley and H. Robillard, wrote Macdonald claiming that Gibson was not a sound choice and recommended Carson in his stead. The French branch of the WLCA (Cercle Lafontaine) intervened on behalf of Gibson, claiming that he was the Francophone choice amongst workers in the Ottawa region. They wrote Macdonald claiming that Gibson, “was your friend in adversity; he fought from 1874 to 1878 as no other man in his walk of life dared to do and resisted tempting offers to persevere in his allegiance.”\textsuperscript{83} Eventually, Macdonald simply added both Carson and Gibson to the list of commissioners in the second round of appointments.\textsuperscript{84} Yet, their appointment on the Commission allows some insight into the complexity of patronage appointments. Macdonald’s concession suggested that the delicate reciprocities characteristic of his legendary patronage machine were instrumental in the

\textsuperscript{82}Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xiii; in particular see footnote 6, xxv.
\textsuperscript{83}\textit{Ibid.}, xiii.
\textsuperscript{84}JAM, LAC, Workingmen’s Liberal-Conservative Association to John Carling, September 13, 1886 10930-31; JAM, LAC, Workingmen’s Liberal-Conservative Association to Macdonald, 21 July, 1887, 10932-33.
politics of the Commission. Gibson was appointed because of pressure from the WLCA, not because he was Macdonald’s choice.\textsuperscript{85}

Both Carson and Gibson were clearly partisan appointments but they were also meant to augment the number of labour “representatives” in the Commission. Gibson, a blacksmith, was one of the founders of the WLCA. Carson was also member of WLCA and had long been involved in the textile industry. As Perley and Robillard told Macdonald, Carson had much “experience in matters between employees and employers.”\textsuperscript{86} While both signed the pro-labour report, Carson was not always a favourite in the labour press. The \textit{Canadian Workman} wrote in February 1888 about Carson’s class allegiances: “The workingmen are watching you Carson. Don’t try to run with the hare and keep with the hounds. It won’t work.”\textsuperscript{87} Carson and Gibson knew and were known by many of the working people who testified.\textsuperscript{88}

Some critiqued the first round of appointments on “class” grounds. Others were struck by its ethno-linguistic bias. Louis Tellier, from the Central Council of Trades and Labor in Montreal, wrote Macdonald after the initial round of appointments to voice just this criticism:

\begin{quote}
[i]t\textit{he Labor Commission just established by the government, have to undertake a delicate and laborious task so that it may attain its end and bring forth the expected good results, it is necessary that the commission
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{86} JAM, LAC, W.G. Perley and H. Robillard to Macdonald, September 10, 1887, 10987; JAM, LAC, Urias Carson to Macdonald, September 9, 1887, 10988.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Canadian Workmen}, 18 February, 1888.

\textsuperscript{88} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), see: J. Oliver, W. Garcock; GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Quebec Evidence (1889), see J. Kerr. For Gibson see GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), see C.T. Campbell.
be composed of all the elements that will inspire confidence – every interest should be well and truly represented therein. Nevertheless, we have noticed with a certain amount of surprise that the French Canadian had not the advantage of finding one representative of their race on the commission.  

In response, Patrick Kerwin of the Quebec Ship Labourers Benevolent Society was appointed to the Commission as a Quebec representative. Little biographical information is available about Kerwin. However, his appointment adds another ethnic criticism to the Francophone representatives that began soon after the second round of appointments were announced. Similar to the problems with Helbronner’s Jewish background, Kerwin’s Irish background also drew attention. *Le Canadien* wrote: “Our compatriots were isolated... and employed like instruments. Is it one of them who was named as a member of the Commission of Labor, has $10 per day, all traveling expenses payed? No, it is Mr. Kerwin! It is he who was recommended by the Irish section of the Knights of Labor.”  

*L’Evenement* saw Kerwin’s appointment as a strategy designed to connect the Conservatives with the Irish population in Quebec. Other critics of Kerwin thought his appointment was directly related to his support for the local West-Quebec Conservative, and Irishman, Thomas McGreevy. Furthermore, his Irish background was championed by the *Quebec Daily Telegraph* who saw Kerwin’s appointment as a triumph for Western/English Quebec. Whatever the undoubtedly patronage-related

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89 JAM, LAC, Louis Tellier to Macdonald, December 21, 1886, 10877.  
91 See *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, November 24, 1887. See also a telegraph from McGreevy in JAM, LAC, Thomas McGreevy to Langevin, November 20, 1887, 10994.
dimensions of his appointment, Kerwin proved to be a die-hard supporter of the pro-labour position in the hearings of the Commission.

Seeking another Francophone appointee, Macdonald turned to Louis Côté. Despite his Liberal connections, Côté’s support of the National Policy was sufficient to secure an appointment. In fact, the premier of Quebec, Honoré Mercier (a Liberal as well), was involved in his being appointed: “I have consulted the leading Conservatives in the town and we are agreed on recommending him. He has studied the labor question both from book and from nature as well in this country as in the United States, in France and in Great Britain.”

Côté was born and educated in Montreal. His manufacturing experience began when he opened a successful shoe and boot factory with his brother and Guillaume Bresse. Eventually, with his keen interest in mechanics and his successful inventions, Côté opened his own factory in St. Hyacinthe and was largely credited with making “St. Hyacinthe what it is today.”

Côté was also involved in social and economic matters in that city: he had served in municipal politics from 1882 to 1885 and was president of the Union Saint-Joseph St. Hyacinthe. Politically, Côté was a Liberal but this did not quash his recommendation to serve on the Labour Commission. Although Côté’s involvement in the Commission was very limited, it did result in testimonies from two workers, 12 and 14 years old respectively, from his St. Hyacinthe factory.

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93 H.J. Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1898), 211.
94 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1327. The testimony from the 12-and 14-year-old boys was particularly short: such young workers would be more extensively questioned about their employment and their employers.
Guillaume Boivin was born and educated in Quebec where he apprenticed as a shoemaker. His apprenticeship took him to Stoneham, Mass., from 1854 to 1856 where he acquired his knowledge of the technological revolution affecting this sector. Boivin opened his own shop in Quebec upon returning from Massachusetts, but soon moved to Montreal where he “earned an enviable reputation among Montreal footwear producers and was one of the major French Canadian manufacturers in the city.” Boivin was also well known in the city for his involvement in museums and Canadian history. He was a participant in the activities of the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Québec and served as that body’s president in 1874. Joanne Burgess and Fernand Harvey consider Boivin to typify a ‘self-made man’ in this early period of Canadian industrial development. He helped found the Protective Association of Montreal, earning him the title of ‘the father of protection in the province of Quebec.’ He was also involved in federal investigations into the industrial sector, particularly an 1876 study into the causes of that decade’s major depression. He was a member of the Montreal Board of Trade from 1876 to 1886 and served as a director in 1885. He was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce in the District of Montreal from 1889 to his death in 1912 (he served nine times on the board of directors and was second vice-president in 1896 and 1897). Boivin’s party loyalty was bolstered significantly when he participated in the political debates during the 1879 federal election which contributed to a Conservative victory. His political

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96 Burgess, “Guillaume Boivin,” 95; and Fernand Harvey, Revolution industrielle et travailleurs, 57-58.
connections and his prestigious position in the French business world were surely instrumental to his eventual appointment to the Labour Commission.

Boivin represents the classic industrialist who established himself soundly as a member of the French-Canadian bourgeoisie. His reforming concerns surfaced in Cornwall where Boivin gave a foreman in the Stormont cotton mill a difficult time because of complaints about impure drinking water: “[d]o you not believe that every man going to the same place or pail could get ill because of the impurity of the water? There must be some cause where there is so much complaints?” His thorough knowledge of the boot and shoe business was apparent in his questions to witnesses. For example, in New Brunswick his questions to Daniel J. Doherty concerned very specific issues: the prices of a particular style of boot, the wages of specific employees (cutters, fitters, “men’s light buff congress, machine sewed work”). And, when Doherty claimed that his product was of a better class than those produced in Quebec, Boivin took it as a personal affront: “[d]o you not admit that they are as good as yours? Have you any other reason than the fact of their not being good to which to attribute the competition -- is there bad labor used on them or bad material in them?”

This brief biographical sketch of the Commissioners suggests that there were several elements at work in Macdonald’s strategy of appointments. A central consideration appears to have been political affiliation. There was no doubt that the Commission was intended to bolster the Conservative Party in the upcoming election.

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97 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1094.
98 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 103.
Macdonald clearly listened to voices within his renowned network urging him to choose particularly favoured men. Macdonald’s patronage, then, was integral to his nation-building aspirations. Ethnicity and region were also significant features in the appointment of commissioners. A further consideration, if the Commission were to achieve any credibility, was that of balancing “labour” and “capital.” In striving for this balance, Macdonald selected people who implicitly undercut the labour/capital binary. His ‘labour’ commissioners all had experience and reputations in organized labour circles. Similarly, his ‘capital’ commissioners were not owners of factories (save Côté) but various professionals. The backgrounds of the commissioners suggest a deep-seated tension between labour and capital that “threat[ened] the course of nation building and economic nationalism” that the national policy was fostering.”

At the same time, Macdonald shrewdly made appointments that subtly undermined these very categories. The Labour Commission was distinctive in the space it made for labour, but – on closer inspection—rather than solidifying the lines between labour and capital, the commissioners personally suggested a basis for a ‘middling’ position. Fifty percent of the commissioners (Judge Armstrong, Blackeby, Boivin, Côté, Kelly, Clark, Helbronner and Freed) could be considered “professional.”

Macdonald clearly pondered the ethnicity and regional background of the Commission. On the surface, Macdonald’s decision with respect to the ethnicity of the

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100 It appears as though Macdonald took some measures to represent region as well as French Canadians in the Commissioners. For many French Canadian historians French speaking has been identified as a distinct ethnicity with its own culture, class and experience. The notion of a distinct Québec ethnic class has been discussed extensively among sociologists such as
Commissioners simply entailed striking a balance of French-and-English-speaking representatives. The privileging of Upper Canada that many historians have continually noted is evident in that commissioners from Ontario were favoured: half of the commissioners were from Ontario with five of the eight in the first round and three of the eight in the second round. There were only four commissioners “representing” Quebec, three of whom were appointed in the second round. Considering these “French representatives,” it is clear that ethnicity was a major concern in Quebec. For example, Kerwin was not perceived by Francophones as a French “representative” because, despite residing in Quebec, his roots were Irish. Similarly, Montreal’s L’Étandard was clearly unhappy about Helbronner’s appointment: “[i]t is true that a gentleman who calls himself a Frenchman and is considered as such, although he is a Jew, has been named to the Commission?” Côté’s minimal involvement in the Commission’s hearings undercuts any sense that he performed as an influential French-Canadian representative. Judge Armstrong, born in Quebec, married to a French-Canadian, and seigneur of sorts resided in Ottawa upon his appointment - a fact that did not go unnoticed by some French observers. It appears that the Maritimes received token attention in both rounds of appointments.

Jacques Dofny and Akinsola Akiwowo, *National and Ethnic Movements* (London, 1980). See also Jacques Dofny and Marcel Rioux, “Les classes sociales au Canada français,” *Revue française de sociologie* 3, 3 (1962), 290-330. For many, French Canadians in Quebec were workers while English speakers in that province were in positions of management. However, this proposition has been challenged by Fernand Ouellet, *Economy, Class and Nation in Quebec* (Toronto, 1991). Another contemporary approach to the ethnicity of the French working class in North America is Jacques Ferland, “Canadians, Acadians and Canada: Knowledge and Ethnicity in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 50 (2002).

101 “Incrédule,” *Étandard*, January 4, 1886. The Translation is mine.
Political allegiance to the Conservative party was an important but not essential consideration in the appointment of commissioners. Some federal Tories saw a direct correlation between the findings of the Commission and the fate of the Party as a letter from H.E. Clarke to Macdonald outlines:

> [t]he Tories will be mortally offended if the opportunity is not embraced for appointing a good solid party man. The Grits in any case will say that it was appointed for the purpose of bringing in a report in favor of the National Policy. And the working men will be very much influenced by the character of the representation they have on the commission.102

Yet, not all the commissioners were solid Tories. Louis Côté was a known Liberal who was sympathetic toward the National Policy; John Armstrong frequently dropped his Conservative ties for what he saw as the interests of labour. That two reports were submitted to the government suggests that the connection to labour or capital ran deeper than that of political affiliation.

The selection of commissioners also sheds light on the class implications of the period’s patronage practices. Simply equating the selection of commissioners with a political management model of patronage does not attend to the varied backgrounds, ethnic diversity and class differences that are apparent in the commissioners.103 Macdonald’s selection was intended to account for various interests and, in turn,

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102 Fernand Harvey, *Revolution industrielle et travailleurs*, 63.
103 The political management model of patronage refers a “top-down” structure in which the politician bestows positions upon able managers (or patrons) who in turn dole out political rewards to clients in their constituencies. For works that forward this approach see J.B. Brebner, “Patronage and Parliamentary Government,” Canadian Historical Association Annual Report (1938), 22-31; and John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System, 1901-1920* (Toronto, 1977). This approach, and subsequent critique, is discussed extensively in Chapter 4.
appease some of his critics. That all the commissioners were not solid Tories suggests that Macdonald’s patronage practices were contingent on factors beyond his immediate “management.” However, this balance of representatives – political, ethnic, class, region – was the source of the Commission’s power: it incorporated these various elements and, in doing so, aligned the interests of the nation with those of the Conservative Party. Yet, as the selection of commissioners also suggests, Macdonald’s political management was not top down but reciprocal. His selection of commissioners involved regionally-based business leaders and labour organizations who were interested to see that ‘their man’ become a commissioner. By catering to these regional connections, Macdonald ensured continual involvement in past and present commissions. Furthermore, these representations gave the Commission legitimacy by accounting for class, regional and ethnic representation.

Finally, the biographies of the commissioners support their standing as ‘middling’. Judge Armstrong was a firm fixture in the Canadian middle class. He was educated and owned property; he was involved in several civil servant appointments and was prominent within Conservative party circles. Freed was another person who would fit a middle-class model. He was a successful printer turned successful editor who also enjoyed several significant civil service appointments and was prominent within party circles. Jules Helbronner was a national policy immigrant, successful reporter and social commentator, and active in reform efforts that directly affected Canadian workers. Côté was an educated and ‘self made’ successful businessman credited with ‘making’ his community. Boivin was also a self-made man who was
educated and ran his own factory. In addition, his secular efforts and reforming work were as prominent as his party affiliation and advocacy of the National Policy. A. Blackeby’s biography boasts a long list of civil service appointments and involvement in reform movements. Even the “worker” commissioners approach a “middling” category as they all had achieved some level of authority in their trades, were active in social organizations and/or the union movement and were politically involved. Furthermore, like their more traditional bourgeois colleagues, notions of expertise, respectability and morality were central to their work as commissioners. John Armstrong was a skilled printer, with a long history of involvement in the labour movement and was prominent in Conservative Party circles. Sam Heakes, whose work on the Labour Commission eventually lead to his leaving the cause of workers’ organization, was also prominent in Conservative Party circles. Michael Walsh was a skilled worker and a fixture in the Conservative Party. Carson and Gibson were skilled workers with histories of involvement in the labour movement and were well connected in party circles. Kerwin was another skilled worker with a history of involvement in the labour movement and was politically well connected. Ultimately, the Commission consisted of skilled workers, educated journalists, reformers and successful businessmen who all had strong political connections. Their political partisanship as well as their interest in the fate of the ‘nation’ (particularly the relations of labour and capital) made them central to the state’s efforts to massage the social tensions stemming from rapid industrialization. Even though they frequently fought amongst themselves, they were in agreement about the state’s role in determining the fate of the workers.
During the hearings -- and in subsequent historical attention to the Labour Commission -- the commissioners, for various reasons, have been touted as representatives of either “capital” or “labour” respectively. Broad notions of tension between labour and capital were prominent in newspaper accounts that labeled the reports and commissioners as such. The newspaper attention to infighting among the commissioners certainly supported the view that there was class tension. Allegiances to labour and capital undoubtedly influenced the infighting between the commissioners. Other factors such as the clash of personalities and administrative priorities should also be considered. Ultimately, the two reports -- “labour” and “capital” -- submitted to the government were very similar in intention and content. In spite of the class tension, the commissioners were largely in agreement about the condition of Canadian workers and about remedies for their problems. The similarity between the reports suggests that the relations between labour and capital were far more nuanced than these terms suggest. In the discussion on the relations of labour and capital, there was reciprocity and mutual agreement. Moreover, the two reports indicate that determining who was capital and who was labour is not a straightforward proposition.

Conflict between the commissioners was a marked feature of the Commission’s proceedings. Tensions began in the first days and continued throughout the duration of the hearings, often in full view of the public. The first instance occurred as early as November 1887 when John Armstrong, as well as some other commissioners, argued

Historians have noted that the two reports share, as Kealey notes, a “superficial sameness.” See Kealey, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, xviii. Yet, they have not focused upon explaining why they were similar or what that means.
with Freed over whether to visit Walkerville, after taking evidence in nearby Windsor, to inquire into the truck system. Freed countered that the workers in Walkerville should have traveled to Windsor. The most obvious and sensational conflict that emerged amongst the commissioners was when instances of child abuse were reported at the Fortier cigar factory in Montreal in February 1888. When it was disclosed that child beating and black-hole imprisonment were regularly employed in some cigar factories, many of the commissioners (John Armstrong, Heakes, Kerwin, McLean and Gibson) wanted to extend their meetings in Montreal and further expose abuses of this kind. Chairman Armstrong and commissioners Freed, Clarke, Walsh, Helbronner and Carson disagreed and pushed for the Commission to continue on schedule. Armstrong openly fought with other commissioners in Montreal. These confrontations were often picked up in the press and open a small window into the broad social tensions that accompanied the relations of labour and capital at the time. As Fernand Harvey notes, “Conservative newspapers such as La Justice and La Vérité sided with Armstrong, whom they regarded as an impartial judge. On the other hand, papers such as the Montreal Canadian Workman and the Toronto Canadian Labor Reformer vehemently attacked the chairman, accusing him of showing partiality to employers.”

The conflicts among the commissioners paralleled more widespread social tensions, and many were fought out in full view of the press and the witnesses. The Montreal Gazzette noted an exchange between Judge Armstrong and Kerwin that

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105 Kealey, Canada Investigates Industrialism, xv; See also Harvey, Revolution Industrielle et Travailleurs, 73. This issue was related to the TTLC’s motion to boycott the hearings as a result of Sam Heakes’s appointment. 106 Fernand Harvey, “James Sherrard Armstrong,” 32.
suggested mutual hostility on the grounds of nationality. Kerwin asked a witness if many of the St. Lawrence pilots were French Canadians. The judge objected to questions of nationality being brought into the discussion.

Kerwin: All right.
Armstrong: No, it’s not all right
Kerwin: I meant to say that if you overruled me I would withdraw my question.
Armstrong: You have shown that you do not care much for my rulings.\textsuperscript{107}

Another point of contention amongst the commissioners occurred in Quebec City. Louis P. Peltier, a lawyer and president of the company that printed \textit{La Justice} brought up the question as to whether interests were allowed to have lawyers represent them before the Commission. The chair agreed that this could happen, whereupon several ‘labour’ commissioners held a secret meeting and overruled him.\textsuperscript{108} Freed wrote Macdonald complaining of the ‘workingmen commissioners’ and looking for his assistance in the matter. Heakes, in turn, wrote Macdonald to counter Freed’s complaints: “[p]erhaps we were wrong in deciding not to admit lawyers to interfere in the future, but I do not understand that the commission is a Police Court where people who give testimony are to be pestered and badgered by technical questions.”\textsuperscript{109} Eventually a resolution was drafted by Blackeby concerning the matter.\textsuperscript{110} Of course, it is not by coincidence that

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Montreal Gazette}, February 17, 1888.
\textsuperscript{108} JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, March 9, 1888, 226846.
\textsuperscript{109} JAM, LAC, Heakes to Macdonald, 1888, 226843.
\textsuperscript{110} JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, March 9, 1888, 226846. “Resolved that in the future no lawyer, unless he be personally and directly concerned in the evidence addressed (and not directly or by reason of his connection with an incorporated company) shall be permitted to put questions to witnesses who appear before the Commission; either by himself or in writing through any person, nor shall a lawyer be permitted in anyway to interfere with the work of this
some commissioners openly fought with others as their personal beliefs and understandings frequently surfaced in the hearings. Given the publicity surrounding the Commission, these personal beliefs and values easily translated into more socially determined categorizations such as labour and capital.

Once the reports were in, the newspapers of the day promptly labelled them “capital” and “labour.” In 1889, when the Toronto Mail attacked the minority group calling them “the capitalistic members” of the Commission, Freed responded with a series of letters. The letters accused the other commissioners of having refused to work with his group, alleged that organized labour had hindered the work of the Commission, and claiming that some of the working-class commissioners (Heakes and Armstrong) had wanted the hearings to last longer so as to receive more money.\textsuperscript{111} The Labour Reformer saw the situation quite clearly: “[i]t seems a most extraordinary course for a Labour Commission to refuse to hear evidence as to the treatment of children by their employers, no doubt Judge Armstrong and the others are anxious to earn the thanks of the class they represent on the commission.”\textsuperscript{112} The article continued to note that Armstrong’s courtesies were not extended to working-class witnesses. It ended with the warning, “[b]e careful judge, our eyes are on you.”\textsuperscript{113} Of course, other commissioners exhibited a similar attitude toward witnesses along class lines. For example, as Kealey points out, John Armstrong constantly led vigorous attacks on capitalists who testified.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111} Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xvii.\
\textsuperscript{112} Harvey, \textit{Revolution Industrielle et Travailleurs}, 74.\
\textsuperscript{113} Harvey, \textit{Revolution Industrielle et Travailleurs}, 74.}
The Toronto *Globe* observed upon the close of the Commission, that the friction between the commissioners was “noticeable at all their sittings.” However, the same paper also noted upon the release of the labour report, “[i]t repeats, in condensed form, the axioms of labour agitation that make up its brother report.”

Personality conflicts also permeated the work of the Commission from the beginning right down to the preparation of the final reports. As most historians have pointed out, these clashes were often premised on an inherent tension between capital and labour. For example, Freed wrote Macdonald from Montreal complaining that Blackeby was sloppy, frequently late, and had leaked information about the Commission to A.W. Wright, the editor for the Knights of Labor in Toronto and a witness summoned before the Commission. When the Tories retained Blackeby to prepare the testimony of the Commission for publication, Judge Armstrong and Freed were furious. The judge wrote, “our arch-enemy, Blackeby has triumphed over us.” The judge went on to claim that the problems between the commissioners were Blackeby’s fault. Furthermore, the judge saw the struggle for power as one between capital and labour: “if Blackeby is to be ‘the boss’ I shall have my own report and be damned therefore by the amiable men who compose the Knights of Labor.” In a letter to Macdonald soon afterward Freed explained that his actions were the result of two years

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114 *Globe*, February 28, 1889.

115 This comment was made after the release of the second (labour) report. See *Globe*, April 17, 1889.

116 There is a letter with Labour Commission letterhead which is a resolution against absenteeism of Secretary Blackeby. JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, 1888, 226848. However, absenteeism was rampant in the commission.

117 A.W. Wright would eventually chair the Sweating Commission that was formed in 1895.

118 Kealey, *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, xvi.
of “bitter and incessant attacks.” According to Freed, his efforts with the Commission had been inspired by an “earnest desire to be of service to the workingmen, to expose the evils to which they are exposed, and to recommend legislation which may benefit them.”\textsuperscript{119} On this note, Kealey calls Freed’s defensiveness as “exactly that element of upper class paternalism which the working class members resented.”\textsuperscript{120} In a letter to Macdonald, Freed implies this sentiment very clearly: “[y]ou are too busy a man, Sir John, to be able to read the report. Will you not, in justice to us, ask some trustworthy friend to read it, and tell you whether, in his opinion it is not a document which the most earnest friend to workingmen might not have signed.”\textsuperscript{121}

These positions were reinforced when the Labour Commission submitted two reports to the Canadian government. It is not surprising that they have been, subsequently, named the capitalist (or paternalist) report and the labour report.\textsuperscript{122} For example, Kealey argues that “the substance of the split in the Commission was the supremacy of class issues over partyism. Despite the excellent party standing of almost all the participants, the paternalists and the workers were unable to co-exist peacefully.”\textsuperscript{123} For example, the class-informed factionalism of the two groups of commissioners was evident given that both reports favored the extension of education to working class children but differed in their assessment of how to rectify problems in this

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., xvii.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} JAM, LAC, Freed to Macdonald, 1889, 149560.
\textsuperscript{122} The “capitalist” report was signed by Freed, Helbronner, Clark, Walsh and Boivin. The “labour” report was signed by Kelly, Heakes, McLean, Carson, Armstrong, Haggerty, Gibson and Kerwin.
\textsuperscript{123} Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism}, xviii.
area: “the paternalists recommend increased education for the development of a highly skilled work force; the workers discuss the class-biased nature of the system which deprives their children of education.” Kealey claimed that “[t]he split in the Commission evidences a particular case of growing working class identity. The tension in the Commission thus mirrors the conflict that was emerging in Canadian society at large, and which the Commission itself had been designed to ameliorate.” Fernand Harvey, on the other hand, saw the split in the Commission as superficial: “the two groups of commissioners produced only a more or less orderly set of findings and recommendations dealing with various problems that had come up in the course of the inquiry.”

Two further considerations bear on this question of the supposed class origins of the split commission. First, there appeared to be some agreement on the constitution of the reports just previous to their release. An early draft of the final report was compiled by all the commissioners. Before that copy was properly verified, the report was submitted to the government. In a letter to the Mail, Heakes outlined what happened in the final stages of the report:

[b]efore the remaining subjects could be dealt with Mr Freed coolly appropriated, as being the work of himself and his four friends, the work of the entire body – added little to it, and then without giving the other commissioners an opportunity of seeing what was contained in the reports, came to a meeting of the commission to announce that a report had been submitted to the government.

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124 Ibid., xix.
125 Ibid., xix.
126 Harvey, Revolution Industrielle et Travailleurs, 247-248. The translation is mine.
127 Mail, May, 1889; it would appear that the Freed reported a similar scenario to Macdonald: JAM, LAC, Freed to Macdonald, May 20, 1888, 149560-149566.
Obviously the tensions and power plays that had dogged the work of the Commission from the beginning were not resolved when the hearings ended. Were they all manifestations of class? Some seem more attributable to personality clashes and partisan identities. The near success of one united report, plus the microscopic differences between the two supposedly class-based documents, bear out this reading.128

Second, the “class” interpretation seemingly implies that the “two classes” presented different bodies of evidence from which the commissioners selected. Yet, in fact, the reports were not necessarily the product of negotiation between the attitudes and values of the witnesses and the commissioners. In many ways, the reports were simply the reflections of the commissioners’ opinions. These were sometimes based on the hearings. For example, the Reports make frequent reference to European and U.S. examples. The evidence rarely does. A good example can be found in the case of arbitration. The minority “capital” report begins by asserting that strikes are a result of unjust regulations rather than wages. To make the point, the report uses a list of statistics from the United States: “Leading Causes of Strikes - Number and per cent. For the United States – 1880-1887.” It then discusses the “Conseils des Prud’hommes,” a court of arbitration in France, and ends with some statements from the United States Labor Bureau.129 It is a discussion markedly free from the Commission-generated evidence – even from Canadian facts and figures. The majority “labour” report is a little

128 Harvey includes a comparison of the differences between the two reports that also notes their resemblance to each other. See Harvey, “Divergent Recommendations in the Two Reports (Appendix G),” Revolution Industrielle et Travailleurs, 283-286.
129 GC, RCRLC, Reports, (1889), 57-60.
better. It discusses the treatment of arbitration in the Commission’s hearings, particularly the views of organized labour: “these restrictions go to show that strikes are not looked upon with any degree of favor by the intelligent worker ....”

It then discusses strikes in Canada and uses international examples of arbitration boards (particularly in Britain and the United States) as models which the Canadian government might consult in establishing a similar body. Both reports exhibit an awareness of international bodies and arbitration efforts and, implicitly or explicitly, suggest similar measures be taken in Canada. That the minority report does not address the Commission’s evidence or the implementation of boards of arbitration in Canada directly could be interpreted by a critical reader as paternalist. However, the knowledge and expertise displayed by both reports is susceptible to the same critique.

It should be noted that the historical value of the Commission rests not upon the reports but upon the testimony. The reports are often simply not based on the testimony taken by the Commission. They seemingly often reflect the pre-existing views of the commissioners themselves. Furthermore, the commissioners appeared to be in agreement about the priorities to be considered in the management of labour and capital. For example, concerning workers’ homes, the labour report encourages cooperative homes, restricted rent increases, and checks on the sanitary state of homes. The minority report suggests investments into constructing workers’ housing and the regular inspection of homes. However, the reports do not always mention the same

130 GC, RCRLC, Reports, (1889), 93.
131 One could even say that in the case of the Labour Commission, the reports are appended to the testimony rather than the other way around.
issues. For example, the majority report makes an explicit statement to the benefits of labour organizations whereas the minority report mentions nothing about them. Similarly, the minority report discusses social issues such as municipal taxation, temperance and suffrage, topics unaddressed in the majority report. Do such subtle shadings indicate a split between “labour” and “capital” – or, more likely from my perspective, do they merely document the varieties of opinion one might often find among “middlemost” Canadians?

Most commentators have claimed that the two reports are very alike in terms of content. The existence of reciprocity and mutual agreement between the commissioners, in spite of the obvious tension that surfaced between them during the hearings, seems evident. This contradiction also sheds some light in the difficulty of assigning labels such as “labour” and “capital” to the two groups which manufactured these reports. For example, could Helbronner, Clark and Walsh be considered “capital” simply because they signed the capitalist (paternalist) report? Their lines of questioning during the Commission’s hearings as well as their backgrounds suggest that grouping them into these categories entails some challenges. Helbronner’s grouping with the capitalists is particularly troublesome. He was an ardent advocate of workers’ rights. In fact, assigning these individuals into the categories of labour and capital entails far more complexity than determining relations to the means of production. It also suggests that moderation and reflection, agreement and consensus-building were central features of the Commission. The commissions investigation into the relations of labour and capital placed them in middling roles.
The Labour Commission was undoubtedly influenced by political partisanship and patronage. It was clearly inspired by political motives. The selection of commissioners represent the growing influence of organized labour in politics as well as the social, economic and cultural turmoil of the great transformation. Labour Commission appointments were politically effective. They rewarded political friends who, under the guise of an independent investigation, could yield a favourable report for the government of the day. However, solid party credentials among the commissioners did not yield a unanimous report. Attributing the split in the Commission to a deeply rooted class antagonism is in line with historical attention to the Commission as well as social forces and media attention at the time. The social tensions that the Commission was designed to investigate surfaced in the Commission itself but measures that could alleviate those tensions were agreed upon by ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ commissioners. Ultimately, both the commissioners and the Commission worked to naturalize readings of ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ in the public sphere in such a way that middlemost Canadians could anticipate a reasonable settlement of their minor differences from a far-sighted and beneficent government.
Chapter Four

The Witnesses and the ‘Social’ Investigation of Labour and Capital

Our object is to get experienced men, like yourself, to come up here and give their opinions, and we do this for the purpose of knowing in future what ought to be recommended, and it is men like you, who have no difficulties with your men, who are in a position to speak without prejudice to give information on this subject. You are in a far better position to give evidence than others who have difficulties with their men, because their judgment may be warped.¹

So did Commissioner Armstrong outline his concept of the ideal witness for the Labour Commission. The ideal witness could provide ‘unprejudiced’ knowledge on the basis of ample ‘experience.’ A background that included labour conflicts might be actively unhelpful. Moreover, the ideal witness was someone who had employed labour himself. There was a tacit hierarchy at play in Armstrong’s mind, one that arguably was influential well beyond the thinking of the Commission’s chairman.

For many historians, the Labour Commission provides access to the voices of hundreds of workers in a period when few alternative sources of this magnitude exist. Yet such historians are often not alert to the subtle and brazen ways in which the words that seem to be the ‘unmediated voice’ of the workers of the 1880s were shaped by tacit hierarchies of significance and power. In her work on the criminal case files of nineteenth-century women, Annalee Golz shows how what appear to be the unmediated voices of people in history have to be scrupulously inspected for traces of the structures which instigated and recorded these voices. Although “[L]egal documents,

¹ Judge Armstrong to Douglas Rutherford in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 536.
especially criminal case files, have proved to be critical sources for probing and reconstructing the more obscure and often conflictual dimensions of family and personal life ....,” she remarks, they also reveal much about the legal system itself:

[t]hese historical records ... reveal a great deal about how family violence ‘crimes’ were adjudicated by the legal system, and how institutions of marriage and the family, as well as the courtroom itself, constituted sites of a complex series of negotiations, antagonisms, and struggles. At the same time, the court testimonies, as written down through the medium of the police magistrate/court recorder and, in some cases, as presented through the voice of a paid interpreter, constitute historical ‘texts’ that were created within specific systems of meaning and relations of power.²

For Golz, constructing a history of violence against women based on court documents requires examining the gendered, social, and legal context that generated such texts. Only if this context is borne in mind can women’s narratives be understood.

Much of her critical appraisal of case files can be extended without difficulty to a consideration of the evidence compiled by the Labour Commission. The attitudes and values of the commissioners affected the selection and treatment of witnesses. In one way or another, the commissioners were responsible for engaging witnesses and bringing out particular social and political understandings in dialogue with them. The Labour Commission thus does not provide the unmediated ‘voice of the workers’ but, rather, documents a theatre of power in which some voices from workers were blended into a more complex chorus. At the same time, and in contrast with the obvious patronage and political aspects of its origin, the Labour Commission did not merely

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manipulate the evidence. The range of witnesses examined by the Commissioners and their strategies of questioning them suggested that the Labour Commission was also a serious if early attempt to undertake a substantial investigation of Victorian capitalism in Canada.

The Labour Commission had an extensive traveling schedule that started in Toronto and continued into large communities in Southwest Ontario. It then proceeded to Montreal and the suburbs before heading east to the capital, Quebec. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were visited before the Commission returned to Eastern Ontario (specifically Ottawa and Hull) where the hearings ended. Requests to visit Western provinces and British Columbia were refused. Paralleling the U.S. case, the Canadian government took a particular interest in industrialization in the East. It is likely because this was where rapid advancements in manufacturing occurred. Similarly, the proximity to the United States (Canadian workers frequently crossed the border for work) and the relative size of the cities (particularly Montreal, Hamilton and Toronto) made Canada’s founding provinces an obvious choice for the itinerary of the Commission. Yet, regional bias was also a tacit feature of the Commission’s investigation. The attention to mining, fishing and timber industries in the Maritimes paled in comparison to the attention paid to urban factories in Ontario and Quebec. Coal and metal mining in British Columbia, already sites of class conflict, were ignored. Furthermore, the volumes of evidence taken in Ontario and Quebec are far more extensive than those of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.
The commissions assembled in the first half of the 1880s laid the groundwork for the Labour Commission. By 1887 many individuals or the companies they represented had already “made known” their opinions on the tensions wrought by rapid industrialization. These individuals were scattered across the country and were involved in rapidly expanding industries such as textiles, shoe and boot manufacturing, and coal mining. Witnesses saw their interests closely tied to the federal government’s policies. Consultation on the labour question legitimized their standing in local and national affairs. Working within its dualistic frame of reference, the Commission placed these individuals in particular roles. Although ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ were sociological categories, and not ones that could be read simplistically off underlying social relations, the Commission was compelled to populate these amorphous social categories with ‘representative’ witnesses from various industrial centers in the East.

The Labour Commission’s witnesses did not make up a random sample of the working population of Canada. Nor were they aggregated on a merely haphazard basis. Many were prominent members of their respective communities chosen in part for their political affiliation, but also because of their experience and ‘expertise’ in industrial matters. Many of them in turn persuaded (or perhaps compelled) some of ‘their’ workers to give evidence. The roster of witnesses was thus in itself a hierarchy, rather than a genuinely spontaneous and free ‘public sphere.’ Because they take the Commission to be an invaluable historical source, historians have retrospectively
bestowed an ‘expertise’ upon these carefully-selected witnesses, seeing in their words unmediated and accurate representations of working-class realities.³

Many ‘workers’ who appeared before the Commission were brief in their comments on working conditions or did not disclose their names. In the absence of any documented reason, it seems likely that these witnesses were protecting themselves and their jobs. For many of these ‘worker’ witnesses, criticism of working conditions or unwanted attention to the operations of their workplaces could have had a direct impact on their lives and those of their families. Herein lies a central paradox with respect to the witnesses who testified before the Commission. For witnesses, engagement with a royal commission held out the possibility of recognition of their social standing and personal worth. For commissioners, this vast and orchestrated collection of Canadians could become ‘labour’ and ‘capital,’ the means by which these categories could be brought to life and even made to defend themselves.

While the selection of witnesses may have been strongly influenced by favoritism, patronage and internal party networks, the testimony taken by the Commission reflects a particular set of social norms and beliefs. Middle-class values — respectability, sexual morality, gender hierarchies, independence and individualism — permeated the text of the Commission. The Labour Commission represented a concerned federal state trying to engage the complexities of the relations of labour and capital. In this respect, industries that highlighted the ‘success’ of the National Policy

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³ The DCB contains many entries that cite the Labour Commission. No fewer than 74 witnesses from Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Saint John, Halifax and New Glasgow have a biography in this series.
were favoured over other industries. Similarly, the Labour Commission ‘disciplined’ the relations of labour and capital. It tried to make sense of them by privileging some witnesses over others, according to broad notions of respectability and expertise. Those who were outside such cultural norms were summarily dealt with.

Yet the Commission also wanted to follow international models of investigative competence. Many witnesses were experienced in working in official “fact-finding” capacities and often had an intimate knowledge of the industries and social issues in their communities. Balancing these very different aspects of its mission required a skill which the Commission, somewhat surprisingly, demonstrated on many occasions. It proved quite capable of generating a text and putting on a performance that induced many Canadians, at least for a time, to consent to hierarchies in its hearings, and by extension, in society.

This interpretation suggests a different way of reading the Commission. Of course, as has been documented, political posturing and patronage dictated the terms of its emergence. Yet the Commission itself was a much more nuanced and persuasive performance than any raw exercise in economic and political power could possibly have been. It was suffused with an atmosphere of reciprocity, as ‘labour’ and ‘capital,’ the ‘ruled’ and the ‘rulers,’ evinced their heartfelt consideration for each other.

In this, it paralleled the actual world of nineteenth-century patronage. Like the analysis of class, the analysis of patronage has changed remarkably over the past twenty

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4 For example, some industries in the Maritimes such as the fishing industry were largely ignored while extensive attention was paid to the Stormont Cotton Mill. Furthermore, little attention was paid to coal mining outside Nova Scotia.
years. Most scholars agree that patronage was a dominant part of Canada’s political culture during Macdonald’s Prime Ministership. As Gordon Stewart suggests, “he did not use patronage for personal, selfish, or temporary ends.... Indeed, Macdonald’s great impact was owing to the fact that he made a continuing effort to ensure that patronage was used to build up permanent party loyalty and resilient party discipline.” Many historians have noted Macdonald’s vast network of political patronage and described his efforts in terms of a “political management model.” This model is a top down structure where the Prime Minister allotted positions to able managers (or patrons) who in turn bestowed political rewards to clients in their constituencies. As Blair Neatby implies in his work, such political management represented an ugly side of Canadian political culture – indeed, the “pornography of politics.” Commentators in the late nineteenth century would agree. The Hamilton Labor Union stated in 1883, “partyism is one of the greatest evils of this country. Everybody admits it. The best men of both parties acknowledge it. The whole system is a defective machine, like a telephone, which receives the voice of the people and transmits only the voice of the wirepuller.”

Goldwin Smith commented:

[t]he task of his (Macdonald’s) political life has been to hold together a set of elements, national, religious, sectional and personal, as motley as the

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8 Greg Kealey and Bryan Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be* (New York, 1982), 204.
component patches of any ‘crazy quilt,’ and actuated, each of them, by paramount regard for his own interest. This task he has so far accomplished by his consummate address, by his assiduous study of the weaker points of character, and where corruption was indispensable, by corruption. It is more than doubtful whether anybody could have done it better than he had done.\footnote{As quoted in Jeffery Simpson, \textit{Spoils of Power} (Toronto, 1988), 96.}

Subsequent scholarly interpretations of Macdonald’s political management model have argued that patronage was not simply about unabashed corruption and self-interest. David Smith’s work on the political integration of immigrants in Britain and Canada, as well as Vincent Lemieux and Raymond Hudon’s work in Quebec suggest that patronage networks wrought a closer, even paternal relationship between Ottawa and the rest of the country.\footnote{David Smith, “Patronage in Britain and Canada: An Historical Perspective,” \textit{Journal of Canadian Studies} 22, 2 (1987), 34-54; Vincent Lemieux and Raymond Hudon, \textit{Patronage et politique au Québec, 1944-1972} (Sillery, 1975).} Jeffery Simpson remarks, “the mutual dependence of business and government, the close personal relationships between prominent politicians and leading businessmen, the parties’ need to expand their reach into constituencies, the belief in the necessity of patronage politics, the prevalent corruption in electioneering, the tiny majorities in so many constituencies ...” made patronage a significant feature in Canadian politics.\footnote{Simpson, \textit{Spoils of Power}, 93.}

The recipients of patronage were, according to Simpson, middle-class professionals who were endowed with a particular authority as a result of being selected to receive a patronage appointment. As Simpson argues, “patronage fortified their standing in the community, and it confirmed their partisanship. It also augmented
middle-class individuals throughout Canada who, like the large commercial concerns, saw their interests inextricably influenced by political decisions.”\textsuperscript{12}

However, to suggest that the relationship between patron and client was one-dimensional and confined to the middle class would be shortsighted. Patronage was admittedly grounded in party discipline. It was also a very powerful extension of the state: “it was a model designed to account for the appeasement of regional, class, and ethnic critics of Canadian federalism.”\textsuperscript{13} Alan Gordon’s discussion of Toronto M.P. Edmund Bristol, for example, suggests that patronage was not only a system of dispensing rewards for electoral favor but also constituted an intricate network of relationships:

\begin{quote}
[l]ocal, economic, ethnic, religious, and even class divisions required bridging in a liberal order. Patronage played this role. Far from simply breaking down local loyalties, as John A. Macdonald intended, patronage brokered a place for such limited identities in the Canadian polity. In particular, patronage networks helped to integrate the local economy and the national economy, a crucial element in the emergence of the modern world. And, in doing so, patronage networks ... helped to ease the apparent tensions between the ideology and the practices of the state.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Gordon notes that partisan relationships were not confined to politicians and middle-class businessmen but included working-class clients as well. In fact, Bristol’s patronage practices emphasized a reciprocity of interests on a municipal, provincial and federal level. Immigrant communities and business interests had to be simultaneously negotiated and massaged according to local norms and values. Gordon notes: “[Bristol]

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 31.
did, however, work within a system of patron/client relationships that relied on etiquette and an ability to manage the science of personal connections in order to ease the economic hardships of his constituents and ensure his continued role as their national representative.”\(^\text{15}\) Given this agenda, part of Bristol’s patronage practices incorporated principles such as social morality and respectability similar to those outlined in other work on the middle class. In particular, Bristol’s patronage highlighted the dilemma of the modern industrial state whereby patrons had to protect individual competitors in the market as well as provide an escape from market discipline. As Gordon argues, men like Bristol were intermediaries between society and the state and integrated these spheres. Such patronage practices were “crucial to the maintenance of liberal hegemony in Canada during the transition to modernity.”\(^\text{16}\)

Were the Labour Commissioners, representing different interests such as labour and capital, French and English as well as region and municipality, also intermediaries between society and the state? One way in which they were is revealed in the selection of witnesses. It is clear that patronage played a part in the appointment of commissioners but what is less clear is the role patronage played in the solicitation of witnesses. Many (as is documented in Appendix Three) owned large industrial concerns or were prominent in their respective industries. Their selection to give evidence before a state royal commission confirmed their local standing and elevated them into a debate on ‘national affairs.’ Others were experienced workers, foremen (and some forewomen),

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 26.
who had achieved some status in their respective workplaces. Some witnesses had already given evidence to previous commissions. In the absence of any material that directly addresses the methodology whereby witnesses were selected, it is clear that the ‘society’ they were supposed to represent was a modern industrial nation.

The Labour Commission recorded and reinforced bourgeois values and, in the process, mediated the relations of labour and capital. To substantiate this claim, this thesis focuses closely on a range of communities — Toronto, Hamilton, Cornwall, Montreal, Saint John, New Glasgow, and Halifax — and presents a ‘collective biography’ of all the witnesses called forward. Tracing these witnesses in periodicals of the period as well as the 1881 *Census*, this chapter shall construct a ‘collective biography’ of the ‘popular experts’ who appeared before the Commission. The Commission obtained far more testimony from employers than it did employees. But not all employers were treated as “capital.” In fact, the designation employer and employee was often contingent on cultural variables such as expertise and respectability. How these variables were balanced so as to appease critics of the Labour Commission is central to understanding how the Commission was able to mediate the relations of labour and capital and obtain consent for a particular vision of social order.

In other respects, the Commission appears to have entailed some degree of investigative rationale. Political affiliation, ethnicity, religion and age were relatively balanced. Consistent with international precedents in social investigation, the Commission was overtly concerned with developing statistics, standardized research protocols and reasoned investigative methods. Indeed, the Commission was formed in
the earliest years of progressive social investigation in Canada, through which the state, with the help of social reformers, actively created and imposed stringent protocols like those exhibited by the national census, or the standardization of weights and measures. Unfortunately, much information concerning the procedures of the Labour Commission is missing from the National Archives as a result of the fire which swept Parliament Hill in 1916. However, even this absence does not prevent insights into some of the investigative strategies exercised by the Commission. ‘Representative Canadians’ were present in the witness stand and the methodology used in balancing labour, capital, industry and region suggests a privileging of ‘middling’ roles in the resolution between labour and capital.

Identifying these ‘middling’ occupations is, however, rather difficult as the middle class is largely an invented and imposed social category. Unlike the working class, which has enjoyed decades of focused attention from social historians, the middle class has largely been ignored, confined mostly to subjects of individual biographies.

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17 See John A. Cooper, “Canadian Democracy and Socialism,” *The Canadian Magazine* 3, 4 (1894), 332. Andrew Holman notes that when the middle class is addressed in Victorian Canada it is referred to as an ‘imported’ idea before 1850. “Throughout the years 1850-1890 … an important cognitive and discursive transition took place [wherein] Victorian Canadians gradually began to develop a three-class conception of local society consisting of upper, middle and working classes.” See Andrew Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal and Kingston, 2000), 15-16.

For many working-class historians, the late Victorian middle class was a fleeting categorization, a group that was flanked by labour and capital and destined to be driven into the ‘lower’ ranks (in spite of the fact that they may have shared common lifestyles with both.) For working-class historians, the ‘proletarianization’ of the middle class occurred as industrial capitalism developed and as power was concentrated in the hands of large industrial enterprises and away from small proprietors and artisans. Historians have also sought evidence of social structural cleavages that could be associated with the middle class. There is no readily identifiable ideology that can be confidently attributed to the middle class, a group whose individuals were identified with efforts to “protect and enhance their own standing.” Thusfar, historians in Canada have struggled to identify middle-class culture and consciousness.

The relative absence of work on the Canadian middle class, however, has more to do with a problem of definition rather than historiographical myopia. R.H. Gretton noted decades ago that there was an inherent vagueness in trying to analyze “a stratum which is so lacking in marked characteristics or qualities that it can only be described as lying between two other classes.” Furthermore, as Brian Lewis points out, “any attempt to define [the middle class] numerically can only be impressionistic and

19 Bryan Palmer noted this in Hamilton claiming, “the post-1853 years saw the relentless erosion of merchant capital … [T]he business failures of this period were, in reality, the demise of independent commodity producers, often skilled artisans.” See Bryan Palmer, A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, 1860-1914 (Montreal, 1979), 12.

20 Holman, A Sense of Their Duty, 10

21 Ibid., 11.
unscientific.” Andrew Holman attributes the relative absence of a definition for the middle class to two factors: the continually shifting boundaries of the middle class and its seemingly inherent diversity:

Middle class groups have, since 1850, been anything but stable: if the middle class as a whole has expanded since the early years of industrialization, this overall pattern of growth has masked the stagnancy and shrinkage of some of its component parts and led historians to underestimate the expansion of others. The conceptual challenge of studying the middle class is to reconcile the movements of individual “middling” groups with the continuing existence of the constitutional whole over time …. The middle class, like any class, is an historical subject whose definition has varied according to time and space.

In spite of this, there are ways of ‘seeing’ the middle class. Holman identifies three approaches to understanding the middle class that deserve mention as they are differentiated by opposing definitions of class. The first model is functionalism. Popular among studies on the middle class in American historiography in the 1960s and 1970s, functionalists viewed society as relatively static, persistent and cohesive; society was a system of interdependent parts that was often expressed as a hierarchy of social classes. In this model the middle class was simply another social stratum wherein status was based on occupational rank and economic standing. The second model, ‘socialist humanism,’ is based on the Thompsonian model of class analysis. In this model,

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23 Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty*, 11
capitalism stratified society into classes that were locked in perpetual opposition and became ‘aware’ of themselves through this conflict. In this approach the middle class organized its resources “in ways that allowed them to express their power and exert their influence over the other classes.”

The ‘structuration’ approach advanced by Anthony Giddens is preferred in Holman’s work and is useful for my work as well. For Giddens, class can not be understood by a rigid adherence to the structure or behavior of a particular group. As Holman reports:

> [e]conomic classes in society are not abstract entities: they exist only in relation to one another. But unlike the classes identified by Marxists (including Thompson) their relations need not be conflictual. How economic classes come into relationship with one another is called structuration: the process whereby economic classes become social entities.

Giddens’s model of class analysis does not privilege class consciousness but rather the recognition and acceptance of similar attitudes and beliefs: “[t]he difference between class awareness and class consciousness is a fundamental one, because class awareness may take the form of a denial of the existence or reality of classes.” This “recognition and acceptance of similar attitudes and beliefs” suggests that privileging respectability,
morality and other cultural variables as a means to identify the middle class can occur without adherence to a rigid ideology or social categorization. Furthermore, it should be noted that Giddens’s model does not work in opposition to other forms of class analysis. Like other approaches to work on class, ‘structuration’ requires understanding such issues as social mobility, accessibility of property ownership and education, workplace authority or divisions of labour and, finally, patterns of consumption. Giddens’s model suggests that class in industrializing society was both stable and perennial, but also need not be crystallized or consciously cohesive.  

As pointed out in earlier chapters, occupation as well as involvement in social, political or reform activities provides some basis upon which most histories address the middle class. In the effort to ‘operationalize’ the concept of the middle class, I have selected the following criteria: (1) those identified as industrial or commercial leaders; (2) those identified as merchants and retailers; (3) men and women employing non-family members; (4) professionals, i.e., individuals able to protect the autonomous sale of their services through control over access to the market for them; and (5) state functionaries. There can be no doubt that this “middle class” is both amorphous and variegated — obviously, a grocer who employs two of his family members in a small town is playing in a different social and economic league than a Montreal accountant.

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29 These criteria are consistently cited in most approaches to identifying the middle class that I have addressed so far. As stated in chapter one, when I address the middle class, I am referring to the interplay between status at work and social, political and economic values. I am interested in overt and underlying social and political opinions (namely respectability, expertise, and morality) and their relation to occupation.
30 Some historians have relied on the employment of domestic servants to determine whether an individual was middle class but this criterion was not available in the material I have consulted.
working for a Canada-wide company — and yet it is also plain (a) that such people cannot be subsumed into the Marxian categories of the ‘proletariat’ or the ‘bourgeoisie’ as conventionally defined with reference to ownership of the means of production, and (b) that they shared many values and sensibilities, as suggested by the massive popularity of certain cultural and political phenomena which overtly played up the “middle-class identity” (such as the Family Herald and Weekly Star or the mainstream political parties). And the Labour Commission was strikingly about these people — or those who could be taken to be like them. The actual ‘big interests’ reshaping the Canadian economy, the driving forces of the banks and railways, the emergent financiers and the foreign investment houses, the most powerful forces of ‘capital,’ were radically under-represented in the Commission, as were the vast ranks of the genuinely proletarian, the longshore labourers, the seasonal lumber workers, even the unskilled labourers in coal mines. The overwhelming bias of the Commission was to select out the people “in between” — the community-based businessman, the concerned charity worker, the skilled worker (who might indeed employ non-family members), and the self-employed master artisan. The concept of the “middle class” allowed all such respectable and self-possessed individuals to believe they had common interests with each other. Involvement in politics, social reform movements or other benefit societies could, in particular contexts, function as powerful criteria for membership in the ranks of the “middlemost.” This middle class was united in a broad attempt to create a social order, based on notions of respectability, morality and hard work, from the chaos of industrialization. It feared conflict and yearned for community.
For many historians, craft unionists, skilled workers and foremen are sometimes referred to as a labour aristocracy that is separate and different from the middle class. Some British historians, for example, have argued for the recognition of a labour aristocracy based not only on economic factors such as wage and skill, but also on other activities such as involvement in unions and social/state organizations such as the militia. Some Canadian historians have come to similar conclusions. For example, Ian McKay recognized a labour aristocracy on Halifax’s waterfront where he argues a group of craftsmen, faced with the influx of a surplus of rural labour, “defended their craft privileges ... by creating an artificial labour scarcity through devices of the restriction of numbers and of the common rule.” Furthermore, McKay argues that this labour aristocracy also had a reasonable standard of living, tended to own their own homes and acted in their own self interests; they were an active, committed and collectively consistent group. Peter Latta points out that labour aristocrats had much in common

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33 A similar conclusion is drawn in Greg Kealey’s look at Toronto printers in “Work Control, the Labour Process, and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Printers,” in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, *On The Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston, 1986). Bryan Palmer also notes a similar trend in his analysis of artisan culture noting that, “[i]three distinct, but interrelated, strands coalesce to delineate the character of artisan culture, the rituals and the traditions associated with life and inner workings of the shop floor; a cluster of ideas and attitudes that set the skilled craftsman apart from other social groups; and finally various institutional forms in which ritual, tradition, ideology and attitude expressed themselves concretely.” See Bryan
with the middle class in terms of morality and respectability. Studying labour aristocrats in Amherst, Nova Scotia, Latta noted several such commonalities: shared perceptions of proper marriages, strategies of maintaining secure and comfortable incomes, an avoidance of exclusively working-class neighbourhoods, a preference for home ownership, and extensive involvement in fraternal orders that brought bank managers into contact with carpenters.34

Anthony Giddens’s model of class structuration argues that classes are distributed in society by, among other things, workplace divisions of labour and workplace authority relationships. Labour aristocrats, in this model, enjoyed a different workplace relationship than other workers, a division that aligns their interests with those of many strata of the middle class. Many might nourish the not-unrealistic expectation that they too might set up shop independently, as masters in their own crafts.

A look at how the Labour Commission identified employers and employees confirms the existence of a multi-strata middle class. Operating with such vast and

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34 See Peter Latta, “A Labour Aristocracy: Skilled Labour in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1891-1914,” Unpublished M.A. Thesis, St. Mary’s University (August 1991). There was some interesting commentary on the prospects for a “labour aristocracy” in the Commission itself. William Houston, Librarian for the Ontario Legislative Assembly, favorably discussed a text addressing wages and work published by the Boston College of Technology: “[Mr. Walker] has come to the conclusion – and he has given good reasons for it – that instead of expecting the artisan class to become more democratic, self-controlled and autonomous, we may expect them to become less and less so. The organization of labor which has been going on so rapidly over the past twenty-five years is going to go on the next twenty-five years with perhaps even greater rapidity, so that the great establishments will continue to swallow up the small ones, and thus the individual workman will count for less and less in the industrial scale, and the organization of labor for more and more. Labor will become more aristocratic rather than democratic, he thinks.” See GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 231.
daunting categories as “labour” and “capital,” the Commission had to operationalize these categories by questioning actual employers and employees — a seemingly simple, but actually quite complex, proposition. For example, some employers were factory owners; others were foremen or stevedores. Conversely, some witnesses who classified themselves or were classified by the Commission as “workers,” owned small businesses that employed people. Keeping in mind the importance of many locations (and industries), of a total of 1,723 witnesses, I have identified 1,518 that fit into the category of employer and employee based simply on whether or not they disclosed that they employed people in their testimony. The remainder consists of interested parties (for example people who ran benefit societies or the relatives of injured employees), scholars, and unemployed people who represented strata other than labour and capital. The breakdown of employers to employees is addressed in Table 1.

35 This will be discussed extensively in upcoming chapters.
36 I refer to location and industry because these variables can radically affect determining employers and employees. For example, seasoned miners often employed their own helpers in the pits. Similarly, some factory workers brought younger family members to work as helpers.
37 Determining whether a witness was an employee or employer for these statistics was based on whether the witness explicitly testified that they employed people or not. Later chapters will explain that, even though some witnesses disclosed that they employed people, their treatment before the Commission was contingent on other, more cultural factors. I shall also discuss how the Commission actively constructed the categories of employee and employer for the sake of the investigation in later chapters.
Macdonald’s speech on the formation of the Commission in 1886 stated that care would be taken to solicit the views of Canada’s working population. His prediction came true, but in a revealingly specific way. About 62% of the witnesses were “employees” and 38% “employers.” There was, obviously, a marked bias in favour of representing the views of employers. At the same time, this ratio allowed many employees to testify, seemingly of their own accord. Hence the Commission, critiqued on many other grounds, was evidently never attacked for favouring employers over employees. The Commission thus succeeded in ‘naturalizing’ a vision of capitalism in Victorian Canada that, although it bore little relationship with actually existing social relations, nonetheless seemed to do so, even to contemporaries.

38 I have found no criticism of the Commission on these grounds in any newspapers or journals.
The selection of the specific witnesses called upon to “perform” as exemplars of much bigger social categories also reveals the middle-class orientation of the Commission. In Table 2 I have picked industries which appeared to enjoy the most representation. The ‘owners of factories’ category includes witnesses who manufactured certain goods. The ‘middle men’ category includes superintendents, managers and foremen who “employ” people but are not the owners of their respective workplaces. State functionaries include mayors and politicians and inspectors while the professional category includes journalists, medical doctors, professors and public sector administrators.
### Employers and Employees According to Occupational Group (Table 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A) Owners of Factories</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>over 100 employees</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 50-100 employees</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between 10-50 employees</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 10 employees</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B) Middling Positions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superintendents</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foremen</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C) Workers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textile</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iron/steel</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mining</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>printing</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D) State Functionaries</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E) Professionals &amp; Intellectuals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1,327</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889)

The representation of factories of over 100 employees was obviously disproportionate to Canada’s state of manufacturing at the time. Most factories would be much smaller in
Similarly, the proportion of textile workers far exceeds any other industry. These industries were chosen at the expense of other large concerns (such as the coal industry outside Nova Scotia and the fishing industry throughout the Maritimes). The industries addressed suggest that the main focus of this investigation was large textile factories. Given that the textile industry flourished from the tariff structure of the National Policy, it cannot be surprising that this industry was featured in the Commission at the expense of other large industries that employed as many people, were subject to labour problems, and encompassed larger enterprises than any cotton mill. Drawn to the “high tech” and “cutting edge” industry of the day, the Commission bore witness both to contemporary cultural fashion and political expediency. Finally, the sum of middling positions and owners of factories is close to that of the workers. The inescapable conclusion is that the Commission tended to cater to the views of the middle class.

The Report(s) of the Commission also bear witness to a broad interest in state formation. A notable feature of the Reports is that fully one third of the text is committed to charts that outline wages wherein the statements of employees are contrasted with that of employers. These statements are then sub-divided into the highest and lowest quotes. Quotes on pay are also divided according to pay periods: per hour, per day, per

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39 In a study on economic growth up to the 1890s, Kris Inwood and John Chamard claim “[a]s late as 1890 small work-places were quite common in Canada although, significantly, the average size-distribution of firms differed substantially between regions.” See Kris Inwood and John Chamard, “Regional Industrial Growth during the 1890s: The Case of the Missing Artisans,” Acadiensis 16, 1 (1986), 103. See also Kris Inwood and Thanasis Stengos, “Discontinuities in Canadian Economic Growth, 1870-1985,” Explorations in Economic History 28 (1991), 274-286.

40 This should not be surprising as this sector of the economy expanded very quickly between 1870 and 1890. In 1870 the textile industry (fur, clothing, textile and secondary products) employed a total 3,084. In 1890 that number increased to 15,585 people. M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, Historical Statistics of Canada (Cambridge and Toronto, 1965), 490-491.
week and per month. It would be easy, as indicated in Table 3, to determine the salary of a carpenter in Toronto, Cornwall, Hamilton, Montreal, Halifax and Saint John:

**National Wage Scale for Carpenters (as noted in the Reports) - A (Table 3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Employer’s statement</th>
<th>Employee’s statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hour</td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>$.275 - 23.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>$2.00 - 1.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>$2.10 - 1.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>$2.00 - 1.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint John</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889)

These statistics were obviously provided so that interested parties -- policy makers and bureaucrats, employers and employees, labour and manufacturing groups -- could easily determine variations in wages with respect to a specific occupation. Yet, as I shall discuss in the next chapter, not all witnesses were asked to disclose their wages.\(^{41}\) Tables outlining this information address all of the occupations that were represented in the

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\(^{41}\) Some witnesses simply refused to tell the Commission their wage rate. Whether a witness was asked to disclose their wages was contingent on several factors such as expertise and respectability.
Commission’s hearings. In most there is a discrepancy between what employers claimed they were paid and what employees said they received. However, the accuracy of these wage claims is only tacitly addressed in these tables. The employers’ statements and the employees’ statements are arranged such that they appear to have equal weight or ‘truthfulness’. Yet, as was seen in Table 1 and 2, the representation of employers and employees was certainly not equal. There are only three other categories in these tables: hours employed per day, sex and pay of foremen (see Table 4). Taking carpenters again:

**National Wage Scale for Carpenters (as noted in the Reports) - B (Table 4)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Hours Employed</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Pay of Foremen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>$.27.5 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>$2.00 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint John</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889)

This emphasis on compiling wage charts for every industry had much to do with the Commission as an early form of state inquiries. Formed amidst a period marked elsewhere by large state investigations, conducted by professionals versed in “modern statistic”-making, the Labour Commission clearly felt obliged to provide scientific-
seeming data, even if it was somewhat amateurish in its attempt to do so. It was of a piece with many attempts to provide the state with reliable and useful knowledge.\textsuperscript{42}

In \textit{Law's Dream of a Common Knowledge}, Mariana Valverde talks extensively about the relation between how information is presented and the legitimacy of investigation. In particular, Valverde notes that the relation between format and knowledge tends to empower investigators:

\begin{quote}
The question of format is closely related to the question of epistemological authority, since certain formats have a built-in tendency to empower certain knowers. Numerical charts tend to empower technicians, health-risk statistics tend to empower epidemiologists, and so forth; and nonscientific formats authorize a variety of personages, including that of the “reasonable man.” Nevertheless, the link between format and authority, which structuralist discourse analysis would read as hard-wired, is flexible and variable.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

The Commission’s wage statistics were likely intended to support its status as the “final say” on labour and capital. The abundant descriptive statistics on capital and labour in the \textit{Reports} of the Labour Commission were designed not only to present clear and comprehensible facts, but also to create the impression of a competent and thorough investigation. Yet, these wage tables also suggest the Commission’s status as a political-industrial fair, a \textit{performance} of Canada’s new economic advances. The tacit focus on cotton mills in the Commission, in comparison to other major industrial enterprises, was meant to present the Dominion as a progressive, modern and developing nation headed

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
by competent political leadership. As a form of industrial exhibition, the Commission often had the flavor of a hall of science and progress, in which there is a surfeit of empirical “experiences” and a dearth of rigorous “analyses.”

The depth of the Commission -- its duration and extensive evidence -- had benefits beyond informing the government of the day and suggests much about nineteenth-century state formation. The Commission was formed and took evidence amidst a burgeoning era of ‘scientific rationalism.’ A similar ethic was developing in another area: the 1871 census. Before 1871, censuses did not entail consistent or coherent observational methods or practices. However, in the latter decades of the century, based on both national and international influences, Canadian officials “went statistical.” They took up such international movements as standardization and centralization of statistical data. The 1871 Census was one of many testaments to this heightened environment. One needs not look far to see the effects of standardization and centralization as the same period also saw the establishment of a national currency,

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44 This is the subject of a work by Keith Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late-Victorian Culture (Toronto, 1997). In this work Walden explores the emergence of the Canadian National Exhibition and how it helped shaped social understandings in a society being profoundly altered by industrial capitalist production, technological developments, and changing values. Exhibitions were a particular feature of late-Victorian culture in which the state took an active interest. For example, commissioner Jules Helbronner was in charge reporting on an international exhibition in Paris not long after his work on the Commission. See GC, Report on the social economy section of the Universal International Exposition of 1889 at Paris (Ottawa, 1890).


a unified system of weights and measures, an extensive inspectoral system, an extension of national police and legal powers, and other assertions of territorial sovereignty.\textsuperscript{47} The Commission fits into this trend through its active interest in the social relations of labour and capital. The Commission, for all its posture as state investigation, was also like a giant middle-class teach-in, providing insight into a flourishing industrial sector with up-to-date social problems.

The wage tables in the \textit{Reports} suggest other features of state formation and its relation to the middle class. The Commission’s preoccupation with wages is evident in the appendices of the evidence. In fact, “wages” was by far the biggest entry in the appendices of all the volumes. This is not surprising since the discussion of wages was closely related to issues concerning the working class — their “condition” (savings and investments) and organization. Wages also suggested a common denominator of interests for all parties interested in the relations of labour and capital, one which potentially allowed for a happy mediation of opposing positions. In other words, the discussion of wages was a sphere of ‘applied’ liberalism wherein witnesses were, to a limited extent, equal. The issue was put rather succinctly by Samuel Carsely, a dry-goods merchant who claimed, “[m]y opinion is the greatest hardship any of our working people can suffer and do suffer is the irregularity in the payment of their wages.”\textsuperscript{48} Witness after witness created the impression that wages were far more important than any other issues — respect on the job, control over new technologies, hazardous

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{48} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1166.
workplace conditions, or the general equity of social relations in Victorian Canada. Yet they did not do so ‘spontaneously’; they did so in response to the Commissioners’ persistent questioning. Included in a royal commission whose very name evoked revered British ties, the wage statistics bore witness to the state’s paternal interest in its people. The Report’s research methodology, while certainly biased, disciplined the changing relations of employer and employee by making such messy concerns as wages and hours convenient and easily comprehensible. More importantly, the Labour Commission, and the other commissions assembled in the same period, displayed a concerned federal state struggling with the impact industrialism was having on its citizens.

Of all the witnesses who testified, 94 were classified as foremen (all save two were male) constituting close to 17% of all witnesses. Once again, such a selection skewed the impression of Victorian Canada in favour of those who had some authority and discretion in the workplace. Their separate categorization in the Commission’s statistics confirms their ‘special’ status in the relations of production. Given all these features, both subtle and obvious, the Labour Commission’s status as a vehicle of state formation seems apparent. Simply put, the Canadian government fostered economic growth and, when difficulties arose, it dealt with the consequences by, among other things, appointing royal commissions. Of course, these commissions would arrive at findings that would not only endorse the government’s economic policies but also

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49 In the Commission female forepersons were called foremen, a distinction I maintain here as well. In Quebec, 43 witnesses described themselves as foremen; in Ontario, 17 witnesses described themselves as foremen; in New Brunswick, 24 witnesses described themselves as foremen, and; in Nova Scotia, 10 witnesses described themselves as foremen.
legitimize the state’s active role in mediating the conflict between labour and capital. In order to serve all these functions, the Commission had to target key witnesses and industries in different regions. As the tables above suggest, the privileged targets of the Labour Commission’s inquiries were largely employers and foremen in large factories. A look at the biographies of the witnesses confirms the high number of “middling” Canadians who appeared before the Commission.

There has always been debate about the merit of biography amongst historians. For many, biography constitutes an ‘older’ historiography, firmly rooted in empirical research, usually addressing political figures who were, for the most part, rich, white men. Of course, within the last thirty years the dominance of rich, white men as historical subjects has been effectively challenged. New biographical works focus on those previously marginalized such as workers and women. New incarnations of biographical historiography continue to develop as the volumes of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography attest. As Bill Godfrey states, “. . . the pages of the [DCB] reveal that the biographic approach, taking far more than the merely political, remains alive and well and continues to offer a substantial historical contribution.”

Collective biography is more than the compilation of many individual biographies within one text. The sketches that are found in collective biographies vary in length and detail and are quite different than the full length monographs on one subject. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a flourishing of collective

50 Bill Godfrey, “A New Golden Age: Recent Historical writing on the Maritimes,” Queen’s Quarterly 91, 2 (Summer, 1984), 36.
biographies. Biographical dictionaries, portrait galleries, the *Cyclopedia of Canadian Biography* and similar publications exhibit specific criteria on the experiences of, mostly middle class, Canadian men and women. For many historians, these collections were compiled by late-Victorian authors in the effort to profile a model of “successful” citizens for the growing Dominion. The series edited by Rev. William Cochrane, *The Canadian Album: Men of Canada, or Success by Example* make quite clear the general purpose of these collective biographies. For Cochrane, the collective biography was a means to “unite people throughout the country and bring together citizens who were unlikely to meet but could still ‘live in our homes, telling the stories of their lives, exerting the influences of head and heart which have distinguished them.’” In this sense, the role of the biography was to portray feats of character and achievement; the subject would embody attributes to be admired and sought out by others. As Robert Lanning remarks, biographers approached their work with the intention of:

... bringing to public notice the many Canadian men and comparatively few women whom they felt were the bearers of essential Canadian values. These men and women exhibited behavior that their biographers felt would serve future generations well, and provide example for securing and extending the progress of Canadian culture.

In sum, the late-Victorian interest in collective biographies was much more about nation-building than about an incipient cult of celebrity.

51 For example see Henry James Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto, 1895 and 1912); George MacLean Rose, *Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1888); George Cochrane, *The Canadian Album* (Brantford, Ontario, 1891-1896).
Given that the creation of the subject(s) found in a collective biography are generally smaller in content and length, the author assumes significant responsibility in constructing what exactly is pertinent information. Lanning has identified three goals which late-Victorian biographers were trying to achieve that demonstrate the value in the ‘representation’ of ‘successful’ Canadians. First, the level of education and experience was put on view in these biographical subjects as this would represent life lessons. Secondly, the success of these subjects, quite often ‘self made men,’ would also promote the growth of opportunity in Canadian society by providing examples wherein hard work and dedication would lead to personal and financial success. Finally, the biographies of representative Canadians also provided the setting or a list of situations where one could achieve, through the biographical example, personal success. These ‘representative Canadians’ were usually associated with Canadian institutions — such as commissions of inquiry, formal politics, or reforming movements — which legitimized their successful involvement within the community. Furthermore, their activities, ranging from reforming efforts to the development of education, law, medicine and government, constitute, for Lanning, the contours of a burgeoning middle class. Lanning claims, “[t]hese elements of class were the subject of active communication among representative Canadians, and that the latter were exceedingly conscious of the social role that their common interests and situations entailed in the development and fortification of Canadian culture.”

54 Lanning, The National Album, 10.
of that class: “[t]he collective biography is the biography of many individuals in relation to many social institutions, in relation to the ideology of the time, and in relation to the contingencies of their own lives as ‘proof’ of the viability and legitimacy of the social order in which they existed.”  

Like the collective biographies of the period, the Labour Commission also assembled a collection of representative Canadians through whom the ‘nation’ could not only grasp the vast contours of the labour question but also recommend measures for the federal government on how to deal with it. The result was another sound endorsement of the National Policy and a public display of ‘important’ community leaders looking out for the interests of the nation by propagating a specific set of social values and moral beliefs.

The collective biography appended to this work (appendix 3) is based on the information that I have found in late-nineteenth-century collective biographies and the *DCB*. Table 5 displays the number of witnesses I was able to locate in these texts. Most of the witnesses I found were involved in politics or business and with one another on some occasion. Most, if not all, were involved in social clubs where, it is certain, a network of “concerned” citizens exchanged their views on their respective cities and social issues. The only deviation in the collective biography appended to this work arises from the case of the labour leaders and journalists whose biographies were mostly culled from the *DCB*. In some respects, the criteria that led to some people’s entry into nineteenth-century collective biographies are similar conditioning the appearance of historical figures discussed in more contemporary biographies: they represent a political

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stance, an overlooked subject, an unheard voice or a successful citizen. In some respects, contemporary biographies of labour leaders are now available because of their “representative” value into the working class or labour organization. The biographies of witnesses in appendix 3 generally fall into the following categories: manufacturers, professionals, journalists, union personalities and railway men. However, I am interested in the attributes that nineteenth-century authors saw in these individuals and that justified their entry into the collective biographies. Their success in business, politics or the community accompanied them on the Commission’s witness stand and not only legitimized a particular social order, but their standing in it.

**Witnesses with Entries in Collective Biographies (Table 5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Witnesses in Commission</th>
<th>Witnesses in Collective Biographies</th>
<th>Witnesses in 1881 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint John</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Glasgow</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889); Henry James Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto, 1895 and 1912); George MacLean Rose, *Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1888); George Cochrane, *The Canadian Album* (Brantford, Ontario, 1891-1896); “1881 Canadian Census,” March 22, 1999, Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints, June, 2004


These manufacturers, professionals, journalists, union personalities and railway men who testified before the Labour Commission were also featured in collective
biographies of the period. They were often involved in political affairs (municipal, provincial and federal) and were also prominent in many business and charitable organizations. Some came from prominent families and others were individually successful citizens who propelled their businesses and reputations into national or provincial prominence. While people from prominent families were written about favourably, particular attention was bestowed upon the ‘self-made man.’ Many of the professionals who appeared before the Commission exemplified this ideal: many had been born in Canada and came from modest backgrounds. Through education or work abroad, they had obtained experience in modern industry and used this knowledge to propel themselves into ‘respectable’ positions, those available to all who exercised thrift, knowledge and hard work. The prominence of these individuals in the Commission was a tacit endorsement of a social order that, in principle, granted equality of opportunity to all Canadians.56

Several journalists appeared before the Commission. Many had worked for prominent papers in Canada or internationally at one point in their career. Like the professionals, many were born in Canada and exemplify the prominence of the “self-made-man.” The biographies of railway men also exhibit ‘inherent abilities’ similar to those of the self-made man: personal initiative, business sense, hard work, respectability, strong moral character and experience. The prominence of railway men in the Commission was also a positive comment on how their personal attributes

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56 The same attitudes, on the other hand, were tied to the overt condemnation of the “undeserving” poor or the able bodied “idle.”
complemented that burgeoning sector of the economy. The biographies of union personalities do not often appear in collective biographies of the latter nineteenth century. For my purposes, these biographies were largely written by contemporary historians. However, their biographies attest to their prominence in their respective communities as it was obvious that they had a significant influence upon many people. Unfortunately, they are often solely defined by their organizing efforts as other biographical information is usually unobtainable.\(^{57}\)

By cross-referencing entries in collective biographies and the Commission’s witness list, we find a striking prominence of the Canadian middlemost. For example, collectively there were 87 presidents and vice-presidents of companies or organizations; nine were active members on their respective municipal Board of Trade or Commerce. All were members of some social/reform organization: Workingmen’s (2), Manufacturing (5), British (2), Sanitary (2), Political Science (1), Educational (3), Social Services (1), Womens Enfranchisement (1), Equal rights (2), Nationalist (1), Exhibition (2), Prisoners Aid (1), Citizens (1), Dominion Travelers (1), Saint-Jean-Baptiste (1), Forestry (1), Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1), Homeopathic (1), Bar (1), Free Thought (10), Good Government (2), Rifle (1), St. John Ambulance (1), and the Literary Association (1).\(^{58}\) The presence of these people in the Commission was an endorsement of the emerging economic structure that allowed equal opportunity and rewarded

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\(^{57}\) The biographies of labour personalities were not in the collective biographies of the latter nineteenth century (with the exception of a brief mention of the PWA’s Robert Drummond in Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1895).

\(^{58}\) The collective biographies that mention these organizations do not provide any detail on the organizations they list. For example, there is no information on what “free thought” organizations were listed.
personal initiative. Furthermore, their ‘successful’ image legitimized and made official the opinion that many of the ‘victims’ of industrial capitalism were so by virtue of some personal moral flaw, or were simply lacking the personal and social qualities of the ‘winners.’

The entries in the collective biography appended to this work are also indicative of the investigative techniques of the Commission as well as the personal attributes it implicitly endorsed. For example, over one third of these noteworthy individuals held or attempted to hold some political office. Five were mayors of their respective cities. Yet, in spite of the strong political current in the selection of commissioners and witnesses, declared Conservatives and Liberals in Table 6 appear roughly equal in strength:

**Political Affiliation of Witnesses (Table 6)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of Witnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889); Henry James Morgan, *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto, 1895 and 1912); George MacLean Rose, *Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1888); George Cochrane, *The Canadian Album* (Brantford, Ontario, 1891-1896)

Of course, that not all the collective biographies included a person’s partisan leanings suggested that those who were so described were highly involved in the political world.

A person’s religion was frequently part of their collective biography. As disclosed in Table 6, membership in Christian denominations was reasonably reflective
of Canadian realities (with some under-representation of Catholics). The figures in Table 7 are cross-listed with my findings in the 1881 census, and the *Historical Statistics of Canada*:

**Religious Affiliation of Witnesses (Table 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number of Witnesses</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>676,165</td>
<td>755,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1,791,982</td>
<td>1,992,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>742,981</td>
<td>847,765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These numbers suggest that the Commission entailed a limited degree of objectivity in the selection of witnesses. Peter Waite notes that in 1881, Catholics comprised 17% of Ontario, 25% of Nova Scotia, 35% of New Brunswick and 90% of Quebec.59 The higher number of Catholics is supported in the higher representation of Quebec in the Commission.

In the effort to further construct a profile of the witnesses who appeared before the Commission I have cross-listed their names (in the same cities) with information provided in the 1881 Census.60 What emerges is some insight into the methodology of the Commission, its investigative strategies and, of course, its bias. The image of a

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60 The criteria for confirming an identity was city, name, age (if provided) and occupation.
‘scientific’ investigation with standardized research protocols was part of what made the Commission so effective in mediating the relations of labour and capital. I have found that the Commission entailed a relatively equal representation of various city wards, a very narrow ethnic affiliation, and a mean age range between 35-44 years old.\textsuperscript{61} Table 8 provides a list of municipal wards and the number of witnesses that represented each.\textsuperscript{62}

**Municipal Residences of Witnesses (Table 8)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Montreal</th>
<th>Halifax</th>
<th>Saint John</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Hamilton</th>
<th>Cornwall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ste-Antoine (20)</td>
<td>Ward 1 (6)</td>
<td>Queens (7)</td>
<td>St. Thomas (5)</td>
<td>Ward 1 (3)</td>
<td>East (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ste-Louis (10)</td>
<td>Ward 4 (5)</td>
<td>Guy (2)</td>
<td>David (4)</td>
<td>Ward 3 (3)</td>
<td>Center (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ste-Lawrence (4)</td>
<td>Delaware (4)</td>
<td>Johns (5)</td>
<td>Ward 6 (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{61} In Montreal, the mean age of witnesses was 44 years old; in Halifax it was 42 years old; in Saint John it was 43 years old; in Toronto it was 44 years old; in Hamilton it was 35 years old; and, in Cornwall it was 40 years old.

\textsuperscript{62} These are only based on the witnesses I could find in the 1881 census. Of course, many more witnesses testified in each city. Table 5 indicates how many witnesses I was able to locate in the census.
It appears as though the Commission sought some balance in the representation of various city wards, with a heavier emphasis on such well-known working-class wards as Ward 5 in Halifax. A wide age range (10 - 77 years) was incorporated and representatives for most city areas were solicited.

A similar picture emerges when we look at ethnicity and birthplace. The Commission’s witness list corresponded, in a general sense, to the Dominion’s ethnic make-up. Concerning these two variables, the proportion of Canada’s population found in the Commission corresponds closely with those of the whole population. Table 9 presents these figures for witnesses before the Commission as disclosed in the 1881 Census:

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Ethnicity and Birth of Witnesses (Table 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Halifax</th>
<th>Montreal</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Cornwall</th>
<th>Hamilton</th>
<th>Saint John</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Most witnesses, like most residents of Canada, had been born in the Dominion. Many identified themselves as “British.” Overall the Francophone presence in the Canadian industrial revolution was underestimated in the Commission.

Table 10 displays the country of birth for witnesses who appeared before the Commission and who also appeared in the 1881 census return.

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64 In 1881, 3,721,826 Canadians were born in the country whereas 478,615 were British-born. M.C. Urquhart, Historical Statistics of Canada, 19.

65 The following exchange between Daniel Murphy, a saddler in Montreal and commissioner Walsh puts the issue quite succinctly. Murphy was asked about imported saddles from England and the fact that no-one in Montreal made a riding style saddle: “Q. Is it not strange that we should import all the riding saddles? A. There are quite a number of people living in the city who will buy anything English in preference to anything manufactured in this country. They look for English goods. Q. They had better go then and live in England? A. It would be better for the country if some of them went there.” GC, RCRLC, 1889, Quebec Evidence (1889), 497.
Country of Birth for Witnesses in 1881 Census (Table 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Halifax</th>
<th>Montreal</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Cornwall</th>
<th>Hamilton</th>
<th>Saint John</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Labour Commission was writing a kind of “collective biography” of Canada’s industrial revolution, and to do so it had to assemble a somewhat representative ‘population.’ Had it interviewed only Nova Scotian miners or French-Canadian textile workers, it would obviously have lacked credibility. Yet it did not, in fact, take testimonials from a representative group of working Canadians. Rather, it worked with a non-random population that was apt to exemplify the middlemost values it held dear. Respectability, expertise and morality were closely associated with education, marital status and home ownership in the Commission. The ‘successful’ would be allowed to talk extensively and to generalize about ‘society’ as a whole. Losers were confined to facts based on their adherence to broad notions of respectability and morality. That these investigative considerations appear as commonsensical, says much about the relation between state investigation and consent to a particular vision of social order and how ‘natural’ a royal commission can make particular social relations appear to be.
The Labour Commission was another ‘scientific’ investigation into Canada’s working population. Cross-listing witnesses with the 1881 Census suggests that some effort was made to have witnesses reflect Canada’s population. Much space was allocated to statistical tables in the Report of the Commission. These tables provided information on wages, occupations and compared statements from employers and employees. The commissions that were assembled 1880 and 1895 all, to varying degrees, provide statistics on the subjects they investigated. Yet, selected Canadians underwent a transformation before the Commission. They became commentators, informants, even experts. In this sense, the formation and mandate of the Commission constructed a pool of Canadians and assigned them a certain status in productive relations, disciplining various elements in the social order and, in turn, mediating the tensions between labour and capital. However, the “science” that went into the Commission pales in comparison to that of the census. Census data, while addressing the same information – marital status, ethnicity, age, and residence – were assembled much more matter-of-factly. The Labour Commission simply did not exercise the same degree of analytical rigour.

For example, in the Labour Commission, practical experience qualified one as a knowledgeable, reliable, ‘expert’ witness. Furthermore, these experts were largely a grab-bag of municipal functionaries, earnest social reformers and journalists. State investigations are forced to simplify “the social” for the sake of clarity and

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66 The effects of this are addressed extensively in Ch 5 where I discuss the lengths to which some witnesses went to see that the Commission received and recorded ‘accurate’ information.
comprehensiveness. In the process, they make research decisions that obscure the material under investigation. Royal commissions and censuses, to very different degrees, both operate under these conditions. The Labour Commission manufactured knowledge on the nation according to acceptable specific research questions but, rather than objectively identifying the concerns of workers on a national scale, or addressing large economic sectors such as mining and fishing, or even visiting industries in the West, it concerned itself with ‘high-tech’ industries and ‘high-profile’ moral questions.

There is another contradiction lying at the heart of the Commission as a provider of insights into Canada’s state of industrialization. The Commission could readily identify ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ amidst the confusion of the 1880s. The very title of the Commission committed its members to a vision of the Dominion as one in which ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ were distinct if related entities. Yet, as the tables and my count of employees, employers and middling witnesses suggests, in their daily operations Commissioners struggled mightily to reconcile ‘the individual’ and ‘the social.’ Witnesses were made to fit the categories of labour and capital through associative categorizations such as employee and employer. In the end, the Commission individualized labour and capital in their selection of witnesses. Indeed, the “social” could only be apprehended through the ‘individual.’ In itself, the social obeyed no laws nor demonstrated any extra-individual regularities. Herein one discerns the deep liberalism of the Commission, which very rarely strayed into any consideration of social forces or causality.
The Labour Commission was well suited to function as a vehicle of liberal state formation. It had to develop its own procedures, determine what testimony was relevant and solicit a pool of witnesses to represent the major, or at least the most notorious, features of the relations of labour and capital. It painted a portrait of a modern nation with a flourishing economy that had benefited from sound political judgment and had not suffered the evils of industrialism common in the United States and Britain. It also represented a concerned federal state struggling with broad social relations such as those between capital and labour. The five commissions assembled to look into the labour question have this in common: they were an example of the state’s intervention as mediator into the ‘social’ relations of labour and capital. The Labour Commission not only assembled information but reinforced communal and regional networks. In the process, the most vocal critics to the new industrial order were briefly silenced by a federal state attending to their concerns. This state formation agenda is also reflected in the investigative techniques of the Commission. The sheer size of the investigation -- in terms of duration, cost and the production of volumes of evidence – belied the many humble and revealing decisions that structured its affairs on the ground. Ultimately, the ‘success’ of the Commission, with respect to its value as a vehicle of state formation manufacturing the consent of citizens amidst economic turmoil, rested upon its quite unrepresentative selection of ‘representative Canadians.’
Chapter Five

Authority, Power and the Environment of the Commission

Q.- Are they aware that there is a Commission in town to take that kind of evidence. A.- They are; there are, however, lots of men who are too timid to come up and give evidence, and there are others who are afraid they might lose something by doing so, and there are others again who have not much faith in the Commission. There are lots of causes which will keep men from coming here.¹

The Labour Commission operated in such a way as to provide a space for the negotiation of contestable definitions, implicit sociologies, even philosophical assumptions about humanity and social order. This negotiation occurred before a state-appointed investigative body designed, among other things, to massage the tensions wrought by large-scale industrialization. The Labour Commission provided a forum for the people most vocal about the labour question, such as journalists, labour organizers and owners of factories. They were asked to comment on a range of issues, from factory discipline to arbitration, from the morality of factory workers to urban housing. In principle, all witnesses were equal before the Commission. Each was formally allowed to take the stand. Those who were relatively inarticulate, and who were present to speak of their immediate experiences of ‘the factory,’ were ‘witnesses,’ just as were those who offered eloquent diagnoses of the social condition. There was a quality of “liberal utopianism” in the Commission, a sense that one could park one’s class prejudices and interests at the court-room door and engage in a constructive dialogue with fellow

¹ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 663.
Canadians on the topic of the Dominion’s industrial transformation. Yet, as the above citation suggests, not all witnesses were comfortable or willing to express their views about their jobs, their employers or their thoughts on the ‘social’ before a federally-appointed commission. As previous chapters have argued, the royal commission was a well-tried and very adaptable means to explore the series of issues surrounding ‘the labour question’ because, in part, it provided an opportunity for a wide range of Canadians to “make known” their concerns. This chapter shows how carefully the Commission, as a theatre of power, operated in local contexts, so that hierarchies of significance were built into a seemingly egalitarian structure of hearing witnesses. In the Commission, one can discern the emergent contradictions of the liberal public sphere.

The Labour Commission, while politically motivated and serving partisan ends, had to establish itself as an authority on the relations of labour and capital. It was mandated to peek into every dark corner of the labour question, listen to the scores of participants and present itself as a legitimate arbitrator in the conflict of labour and capital. However, it became clear that, in this public sphere, commissioners and witnesses alike shared a common sociology that privileged notions of respectability, morality and expertise. In the process, commissioners decided whose sociologies and philosophical assumptions about social order were acceptable and whose were not. In

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3 For a parallel critique of the liberal public sphere in nineteenth-century Ontario, see Carmen Neilson Varty, “‘A Career in Christian Charity’: women’s benevolence and the public sphere in a mid-nineteenth-century Canadian city,” Women’s History Review, 14, 2 (2005), 243-64.
order to make such demarcations the Commission had to exert authority over how knowledge was generated. Therefore, this public sphere also suffered severe limitations. Most glaringly, there was no direct and extensive discussion of the very National Policy whose successes and failures ostensibly provided one of the primary topics validating the Commission’s existence. Similarly, the Commissioners frequently shut down the expressions of witnesses, such as leftist Phillips Thompson or advocates of Georgeite economics, who called into question the liberal values and assumptions underlying the project of state formation. These limits on the free exchange of ideas in this public sphere suggest that the first step in theorizing the Labour Commission as a text entails understanding this context, how it established authority over knowledge, mediated its acquisition and constructed itself as the ‘final say’ on labour relations in late-Victorian Canada.

One way this authority was established was in the Commission’s focus on investigative objectivity and the ‘legalistic’ quest for facts. This establishment of authority was plainly in view in many interchanges between the witnesses and the commissioners. It testified to a unifying sociology in the Commission, one deeply entrenched in liberalism, that privileged the individual, and the quest for facts. The Commissioners selected and questioned individual witnesses according to their own methodology with respect to how to address the relations of labour and capital; they had no scope for examining collectivities, even ones represented by proxies. Thus, the setting(s) of the Commission, the questions the commissioners asked and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of expertise also shed light on this establishment
of authority and provides vital insight into the Commission’s role in ‘governmentality.’\textsuperscript{4} That the Commission was a forum for many to voice their complaints about economic development, personal misfortune or misguided policies was another feature that added to its status as a broker of knowledge on the labour question. Awareness of the dynamics of power and authority in the hearings is fundamental to understanding not only how the Commission functioned as a tool of consent, but how it fit into a larger trend of middle-class and state formation in late-Victorian Canada.

Detailed records on the administrative procedures of the Commission, specifically how witnesses were called or how the hearings were physically arranged (seating for example), appear to be lost. In the absence of administrative records, and working from newspaper accounts, I have attempted to piece together an idea of the ‘experience’ of giving testimony that includes the setting wherein testimony was taken, how witnesses were solicited, and the effects the audience had on the testimony. I begin this chapter with a discussion of these issues as they provide some context as to why some witnesses refused to answer questions or, when they did answer, often claimed they knew little information about a variety of subjects. As has been mentioned in previous chapters, the Commission was hailed as a forum for Canadians to voice their concerns. It was an opportunity to ‘inform’ the state. Many went to some length to provide ‘correct’ information. On the other hand, the publicity generated by the

\textsuperscript{4} As mentioned in earlier chapters, by ‘governmentality’ I mean the rationality that underpins the relation between the state and citizens in terms of knowledge and power that links the individual subject with state formation.
Commission’s hearings had the potential to ruin some reputations and many witnesses hid information or simply refused to answer questions.

On several occasions, witnesses described how they came to be before the Commission. For the most part it appears that witnesses were either solicited by the Commission, asked to appear by their respective employers, or gave testimony of their own free will.⁵ That many witnesses were solicited by their employers lends some insight into the political patronage and insider personal connections that were obvious in the Labour Commission and the other commissions that preceded it. The opportunity to give testimony to the Commission was taken very seriously by some and treated with contempt and indifference by others. With a court-like atmosphere, the hearings were performances of power and authority. They took place in spaces such as town and city halls and court houses, where the state conducted its business and the communities often discussed their affairs.⁶ Thus, on several levels, when the Commissioners came to a city or town to hear people’s views on the relations of labour and capital they were

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⁵ Those who did appear on their own free will were often asked about it, suggesting that it was the exception. See James Reynolds in GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 86-88; Robert Murray in GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 380-382; John Gale in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1134-1135; Jean Brisson GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1070-1071. See also Phillipe Laliberte in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1360. Laliberte’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 500-501.

entering pre-established networks of custom and authority. The ‘stage’ greatly affected ‘the performance.’

The surviving evidence provides several examples of the ways in which witnesses reacted to the court-like aesthetic of the Commission. For Maurice Boas in Québec, both the questions asked him and the court-like setting caused him to balk in the face of the Commission. He was on the defensive when he claimed: “I do not know the capacity of the Court for the management of business, but we know our own affairs and we think we can manage them in a way most suitable to our own interests, and the interests of our hands without outside interference.” Boas’s reference to the Commission as a “court” (replete with the capital C in the published testimony) suggests that there was much more to the environment of the Commission than the objective collection of information on the labour question. This legal ambiguity concerning the power of the commissioners was one feature of the power dynamics inherent in the Commission, simply by virtue of the setting and aesthetic of the hearings.

Many witnesses were not simply asked to give testimony; they were subpoenaed or summoned. The first question posed to George Drolet when he appeared before the Commission was “Q.-Did you receive a subpoena? A.-Yes.” Similarly Miss Rosalie Cantin was asked “Q.-Did the foreman ask the girls, who received subpoenas to appear

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7 Coincidently, the Court House in Quebec was in the middle of a labour dispute when the Commission held its hearings. There was trouble between the contractor and his workers: the employer was withholding pay, as he was waiting for “government money.” See GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 78-82.
8 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1299.
9 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1123. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 485-486.
before the commission, to come up here with him? A.-Yes, sir. He should be here. Q.-
Have you your subpoena with you? A.-Yes, sir.”

In a similar vein, Francis Buck apologized to the Commission for being late and in doing so referred to his invitation as such: “I only discovered my mistake late in the day on looking at the summons.”

The frequency with which this happened reinforced the official or legal setting of the Commission and the formality of giving evidence that may, in part, be the reason why there was such an emphasis on correct and accurate information or why hundreds of witnesses “did not know.” These words — subpoena and summons — were vital components of the environment that the Commission created to generate information on industrial Canada. It was within the legal scope of the Commission to subpoena witnesses. Failure to appear could result in charges. However, the Commission could not force witnesses to speak frankly, openly or honestly. The Commission was possessed of only some of the tools of the legal system.

In general, the witnesses displayed a wide range of preparedness before being sworn in. It appears that some witnesses had received a circular that outlined the information the Commission was seeking. Some witnesses took the opportunity very seriously while others did not. According to Fred Walter and James Stephenson, the Hamilton Moulders Union received the circular sent out by the Commission. 

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10 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 968. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 487-488.

11 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1198.

12 It appears that there was some notice sent to witnesses. See Michel Vallieres in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1068.
up those papers you sent to us and looked over them and considered the different subjects."\(^{13}\) The moulders plainly took the Commission seriously. On the other hand, some witnesses were not so conspicuously conscientious. For example, Robert Murray, a police magistrate in Chatham, New Brunswick claimed, “I did not know I was going to be called for testimony; I merely came out of curiosity.”\(^{14}\) Based on the bias evident in the appointment of commissioners, the Hamilton Central Labor Union simply advised its members not to appear before the Commission because the commissioners were “not in sympathy with the cause of labour and [were] prejudiced against the interests of the working class.”\(^{15}\)

In another category altogether were witnesses who were called by their employers to appear before the Commission, with obvious consequences for the sort of testimony they provided.\(^{16}\) For example, H.D McLeod, the superintendent of the New Brunswick Railway, disclosed that he had clearly “prepped” his workers:

Q.-Did you ask those employees of yours to come here and give evidence before the commission? A.-I did.
Q.-Did you outline any of their evidence? A.-Nothing further than when they asked me what they were coming down for, I said, “Probably the Commission will ask you what wages you receive, and you can tell them that you get a good deal of extra pay.”\(^{17}\)

\(^{13}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 796.
\(^{14}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 381.
\(^{15}\) JAM, LAC, Hamilton Central Labour Union to Macdonald, 12 January 1887, 213580. The PWA was also not in agreement with the people appointed to head the Commission but decided to cooperate in spite of the fact that “the largest body of workers in Nova Scotia has been passed over in the way of representation.” See JAM, LAC, Clarke to Macdonald, 19 October, 1886, 211066-9.
\(^{16}\) For examples see Adeline Martin in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 477; Edward Rennie in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1231; Adjutor Gauthier in GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1235.
\(^{17}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 204.
Some commissioners were keen to expose employers who had coerced testimony from their employees. For example, when a group of female cotton factory workers in Montreal appeared before the Commission, one witness admitted to having been asked to give testimony. Later that same day the commissioners tried desperately to see if something was going on:

Q.-Were the girls who have been here to give their testimony, sent by the employees, your associates or were they sent here by the superintendent of the factory? A.-I cannot tell you for all of them; but I know that, for myself, the “first” boss came to me, and asked me to sign my name to come here as a witness of what I had seen in the factory.\(^{18}\)

It is impossible to determine if witnesses did, in fact, simply say what their employers asked them to say. However, it would seem unlikely that employers, when given the choice, would put forward known critics. After all, the media and their community would be exposed to their employment practices. Reputations were on the line.

Another dynamic in the experience of giving testimony to the Commission was the audience. Several times in the testimony reference is made to people in the room other than commissioners and witnesses. For example, in Springhill, commissioner Gibson claimed, “Looking around the audience I see they are young men.”\(^{19}\) No detailed records about audiences are available but it is clear that bystanders contributed to the dynamic of the event. For example, H.D. McLeod gave evidence after several of his employees in New Brunswick. There was obviously a problem between McLeod and his employees concerning overtime and extra pay: “the extra pay was a little bone of

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18 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 484.
19 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 290.
contention among the men.” However, for some unknown reason, his five employees had little to say on the subject. F. McClennan was very brief about the notion of extra pay and hours and stated that he did get paid for the extra time that he worked as a conductor on the New Brunswick Railway. Thomas McKenna, an engineer, also testified that he received extra pay on his line. The short testimony of Melbourne Burgess and Robert Bartlett, respectively a conductor and engineer, had nothing to add to the testimony of McClennan and McKenna. The issue of overtime pay did not even come up when the last of McLeod’s employees, James C. Johnston, appeared before the Commission.20 All of these men and their employer gave testimony on the same day and appeared after one another, likely in the same room.21 This appeared to have affected what they disclosed to the Commission in as much as they all agreed that the “bone of contention” between themselves and their employer would remain their business and not become that of the community, state and media.

Another example of the effects the audience had on the testimony appeared when a child involved in the Fortier scandal was asked who put him in the black hole in that establishment. Jules Chartrand replied, “Mr. McGregor.” In an unprecedented move, commissioners were soon asking questions on behalf of McGregor: “By Mr. Helbronner, at the suggestion of Mr. McGregor: Q.- Were you at Reformatory school two and a half years ago? […] Q.- Why were you sent to the Reformatory?”22 Later in the same testimony McGregor asked a question through Freed: “By Mr. Freed, at Mr.

20 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 198-203.
21 In other words, they are in the published testimony in succession.
22 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 107.
McGregor’s suggestion: Q.- When you were sent to the Reformatory, did your mother testify against you in court? [...] Q. – Did she send you to the Reformatory?” It is obvious that McGregor was nearby when Jules Chartrand implicated him. He took the immediate opportunity to attempt to discredit Chartrand’s testimony. Other witnesses observed the power dynamics at work, whereby the accused swiftly became the accuser.

A similar case also emerged in Quebec City. A lawyer was allowed to ask questions through Judge Armstrong. In this instance, the lawyer was known to be particularly hostile to local printers. Like the judge, Mr. Pelletier, the lawyer in question was hostile to Antoine Langlois, a Quebec printer and member of the Quebec Typographical Union. The testimony was particularly concerned with a confrontation between the union and employers in the city. The “masters,” resistant to dealing with the union, had attempted to confer individually with workers. Pelletier pressured Langlois by asking him if the men’s negotiators had been sent by the union or as individual workmen. He implied that the ensuing strike had been the fault of the union, not the employers. Eventually, the lawyer’s questions became “legal” and antagonistic: “Q.- The question put to you is this: Were not the masters ready to meet and sit with you individually, refusing, at the same time, to have anything to do with the Typographical Union? Did the masters offer to meet the workmen individually and not as representing the Typographical Union?” In a secret meeting, several commissioners overruled the chair, and passed a resolution that lawyers could not represent witnesses. The affair

23 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 107.
24 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 959. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 489-492.
became a source of contention between the commissioners that warranted the intervention of the Prime Minister.²⁵

As the above examples suggest, being implicated in wrongdoing had a profound impact on some witnesses. In Ontario, commissioner Armstrong, obviously acting on some tip, placed W. Wilson on the spot in Kingston. “Did the company,” he asked, “a few days ago, send home several young girls who were under age, knowing that the Royal Commission of Labor was going to visit this city?”²⁶ National and local reputations were made and discredited throughout the Commission’s hearings. It sometimes appears that witnesses went to some length to present a favourable image of their businesses to the Commission which, as the above examples suggest, meant young workers were let go or bones of contention were resolved before they became public. These plays of power also served to construct, through a process of pre-emptive editing, the evidence of the Commission on the ‘relations of capital and labour.’

The examples just mentioned provide some insight into the legal/institutional methodology of the Commission. Clearly there were factors that, although subtle and understated at times, had a significant effect on the testimony. The experience of being a witness before the Commission entailed catering not only to the authority of the commissioners, but to members of the audience who were bosses, employers or simply members of the community. Even though some commissioners were keen to expose coerced testimony, they themselves were also agents of coercion. They allowed

²⁵ See JAM, LAC, Blackeby to Macdonald, 1887-1888, 226846.
²⁶ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 972.
audience members to borrow their authority in their efforts to “get to the bottom” of an issue. They permitted employers some leeway in deciding who the witnesses were. There was tension in the methodology of the Commission which was, on one hand, concerned with “objectively” documenting “the facts” and, on the other hand, allowed employers and the audience to determine who witnesses were and even what they said.

Other issues of power and authority surfaced when the Commission asked for information that witnesses were not interested in disclosing. For many witnesses, “getting to the bottom” of the labour question carried risks for their reputations, respectability and even their jobs. Many witnesses balked at the authority of the Commission in this respect. They enquired whether they had to answer the questions the commissioners asked. For example, John Scott, a livery stable keeper, was questioned about an oil producer in Petrolia, Ontario who paid his workers by store orders. He would not disclose the producer’s identity when the chair asked if this party operated another business besides oil. Scott answered yes. McLean followed the issue: “Q. – What other business is he in? A. – I do not know that it is necessary for me to answer that question.”²⁷ Sometimes refusing to answer a commissioner’s question was intended to protect the witness himself. Angus Barnhart, an engineer in the Cornwall Spinning Mill, was asked about plugging the safety valve on his boiler. The witness answered “no” to a question about whether such a thing had ever happened. Thereupon Commissioner Heakes pushed the issue. His question appeared to contain knowledge that the witness had indeed plugged the safety-valve on his boiler. “Q. – Did you ever weigh it down

²⁷ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 701.
with bricks, or anything – you need not answer unless you like? A. – I do not answer.”

Yet, later in his testimony, the witness corrected Heakes when the latter used the word “bricks”: “It was not bricks; it was one brick.”

When witnesses refused to answer a question, one often discerns, in their silence, the outlines of the matrix of respectability and reputation. After all, when the Commission left town, most working relationships had to continue. David Flack, a coal merchant, was asked about a combine in Cornwall to control the prices of coal:

Q. - Can you tell us if the coal dealers of Cornwall used their influence to prevent workingmen from getting coal from Montreal dealers? A. – I do not propose to answer any such question.
Q. - Do you know if the coal merchants of Cornwall used their influence with the coal transportation companies to prevent the people of Cornwall, or the workingmen of Cornwall, from getting a consignment of coal through to Cornwall? A. – Am I obliged to answer these questions? Is there no lawyer here to protect a witness?
By the Chairman: -
Q. – You can please yourself about answering? A.- Well, I decline to answer any such questions.

It was obvious Flack was, for whatever reason, withholding information.

A similar situation cropped up in London, Ontario. Builder John Hayman was asked about the establishment of a “builder’s exchange,” i.e., a combination of construction employers in the city. When first asked about the exchange Hayman gave a series of one-word responses. As the questions got more detailed – ranging from who was allowed in the exchange, prices for members, tenders on building contracts – it becomes clear that the commissioners thought he was hiding something. They

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28 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1078.
29 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1078.
30 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1080-1081.
eventually asked Hayman what the advantages were to belonging to the association and if there was a distinction made between members and non-members. Hayman simply replied, “[t]here is no distinction.”

Thomas Green testified soon after. He was asked if he was part of the same exchange. He replied, yes. The difference was that Green was quite open about the combine:

> [b]ut I hold this: if you do not belong to the Builders Exchange you have not the right to favoritism as members would have, if I was dealing with you; one belongs to the exchange and the other does not; I would make it a point to deal with the man who supports my institution. You call that boycotting, I believe. I will work, however, for any man who brings stuff to me.

There was clearly a different tone to the two interviews. It was obvious to the commissioners that Hayman was withholding information whereas Green was quite open and unapologetic about the exchange’s restrictive practices. The Commission obtained the requested information but it is interesting to note the very different attitudes of these two witnesses: they rationalized their positions in front of the Commission with very different results.

Other exchanges suggested a submerged nexus of understandings about respectability. Montreal stevedore John Brennan was asked about the issue of Sunday labour among dock workers.

Q. – From your experience is not Sunday morning work liable to induce men to drink? A. - I think it has the tendency to cause men to drink, because after a man breaks the Sabbath, he does not care what he does after that.

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31 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 636-641
32 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 639 and 648.
Q.- Are there taverns at which he could drink? A.- I think that is a question I should not answer.³³

But why would this be a problematic question? Was Brennan protecting his respectability by denying any knowledge about taverns or was he protecting the likes of tavern-keeper “Joe Beef” — perhaps a source of some of his work-force — from the watchful eye of the state and the community in which he lived?³⁴ Similarly, William Halpin, an undertaker in Montreal, was asked to disclose his profit margin on hospital coffins: “Q. – It is one hundred percent or not? A.- No. Q.- Have you any objection to state what is the ordinary profit on an ordinary coffin? A.- I would rather not answer.”³⁵ Commissioner Helbronner was pushing the issue as though he already knew the profit margin on hospital coffins but wanted the witness to admit it for the record. Obviously, Halpin thought that was private knowledge and was protecting his and his company’s interests. Another example surfaced when L’Abbé DesCarries was questioned about ill treatment by foremen in his working experience:

Q.- Do you know of any foreman who has abused his position to ill-treat those under him in the sense of immorality? A.- If I am not bound to reply to this question I shall not do so. I repeat what I said. I once made a complaint and was promised that it would be attended to.

Q.- To the best of your knowledge have these abuses been kept up? A.- I should prefer not answering that question.³⁶

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³³ GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 154.
³⁴ Joe Beef has gained popular notoriety for his philanthropy towards Montréal’s poor into the latter nineteenth century. Joe Beef’s policy of ‘never refusing a meal to a poor man’ as well as his location near the docks meant that his canteen was frequented by Montreal workers. Peter DeLottinville, “Joe Beef of Montreal: Working Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869–1889,” Labour/Le Travail, 8, 9 (1981/1982), 9-40.
³⁵ GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 638.
³⁶ GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 704.
Was DesCarries protecting his interests by holding up his end of the bargain to not disclose ill-treatment in the hopes that the promise made to him would be kept? If that were the case, even the authority of the federal state could not breach the local power plays of employed and employer.

Clearly, the Commission and the publicity surrounding it had the potential to ruin the reputation and respectability of some witnesses and their employers. Therefore, many took it upon themselves to put their interests above the mandate of the Commission. As the *Globe* commented in November 25, 1887, many witnesses were in fear for their positions when they testified. The newspaper was struck by an unidentified plumber who “did not say one word that any employer would object to. [Many witnesses would rather] suffer in silence than risk their position.” 37 This “public sphere” was effectively policed.

Some witnesses seemed to view the proceedings of the Commission with either fear or contempt. They would not expand on any subject. 38 Several children and women, for example, delivered answers of only a few words. Others were remarkably reluctant to divulge any facts about the workplace. For example, Mary Buchanan was a foreman in a steam laundry facility in Quebec. Buchanan was asked about the wages paid in her shop, a question whose answer, it would be fair to assume, she should know: “Q.- How many of these young women receive fifty cents a day? A.- One or two, I could not really

37 *Globe*, November 25, 1887, 3.
38 For example, see Murdock McLeod in GC, *RCRLC*, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 288. His testimony is in Appendix 4.
say, not more.” Another example concerns Buchanan’s general knowledge of wages in the city: “Q.- How many laundries are there in Quebec? A.- I only know of two. Q.- Are the wages in both laundries the same? A. I cannot say.” In fact, there appeared to be many things Buchanan could not confidently speak about in spite of her position as “foreman” (which implies some detailed experience) in a specific industry. Even the most obvious questions elicited evasive answers: “Q.- Don’t you think it is pretty hard work for these young women, considering that they get three dollars a week to feed and clothe themselves? A.- I do not know.” Indeed, “I do not know” was a common response, varied at times with “I cannot say” or “I am not sure.” Some witnesses, deemed knowledgeable, were pressed for information; others were allowed to hazard a guess; and others were simply told they could add more detail if they chose to do so.

Conversely, it appears that many witnesses felt compelled to provide the Commission with correct information ranging from the prices of provisions, rent in different cities and the wages of different occupations. Having already testified before the Commission in Hamilton, George Metcalf asked to be recalled for a single purpose: “I think I gave a wrong impression about the highest wages. I merely gave the highest and the lowest wages received. I did not say how many or how few received them. I did

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39 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 818.
40 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 818.
41 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 818.
42 This response occurred too often to cite each example.
43 See Edward Splashett in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 468; Samuel Argrove, GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 945; Patrick Kennedy, GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 265.
not wish to give any wrong impression.”

Some witnesses went to great lengths to provide correct information. Hollis Shorey, a tailor who owned his own establishment, reappeared before the Commission to provide details about the inflation of workingmen’s clothes:

My son and I went to work, last night, and spent an hour looking over the books for this year, eighteen hundred and eighty eight, and the books back to seven years ago; and the prices, for three years previous to seven years ago, was about the same as the prices seven years previous to that.

In an interesting comment on legalities of the Commission and the presentation of accurate knowledge, F.X. Thivierge was asked about his position on the relations of labour and capital: “Q.- Do the employers take advantage of the necessities of the workingmen to reduce their wages? A.- Being under oath I cannot affirm this; but, to the best of my knowledge, I believe it to be true. Q.- But you cannot say it on your oath? A.- No.” A tacit acknowledgment of the Commission’s authority was presented in the fact that many witnesses went to some lengths to see that the correct information was collected.

The effort to present correct knowledge echoed larger social tensions. As can be expected, the information that the Commission did attain was not without challengers. Such challenges were not necessarily about a specific issue but often entailed complex power dynamics within the community. In New Brunswick, William Jarvis recited the testimony of a labourer named Patrick Kennedy who, when he had testified days before,

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44 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 869.
45 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 715.
46 GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 313; see also David Black in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 278.
provided a detailed list of provisions and prices for himself and his family. The Commission questioned Jarvis if those figures fairly represent the cost of feeding a family of seven persons:

A.- … it struck me that his figures were entirely exaggerated. In the first place, if I recollect correctly, he spoke of the expense of feeding his family, and said he purchased five loaves of bread per diem. That would be equal to twenty-two barrels of flour in a year. I am at a loss to know how they could consume so much flour.\textsuperscript{47}

Later in the testimony Kennedy’s numbers were again disputed but to a different end:

Q.- Is it your opinion that with the same amount of money that more palatable and more nutritious food could be bought for a family than named in Mr. Kennedy’s bill of fare? A.- There must be waste somewhere, and very serious waste.
Q.- Have you ever thought of the prospects of giving instruction, not only in cooking, but in domestic economy, for the families of the comparative poor? A.- I have thought over the matter very seriously.\textsuperscript{48}

This discussion led, seemingly inevitably, to the establishment of technical schools for teaching thrift and household economy. The paternalism that this witness and the commissioners displayed indicated not only their notions of “knowing better” for a certain class of people but also the tensions that their attitudes caused amongst those who “needed their guidance:”

Q.- Do you think that the working classes would resent the establishment of such schools, as infringing upon what might be called pauper treatment? A.- Not at all. There is a very friendly feeling between classes of people in this community. Q.- Are you not aware of the fact that people do resent any action which classes them with paupers? A.- It is very marked in this community, but still, if such a school were established there would be no fear of such a thing taking place.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 207-208.
\textsuperscript{48} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 269.
\textsuperscript{49} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 269.
The Commissioner seemed to contest Kennedy’s own perception of attitudes to poverty in the community.

Such negotiations with respect to the facts also surfaced in wider debates over the press stories generated by the hearings. For example, James Bowen appeared before the Commission in Hamilton and took the opportunity to correct evidence he had read in the newspaper. Bowen was an employee of George Tuckett, a tobacco manufacturer, who had allegedly given incorrect information to the Commission:

I would like to make a statement, if it is in order. In reading the papers last night I saw that Mr. Tuckett made a great mistake in regard to workmen making $1.25 a day on average. There is not a man in our factory that is paid less that $1.40. I have got statistics of my own which show that I earned $600 last year myself, and several others had more.\(^{50}\)

For some reason, Bowen felt compelled to correct the testimony of his employer and make known the fact that tobacco workers in this shop made more money. Whether Bowen did this to buttress his employer, bolster craft pride, or make sure the Commission obtained correct information is impossible to determine. Similarly, Joseph Brousseau, a currier, appeared before the Commission in Quebec with the following result:

Q.- Is there anything you wish to say to this Commission? A.- I read yesterday, in *L’Artisan*, that one of our employers had stated to the Commission that curriers’ wages are from $8 a week up. It is true that there may be one or two in our shop who may earn that much, but it is because they work by the job, and when they can’t get a job they work by

\(^{50}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 811.
the week, and then they earn $5.50, and oftener $5 only ... I am only paid $5.50 a week.\textsuperscript{51}

It was important for many witnesses that the Commission record sound data. The concern spoke to the respectability of witnesses, whose probity was so acute that they would go to such lengths to establish the truth. They thereby legitimized both the hearings and the knowledge they generated. Elizabeth Middleton, a temperance advocate in Quebec, even wrote the Commission after she gave testimony to correct her own statements:

In some of the newspapers I am reported as having, in my evidence before the Labor Commission, said: 'We have two or three temperance groceries,' whereas, when asked if I could inform the Commission how many temperance groceries we have, I said that I could not speak positively, but knew of two or three.\textsuperscript{52}

Mrs. Julia Dubois appeared before the Commission in Montreal for the sole purpose of refuting the charge of immorality amongst factory workers: “Q.- Have you seen anything to complain of? A.- No. All I complain of is what has been put in the newspapers. The mill hands are more decent than the one who put that statement in the papers.”\textsuperscript{53} On one occasion, the commissioners commented on the relation of newspaper evidence to the work of the Commission. George Racine, a tailor in Quebec, appeared before the Commission with the following result:

\textsuperscript{51} GC, \textit{RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889)}, 1128. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 493-494.
\textsuperscript{52} GC, \textit{RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889)}, 762.
\textsuperscript{53} GC, \textit{RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889)}, 485.
Q.- You wish to make some remarks before the Commission? A.- I have not heard what the other tailors have stated here, I only saw the reports given in the newspapers.
Q.- I ought to tell you that the newspaper reports are not always exact? 

In a similar vein, Stansalis Beaulieu appeared before the Commission in Levis, Quebec. Beaulieu began his testimony by stating that “I have seen the papers, that the Ship Laborers’ Society has not paid much attention to ... The Chairman, interrupting him:-
Q.- Do not quote the papers, but state what you, yourself, have to say?”

In the court-like legal atmosphere of the hearings, hearsay evidence was (selectively) discouraged.

The commissioners’ social and political preferences shaped the sort of testimony they were willing to credit. The commissioners came to communities in search of facts. They had very limited time for the opinions of some; conversely, others were allowed to expatiate on a wide range of topics. The commissioners were able to exercise this discretion in part because of their special status within what was in essence a quasi-judicial proceeding. For example, Judge Armstrong’s legal background surfaced frequently throughout his chairmanship of the Commission. Freed’s treatment of some witnesses also exhibited his tendency to use the Commission as a means to forward his own notions of social order. Such ‘labour’ commissioners as Armstrong, Helbronner and Heakes also expressed their preferences in their questions. The relationship between the commissioners and witnesses was transparently unequal. The commissioners had the final say on the contents of the testimony. With the help of witnesses, they were active

54 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1071. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 495-497.
55 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1132. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 498-499.
participants not only in the investigation on the relations of labour and capital, but in the creation of knowledge on the subject.

Judge Armstrong’s actions often surfaced in authoritarian or disciplinary ways that enhanced the legal impression inherent in the Commission and thinly cloaked his political and social preferences. Judge Armstrong’s legal/judicial background, extensive land holdings and ties to the Conservative Party compensated for his total inexperience in addressing the labour question. The hearings were an opportunity for him to project his personal thoughts and opinions. For example, when Thomas Crowley testified in Windsor, Judge Armstrong asked him if the circumstances of the poor in this country had grown worse: “A.- I swear positively that I believe the competition [interruption] Q.- I am asking you a simple question – yes or no? Do you say the people of this country are poorer now than they were 10 or 15, or 20 years ago?”\(^\text{56}\) When William McAndrews of Hamilton testified on the subject of assisted immigration, Armstrong was obviously annoyed. He asked: “Q. Do you know of any person who came to Hamilton without paying a cent – answer, ‘yes’ or ‘no’, within the last twelve or eighteen months?”\(^\text{57}\) In these instances, Armstrong was holding witnesses accountable for any criticisms of the Conservatives’ political policy, under the guise of a quest for ‘facts.’ In essence, ‘facts’ could only be produced by authorized individuals and could only pertain to certain levels of generality.

\(^{56}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 434.

\(^{57}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 752.
For example, John Noble of St. Thomas, Ontario was asked for his views on bonuses for manufacturers. After a few words, he was interrupted by Armstrong, who argued, “In this inquiry we have only to deal with facts, and we cannot enter into all those general questions, or there would be no end to them.” Getting to the facts was the subject of another confrontation with a member of the Hamilton Land Tax Club. The second question asked of John Peebles unquestionably assumed a tone of intolerance that began with Noble (who had testified just before):

[w]hat have you to say more as to facts. We cannot go into discussions on theories; we leave that to books and pamphlets? [...] If it is a mere essay you wish to deliver you can read that in a book, and its publication will cost nothing to the Government. Have you any facts? [...] We can find all that in Henry George’s book. Please tell us some facts connected with Hamilton.

For Judge Armstrong, there were opinions on social matters that wasted the Commission’s and the government’s time. His willingness and capacity to discipline witnesses and even other commissioners through ex cathedra pronouncements meant that some voices were silenced and some topics simply disappeared. Montreal cigar apprentices, for example, were to be confined rigidly to one topic: “it was understood by the Commission that no other question other than those relating to immorality should be asked of cigar men.” In this case the tactic backfired. As the above examples suggest,

58 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 548.
59 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 863-4.
60 Three Ontario witnesses came to the Commission prepared to discuss/advocate the principles of Henry George. See W.A. Douglas in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 13-25; R.T. Lancefield in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 25-28; and, E.S. Gilbert in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 861-863.
61 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 266-7.
Judge Armstrong’s interventions were often determined by his political views and his position as the chair allowed him significant sway in determining testimony. The Judge’s preferences were recognized by the *Canadian Workman* which noted:

> We have noticed in our attendance upon the sittings of the Labor Commission that Judge Armstrong is rather a drag upon the investigations of that body. He is far too partial and has too exaggerated an idea of his own importance to be just the proper man to preside over the investigations. When a capitalist is under examination, he is very careful to watch the tenor of the questions put, and is jealously watchful that no questions shall be pressed which in any way seem to encroach upon the private concerns of the witness. [...] When, however, a workingman is giving testimony these queries give the Judge the least concern, and he is then chiefly on the qui vive to choke or round off any questions which might elicit information damaging to the bosses.⁶²

The doctrine of “sticking to the facts” was transparently a way of adhering to a very narrow and empiricist conception of the factual. Applied unevenly to witnesses on the basis of their ideological framework, such empiricism allowed Armstrong to discredit other conceptions of the social order.

Other commissioners were no less keen to shape the evidence. In many instances, questions were slanted and full of insinuations, suggestions, attitudes and opinions. Commissioner Freed’s opinion of Single Tax radical and future socialist Philips Thompson was made obvious during the latter’s testimony. Thompson testified that rent increases had diminished working-class standards of living. Many other witnesses had said much the same thing. Yet, Freed felt compelled to go to some length to refute this

⁶² *Canadian Workmen*, February 18, 1888.
statement. In an effort to undermine Thompson’s position, Freed attacked his credibility through a succession of questions:

Is it not true that when you said the increase of wages was offset by the increase in house rent, you had not made any actual study of the matter? [...] Was it a matter of opinion with you when you gave that answer, or was it a conclusion based on the collection of facts?63

A similar line of questioning surfaced in the testimony of John Ballantine, a representative of the Toronto Master Carpenters Association. Ballantine and Freed extensively discussed the benefits of organization and strikes for Ontario carpenters and their union. At the end of the testimony Freed asked Ballantine: “Is this information given from general belief on your part, or from knowledge of those cities? Have you worked there?”64 For Freed, Ballantine needed to be ‘on the ground’ to fully understand labour difficulties. When another Ontario witness brought up the National Policy, Freed took the opportunity to clarify its benefits for Canadian business:

Q.- In what way does the National Policy work? A.- Well, it has caused the establishment of several industries here and they have assisted real estate.
Q.- And given employment to many men? A.- Yes; quite a number. Q.- And this, of course, has caused more business to be done by merchants and others?65

In this instance, Freed appeared to be giving testimony himself. As in the case of Judge Armstrong, Freed’s political opinions entered into his line of questioning.

63 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 99.
64 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 244.
65 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 391.
It was not only the ‘capitalist report’ commissioners who acted this way during the proceedings. For example, John Armstrong questioned a witness in New Brunswick about the seasonal reduction of wages that stone cutters regularly faced. Armstrong, obviously unhappy with the answer, interrupted the witness before he had fully answered his question:

Q.- What is the cause of this reduction being made? A.- A dullness of the time and shorter day [...]  
Q.- Is that the principal reason? A.- It is.  
Q. Is not the reason that people are not employed, and the employer takes advantage of the labor? A.- It is the shortness of the day.  

In another instance, a witness testified that the water-closets in his establishment were fine despite being beside one another. For commissioner Heakes, this attitude was unacceptable. In his follow-up question, Heakes not only made his opinion of the matter known, but articulated his question in such a way as to hold the witness to a moral standard that could not be ignored:

Q.- Do you think in the interests of decency and morality, it is right to have them so near one another? A.- I do not see any objection – it is the handiest place.  
Q.- Where there are so many employed in the factory? We have no objection to your having them wherever it is convenient, but an objection may be found to your having them beside one another, where both sexes and all ages are compelled to go. Now, in some places where I have visited, they have promised to alter this state of things, and place those for the females in one portion of the building, and those for the males in an entirely separate place, so that the sexes do not meet. Do not you think yourself it would be an advantage? A.- Yes; I do in that light.

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66 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 127.  
67 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence, (1889), 1076.
It is obvious that the articulation of Heakes’s question was intended to force the witness into addressing the water-closet issue in his factory. That Heakes made the witness promise to alter the situation, under oath and for the record, was an indication of the symbolic and actual power this labour commissioner felt he had garnered.

Sometimes the commissioners’ very line of questioning was seemingly designed to elicit particular answers. For example, the commissioners cloaked their seemingly unanimous pro-arbitration convictions in well-turned questions. Joseph Smith appeared before the Commission in Chatham, Ontario. Smith was asked about any troubles arising from employers and employees in the city. He replied there had not been any issues:

Q.- In the case of labor troubles arising between employers and employed, would you prefer a system of arbitration; and if you would, what kind of arbitration would you prefer? A.- I would prefer arbitration; but I do not know whether I rightly understand you as to the kind of arbitration.
Q.- Would you prefer disinterested parties being asked by both sides to interfere and settle the dispute amicably without a strike: do you believe in such a system of settling trade troubles? A.- Yes; I do, if it is possible to do so.
Q.- Or would you think it better that the Government should form a standing board of arbitration to settle the difficulty? A.- I think if you could establish it as a rule that disputes should be settled by arbitration it would be better.
Q.- By the Government? A.- Yes.68

Based on this line of questions, posed to a relatively uninformed witness, it appears as though the commissioner was trying actively to insert the government as the ‘obvious’

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68 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 453.
choice for an arbitrator of labor disputes. A similar impression was created by the
questioning of John Waddell of St. Thomas, Ontario:

Q.- Suppose that differences did arise, what system do you think would be the best for settling matters between you? A.- Arbitration.
Q.- What kind of arbitration would you advise? A. In which way do you mean?
Q.- What kind of arbitration would you advise – compulsory arbitrators appointed by the Government or arbitrators chosen by the two parties interested? A.- --
Q. Would you favor a law compelling both parties to go to arbitration? A.- Yes; I would.
Q.- If those parties could not agree, what would you advise? A.- Let them call in a third.
Q.- Who should this third party be? Would it do to have one appointed by the Government, who would be outside the interests of either of those people, or one chosen by themselves? Which would you prefer? A.- He ought to be a disinterested party.69

Again in Wadell’s case, the witness seems to not have put much thought into the parties involved in arbitration. However, the Commission continued to insert the government as a dominant option for addressing the issue, in effect creating the remedies for labour troubles in their very investigation of them.70

In the many queries into wages, some witnesses were given an opportunity to answer and some were not. This discrepancy was a tacit acknowledgment of the power relations between the Commission and the witnesses. Different levels of expertise and respectability, as constructed by the commissioners, led to different strategies of questioning. For example, several employees from the Marysville Cotton Mill were

69 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 532.
70 It is not by coincidence that these issues, Single Tax and Arbitration, were extensively addressed as such by the Commission. They were central issues for the Knights of Labor and the left during this period. Indeed, the attention to these matters is indicative of the Commission preemptively “cherry picking” the issues it found most congenial.
called before the Commission in New Brunswick. C.O. Shaw, an overseer in the cloth hall was asked:

Q.- Would it be a fair question to ask how much of your wages you receive in cash at the end of the month? A.- I presume that the question would be fair enough.
Q.- Would you mind telling us what the amount of cash that you would receive at the end of the month would come to? A.- I should object to doing so.\(^\text{71}\)

The next witness, John Murdoch, an overseer in the carding department, also balked at disclosing his wages: “Q.- What wages do you get a week? A.- I should not like to speak right out and tell you, but I will tell you in private.”\(^\text{72}\) John Hatch, a foreman in the weaving room also objected to having his salary disclosed in public stating, “I would not like to state it here.”\(^\text{73}\) The next witness, George Tapley, a second hand in the same mill was asked his wages and there appears to have been no hesitation: “Q.- Do you have any objections to stating what wages you receive? A.- No; I get between $1.50 and $2.”\(^\text{74}\)

Some witnesses were obviously concerned with making this information public and others were not. Other witnesses were very open concerning their earnings because, in the effort to address a problem, it would provide evidence (and subsequent compassion) for their cause. For example, Patrick Kennedy of Saint John, New Brunswick was very open about his household economy and earnings. Kennedy supported a family of five

\(^{71}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 460.
\(^{72}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 460.
\(^{73}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 462
\(^{74}\) GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 459-462. In spite of the fact that the Commission actively sought information on wages, these witnesses were not forced to disclose this information.
on his labourer’s salary of $1.10 a day.\textsuperscript{75} His full disclosure of both his wage and his living costs suggests a conviction on his part that the Commission might do something about his circumstances.

For the most part, when the commissioners asked witnesses for their earnings they were given the information. In fact, this occurred so often that citing specific examples would be cumbersome. However, it must be noted that not all witness were asked about their wages and, if they were, not in the same way. Sometimes, and for some reason, the commissioners would include a disclaimer in their question. For example, Douglas McLeod appeared before the Commission in Amherst, Nova Scotia. Commissioner Walsh delicately asked the following question:

\begin{quote}Q.- Are you in a position to save any money. I do not wish to interfere in your private matters, but it is our business to enquire whether workingmen here live in comfortable circumstances or not; it is not a matter of mere curiosity on our part but for the good of the men?\textsuperscript{76}\end{quote}

No factory owners were ever asked about their personal earnings. Nor did the Commission ever explore the question of business profits with any rigour.\textsuperscript{77} Walter S. Ray, a manager for a Quebec lumber merchant, was given a disclaimer concerning the truck system, a central topic in the Commission’s investigations: “Q.- You need not answer this question unless you like. Are your men paid by cash?”\textsuperscript{78} A former foreman of Fortier’s cigar factory appeared before the Commission in Montreal and admitted to

\textsuperscript{75} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 265-266.
\textsuperscript{76} GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 320.
\textsuperscript{77} The issue was addressed when J. S. Anthes, a children’s carriage manufacturer, testified in Berlin, Ontario. Anthes was recalled by the Commission to discuss (rather briefly) his profits. See GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 842.
\textsuperscript{78} GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1020.
some of the abuses in that factory. In fact, the witness claimed that he had left the employ of Fortier because of the abuses. However, he refused to give his name to the Commission. After disclosing much information about what he had witnessed at Fortier’s as well as where he worked at the time of his testimony, commissioner Côté asked, “Q.- What wages do you earn usually as cigar-maker? You are not obliged to answer that question, unless you want to?” The same treatment was accorded Richard R. Leahey, a ship labourer in Quebec. Armstrong asked the witness: “You need not answer this question I am about to put to you unless you like. What would your wages amount to per week, if spread over the whole twelve months?” Ultimately, the commissioners determined which questions were asked and what answers were acceptable.

As the Commission was the authority on the subject matter of the testimony, it also determined who was fit to give evidence. For example, some witnesses were allowed to hazard a guess in answering a question and others were only allowed to disclose “facts.” Some were allowed to ramble. Others, by permission, delivered statements. The commissioners actively sought experts on the relations of labor and capital and treated witnesses according to their adherence to tacit criteria of social and intellectual respectability. There were to be two kinds of experts in the Commission: those “successful citizens” whose expertise was established outside the Commission, such as journalists, reformers, lawyers; and others, respectable workers and the like.

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79 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 45.
80 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 747.
81 Many witnesses were not asked questions on wages. For example, see James Joyce in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 730-732.
whose expertise was constituted by the Commission itself. Because the Commission had such a self-defined mandate, the issues that required expert knowledge were, ultimately, defined by the commissioners and based on a wide spectrum of subjects. However, the criteria for expertise also followed a more standardized determination: years in a particular occupation, respectability in a trade, and social standing. And there appear to have been secondary criteria at work as well. For example, whether a witness owned property or was married with a family mattered not only to their overall credibility but also affected the factual legitimacy of the information they provided. The length of the testimony and the range of questions asked of a witness were clear indications of their level of expertise. The Commission both privileged and defined expert knowledge.

Experience mattered. The Commission was very successful in obtaining witnesses with lengthy track records in their fields. On average, witnesses had worked between 15 to 20 years in their occupations. For example, a score of carpenters appeared before the Commission in Halifax on 4 April 1888. Their treatment before the Commission confirms the emphasis the commissioners put on experience. The first carpenter, John McInnis, was a general contractor who was asked the routine questions on the wages and hands he employed, the hours of work, apprentices, and the prices of materials. His testimony consumes just over a page. James Brodie was next. The first question that was asked of him was, “I presume that you are considered a first class man? A.- Yes[.]” His worthiness thus established, the Commissioners moved into

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82 This based only on those witnesses who disclosed this information. Not all witnesses – especially not juveniles -- were asked or gave this information.
83 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 29.
questions on his wages and expenses, hours of work and views on apprenticeship. Neither of these two witnesses was asked how long they had worked at their respective occupations. Alexander Fraser was the next witness. His first question concerned how long he had been in the carpentry business. He replied, “15 years.” This was followed by some questions on inflation. Then the witness was asked about familiar topics: hours of work, apprentices, conditions of shops in Halifax, benefits of being a member of the Builders’ Society, family economy, and rent increases. His testimony is about a full page longer than those before him. Michael McNeil, the next witness, disclosed that he had had 17 years in the trade. His testimony covered the same issues as those before him but specific issues began to come out. For example, McNeil was asked very particular questions about the conditions of workingmen’s homes and sewer connections, and also for his opinion on the seasonal inflow of country workers into the city. His testimony was about as long as Fraser’s. The next witness was Albert Lessel, the president of the Carpenter’s Union and thirty-year veteran in his trade. His testimony begins with a description of the conditions of carpenters over the last several decades, then enters into particulars on workingmen’s tenements and homes. At one point, he was asked if he had anything to add to the testimony, a privilege not afforded to the previous witnesses. Lessel brought up the subject of apprentices and then smoothly moved into the controversy aroused by the influx of labour from country districts. Commissioner Walsh asked: “[y]ou, as a practical man and one who understands your business in every particular, do you think these people are a benefit to the city as regards their cheap labor?” Of course, coming from a commissioner, this question was an obvious
acknowledgment of Lessel’s expertise. His testimony constitutes about four pages in length. The next carpenter, Alexander Northrop, also a member of the union with thirty years experience, was asked more questions on the history of organization in Halifax (a subject not explored with Lessel) and his organization’s views on certain subjects such as the establishment of a bureau of statistics. Northrop’s evidence is just short of Lessel’s in terms of length. Finally, the last carpenter who appeared before the Commission on this day was William Gibb whose testimony is about one page. Gibb had twenty years of experience as a carpenter in Halifax but appeared to not have any further evidence to offer the Commission. It appears as though enough was known about carpenters in Halifax that day.

What is displayed by these examples? First of all, we see the length of the testimony from carpenters increased throughout the day. Time spent testifying loosely correlates with the increase in experience: the first two witnesses were not even asked how long they had been working as carpenters, the second two had about 15 years and the last two were thirty years each. There was undeniably a tacit hierarchy imposed upon these witnesses which, among other things, makes it difficult to determine who was ‘labour’ and who was ‘capital.’ Lessel was a prime example of working-class respectability. His efforts in organizing Halifax’s skilled carpenters and his thoughtfulness on labour issues warranted an “elderly mechanic” to describe him upon

his death as a “deep thinker and a close reasoner,” noting that he had been a “theorist of this kind from boyhood up.” In February 1896, another article in the *Acadian Recorder* acknowledged Lessel’s contribution to the union movement in Halifax: “[t]o him may be attributed the nucleus of the labor organizations which were set on foot and flourished in this community, and which, despite occasional illustrations to the contrary, are admitted by workingmen generally to have been fraught with good to them.” Yet, the majority of the questions concerning the organization of Halifax carpenters were asked to Northrop. Similarly, Gibb, who also had decades of experience and owned his own property was largely passed over by the commissioners. The commissioners allowed some carpenters – some known personally to them – to be full-range experts on their trade and on the city in general. Others were relegated to merely disclosing particular “facts.”

Conversely, some witnesses were deemed incapable of factual knowledge about their own circumstances. Mrs. Sarah Hardy was called before the Commission in Montreal. Three of this widow’s ten children worked at Fortier’s cigar factory. The questions posed to her started with her knowledge of the factory, the respectability and morality of her children as well as the factory itself. Her credibility came under question when she disclosed that she herself had never worked there: “Q.- You know nothing in connection with the working of the factory except what people tell you? A.- No.” Her ‘hearsay’ testimony soon ended. On the other hand, an anonymous Montreal witness

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85 *Acadian Recorder*, October 30, 1895.
86 *Acadian Recorder*, February 8, 1895.
87 GC, *RCRLC*, Quebec Evidence (1889), 208.
was asked about the questionable dealings of sewing machine dealers who leased machines to women who worked at home. This witness offered to supply the Commission with information on the subject. Not long into the interview Freed asked, “Q.- These statements that you have just made, are based on your own actual personal knowledge? A.- Yes.”

From this point the testimony continued on the sewing machine issue, then entered into the equally murky world of piano leasers. The rule of first-hand knowledge and rigid adherence to the “facts” was selectively enforced.

Louis Kribbs, a journalist in Toronto, appeared before the Commission to give evidence on the subject of technical education. Kribbs’s first sentence of evidence was a confession that “[m]y knowledge of this subject is theoretical; it is not practical.”

In spite of the confession and the Commission’s quest for factual knowledge, Kribbs was allowed to give extensive evidence on the subject. Conversely, a witness with extensive first-hand knowledge might be cut short if he were not considered respectable. Philip Laliberté, a hotel keeper in Hull, testified that he kept a hotel, sold liquor and employed men. However his testimony, in spite of the commissioners’ preoccupation with alcohol, did not go into any particulars regarding the patrons of his establishment or the effects of alcohol on his employees’ lives. His activities as a liquor-seller undermined his credibility as a witness.

The lengths to which some witnesses went to see that the Commission obtained accurate information reinforced these notions of respectability and expertise. For

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88 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 604.
89 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 197.
90 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1360.
example, moulder Michael Baskwell appeared before the Commission in Hamilton with the sole purpose of correcting a statement about the wages of moulders working for the Grand Trunk Railroad:

Q.- Have you heard the statement as regards wages made by the previous witness; is he about correct? A.- Yes; he is about correct. That gentleman has only worked in the city about ten months, and never worked in a stove-shop, and yet he assumes to tell this Commission what wages stove-moulders make. I don't believe he ever was in a stove foundry in the city; he says there are only twelve foundries here, whereas there are fifteen.91

Thus, even though the statement made by the previous witness was ‘about’ correct, his experience was not credible enough to be left unaddressed by another worker in the city. Baskwell was simply balking at the fact that a new moulder in the city had spoken for those, such as himself, who had spent their lives working in Hamilton.

Whether a witness was married seemed to matter intensely both to the commissioners and to other witnesses.92 In this sense, being married and owning property entailed an implicit respectability and an extra stake in the relations of labour and capital. Many times throughout the testimony, commissioners would ask whether witnesses were married.93 In one instance, commissioner Armstrong asked James P. Watson, the manager of the Cornwall Manufacturing Company, “Are your married people pretty well circumstanced? A.- Yes; they have a good reputation in the town,

91 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 801.
92 This was a criteria in the census as well as the collective biographies discussed in chapter four suggesting that marital status was quite important. I was able to cross-list 213 witnesses with the 1881 census. A total of 133 witnesses were married.
93 For example see John Fraser in GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 360; H.A. Patterson, GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 486-487; C.R.S. Casey, GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 317.
some have houses of their own." Other witnesses alluded to a change in status that accompanied being married. For example, John Andrews, a farmer near St. Thomas, gave much information to the Commission. His testimony encompassed several topics all related to the operation of a successful farm: employing hands, machinery and cash crops to name a few. Andrews was asked about renting some of the property he owned to agricultural workers: “Q.- Do you give preference to single men on a farm? A.- We do where we have not tenement houses for married men to go into. Q.- If you had tenement houses would you prefer married men? A.- I would.” W. Anderson, a bookkeeper for J. R. Booth, testified before the Commission in Ottawa. Anderson was asked about his employees’ yearly wages. He reported that not all his employees worked all year long, but “[w]e have men here who work continuously through the year -- married men, whom it is necessary to keep about the mill.” Thus, married men appeared to enjoy a privileged position amongst employers. An element of security and respectability seemed to accompany this status. The commissioners seemed to think along the same lines. In Toronto, moulder David Black, having discussed rent increases in Toronto, was questioned by commissioner Carson as follows: “Q.- You spoke of rent: are you a married man? A.- I am not. Q.- Then on what authority do you speak?” Obviously, a bachelor did not have the married man’s credibility on this issue.

Respectability and authority in the hearings was thus the complicated outcome of wider values and beliefs. This was seen when two employees from a cotton mill in

94 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1069.
95 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 506.
96 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1105.
97 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 153.
Moncton, New Brunswick testified before the Commission. The first witness to appear was John Walmsley, an overseer of weavers. The witness directly after him was John Fielding, who worked in the department that Walmsley oversaw. It appears as though Fielding was brought before the Commission by Walmsley because he was married with children and owned his own house.\textsuperscript{98} Perhaps the foreman was putting his best foot forward for the Commission, presenting an employee who was married, had a family and owned property. Upon disclosing his personal information, Fielding was then asked by the Commissioners about whether he could live comfortably on his earnings and if many other workers in Moncton were in a similar circumstance. Of the several other mill workers that appeared before the Commission that day, none was asked these questions. Thus, in this instance, Fielding’s experiences — of marriage and property ownership — fit a social model that both acknowledged his expertise and underlined the social and economic role of his employer.

The final precondition of expertise was gender. Much has been made of notions of gender in the Commission by Susan Trofimenkoff in her article “One Hundred and One Muffled Voices.” Trofimenkoff noted that the commissioners’ questions to industrial women often addressed morality and water closets, not wages, hours, or safety. The main point Trofimenkoff makes in her article is that the assumptions of the commissioners had the effect of “muffling” the voices of industrial women and the “crucial economic and social questions raised by the factory system and by women’s

\textsuperscript{98} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 323.
place in it.”99 Trofimenkoff rightly argues that the morality of women was intimately connected to the problems of the factory system.100

However, many women who appeared before the Commission were in fact questioned about wages, overtime, conditions in factories, fining and hours worked per day.101 Their voices were not so much “muffled” as “constructed” and “selected” according to the requirements of a hegemonic script. On various occasions, women were prevented from becoming experts on elements of the labour question because of the questions the commissioners failed to ask them. For example, the Commission was particularly preoccupied with inflation and its effect on household economies. Many of the men who testified admitted that they knew nothing of the prices of provisions because such details were taken care of by their wives. Rather than allowing women to assume the position of individuals with expertise in household economics, the commissioners constructed them as bit players in society. No women were asked about inflation and the rising costs for households. Instead they were asked about work conditions and factory rules. For example, when R. Clements testified, the commissioners asked him whether “a man who has $1.75 a day can support his family....”102 Clements responded that that would depend on the size of the family to which the chair responded: “Q.- Does [it] not depend a great deal upon the wife? A.-

99 Susan Trofimenkoff, One Hundred and One Muffled Voices: Canada’s Industrial Women in the 1880s (Toronto, 1977), 19.
100 Ibid., 2.
101 For example see: Miss *** in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1161.
102 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1121.
Exactly.” ¹⁰³ Springhill’s Elisha Paul alluded to the same gendered dynamics of political economy: “Q.- Have you any idea of the cost of the necessities of life, bread, meat vegetables, tea, sugar and such things, also clothing at Springhill as compared with, say, Halifax? A.- No; I have no idea.” ¹⁰⁴ Although Paul’s family required these goods, he was obviously not the person who purchased them. It appears that in spite of the Commission’s preoccupation with inflation and the changing circumstances of workingmen, obtaining information from the very people who were actually engaged with the purchase of daily provisions was not important. Thus, in general, women had no expertise, not even in the “women’s sphere.”

The commissioners and witnesses, both middle and working class, were preoccupied with the maintenance of working women’s morality. For example, the use of foul language around women and children was continually scorned by the commissioners. Witnesses also expressed their opinions on the matter. James O’Donnel, a Knight in London, testified that the language women heard in factories was liable to result in their becoming immoral: “I claim that in the large shops girls are liable to become immoral; they hear immoral words.” ¹⁰⁵ Another example surfaces in the extensive attention to water-closets. On this issue, the commissioners were in unanimous agreement: women’s morality was jeopardized by inattention to separate conveniences. The questions that the commissioners asked concerning water-closets all evoke a strong belief in maintaining women’s morality, and the ability of the factory to

¹⁰³ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1121.
¹⁰⁴ GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 272.
¹⁰⁵ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 665.
corrupt women’s morals. For example, Sam Showfelt, a cotton carder in Cornwall, was asked the following questions by Judge Armstrong: “Do you not think in the interests of morality and decency, it would be better [to have the conveniences separated]? [d]o you think it proper that young women should sacrifice their modesty to the necessities of nature?”106 Andrew Carroll, a printer in St. Catherine’s Ontario was asked the following question by Heakes: “Where the men and the women work together in the same room do you consider it is conductive to morality on the part of those working there?”107 A shoe manufacturer in Toronto, William Thurston had the following discussion with commissioner Heakes: “Separate conveniences? A.– No, sir. Q.- Do you not consider that using the same conveniences has an immoral tendency?”108 As the hearings went on, the water-closet issue became even more sensitive. In Nova Scotia, the ability to view people going into the washroom became an important issue. Commissioner Heakes had the following exchange with Joseph Tanner, a tailor’s pressman in Halifax: “Is there a screen between the doors; can the parties entering be seen from the room?”109 Joseph Clarke, the acting superintendent of a cotton factory in Halifax, was questioned about the facilities in his factory by commissioner Walsh: “Is there a partition so that the doors can be separated? A.- They enter by separate doors. Q.- Are the doors far enough away, so that the sexes cannot have a view of one another entering?”110 Women themselves were not asked about the separation of conveniences in factories. As was the case with

106 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1076.
107 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 927.
108 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 307.
110 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 22.
household economy, women were similarly prevented from being experts in ‘the other’ women’s sphere.

This paternal preoccupation with water-closets was a proxy for a larger concern with women’s sexuality. An indication of the increasingly charged issue of women’s morality was the Seduction Legislation which was introduced in the House of Commons in 1882 and passed in 1886. The law was designed to protect women who were: a) between the ages of fourteen and sixteen; b) under the age of twenty-one when sex was accompanied by the promise of marriage; and c) under twenty-one and the ward or employee (in a factory, mill, or workshop) of her seducer. The law only applied to women “of previously chaste character” and a prosecution could only be initiated by the woman’s father. The debate in the House of Commons revealed dichotomous constructions of “woman:” some women needed protection, but others were “designing” and might well find it “profitable to fall.” Yet, seduction legislation unified social reformers and organized labour in the quest for the purity of working women. For example, the Montreal Society for the Protection of Women and Girls supported the legislation and argued that the “previously chaste character” clause should be removed because of the inherent responsibility and respectability of employers who “should not be in a position to take advantage of the weakness or previous faults of those whose moral welfare he should be in an important sense the custodian.”

111 Karen Dubinsky, Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929 (Chicago, 1993), 68.
112 LAC, RG13, Department of Justice, File 63/1894, Letters and Submissions to the Department of Justice re: 1892 criminal Code; Thompson papers, LAC, R.C. Smith to John Thompson, 6 May 1892.
the Knights of Labor, arguing that women were frequently subject to the "mercy of lecherous employers," were also behind the legislation.\textsuperscript{113} Based on the emergence of the Maria McCabe case (where an immigrant mother was convicted of murdering her illegitimate infant) and the \textit{Maiden Tribune} case in England (where a journalist supposedly discovered a huge network of white slaves, consisting primarily of working class women), the Knights argued that capitalism and morality were incompatible. As Phillips Thompson wrote, all classes were subject to the "corrupting influence of unearned wealth and idleness on the one hand, and on the other the degradation caused by overwork, poverty and wretched homes."\textsuperscript{114} The Knights successfully lobbied Justice Minister John Thompson to include amendments concerning workplace seduction in 1889. Clearly, the introduction of women into the waged workforce stirred up a vast world of opinions about morality and sexuality. As Karen Dubinsky argues on seduction legislation, "the law was constructed such that age or economic relationships, not force, were the determinants of the sorts of sexual liaisons women were to be protected from."\textsuperscript{115}

Many men were also self-declared experts on the morality of the female wage labourer. Some believed that cheap wages offered to many female factory workers often led women down an immoral path.\textsuperscript{116} For example, Toronto Mayor W.H. Howland

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\textsuperscript{113} \textit{The Hamilton Palladium of Labor}, 10 April, 1886.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Hamilton Palladium of Labor}, 18 July, 1885.
\textsuperscript{115} Dubinsky, \textit{Improper Advances}, 71.
\textsuperscript{116} George Hope, a general woodworker from Chatham, Ontario, when prompted by commissioner Armstrong, testified that men were also subject to immorality as a result of cheap wages: "Q. Do you think the shortening of the hours of labor would have a tendency to improve the morality of the working classes? A.- I do." GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 463.
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commented extensively upon “some” women who were drawn to prostitution because of underpayment in factories. Howland claimed: “a good woman will die first, but there are a great many unfortunate girls, who are young and careless and like pleasure and who have not had good training, who are under the influence of temptation, with possibly starvation, in spite of the best work they can do.”117 Yet, Howland continued, the root of the problem for these women was laziness: “their laziness becomes a matter of education and training; they have led a lazy life for such a time that that they become unfit for industry.”118 Howland’s reference to laziness echoes a larger social association between poverty and morality. For example, John Wright, a witness to the Commission, wrote in 1887 that independent working women could not live respectably on low wages. Poverty forced young unmarried women living outside the family into prostitution in order to survive. The result was a “lowering of womanhood” and the “tempting of women from lives of virtue.”119

Social reformers believed the morality of women was central to the constitution of social order. For example, John Charleton, M.P. for Norfolk North, claimed in the House of Commons:

The degradation of women is a crime against society. The pure Christian home is the only safe foundation for the free and enlightened State. Vice in the shape of social immorality is the greatest danger that can threaten the state, and the duty if the Legislature, the duty of the Government, is to take measures, so far as it can, to punish infractions of morality and to conserve the morality of the public.120

117 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 168.
118 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 168.
119 Canadian Labor Reformer, 1 January 1887.
120 Historians have noted moral reform as rooted in the middle class’ response to, among other things, the growth of the working class. See Carol Lee Bacchi, Liberation Deferred? (Toronto, 1983).
Howland and other witnesses appear to have agreed: “the whole question of female labor is one which should also be under government supervision as a helpless class.” Similarly, both Reports of the Commission argued that the government of Canada should enact legislation to improve factory environments and remove the potential for sin.

Both commissioners and witnesses frequently raised the issues relating to women’s new role in industrial life. For example, the equality of men and women in the workforce elicited many opinions from witnesses. Many believed in the principle, if seldom the actuality, of equal wages for equal work. If there were gender-related discrepancies in wages, these related to different capacities for work. For Hugh Graham in Montreal, gender differences were quite clear:

Q.- You think a woman cannot compete successfully with a man? A.- I think there is little difference. We pay our best men 30 cts. And our best women 29 cts., that is the only difference of one cent per thousand; but there are reasons obvious to every body, why a woman cannot be depended upon to the same extent as a steady man; besides they are not equally as strong and cannot endure the same amount of fatigue and therefore altogether they are not worth as much.

On the other hand, James Munro testified that women’s and men’s work could be of equal value: “Q.- Is it not generally supposed that a man will do more work tailoring than a woman? A.- It may be supposed that way, but I do not think it is in accordance

Other historians see moral reform as a component of nation building. For example, Mariana Valverde and Lorna Weir claim that “the formation of a moral subjectivity that would not only be congruent with but also would provide the psychological basis for what was known as nation-building.” See Mariana Valverde and Lorna Wier, “The Struggles of the Immoral: Preliminary Remarks on Moral Regulation,” Resources for Feminist Research 17, 3 (1988), 31-34.

121 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 167.
122 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 327.
with the facts of the case.”  Of course, gendered assumptions and opinions were not solely the domain of witnesses. Commissioner Gibson posed this question to C.T. Campbell in Ontario: “Is it not a fact that the reason ladies are paid less salaries than gentlemen is that they don’t choose teaching as a life work, but as a temporary occupation?”

The Commission heard a plethora of opinions concerning women’s place in the industrial workforce. The testimony supports a ‘separate spheres’ interpretation. Women were viewed in one of two ways: as either factory workers or home makers. For example, the testimony of Stewart Dunlop of Toronto was an eloquent confirmation of this dichotomy:

Q. If they do the same class of work as male compositors, are they paid the same rate? A. Well, not usually.
Q. Is it your experience that they do their work as well as male compositors? A. No it is not.
Q. In what respect are they inferior? A. Almost invariably they do their work in a very inferior manner. I daresay there may be several reasons for it and it is partly on account of their getting such small pay — smaller pay than the men are getting.

According to Dunlop women were paid less because their work was “inferior” to that done by men in the printing trade; yet, he was also suggesting that the work done by

123 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 833.
124 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 590.
125 The concept of ‘separate spheres’ refers to the changing roles of women during this period. Ultimately, women existed to two different spheres: as workers and as home-making mothers. For many, these spheres were not compatible with one another. See Linda B. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” Journal of American History 75, 1 (1988), 9-39; Christina Burr, Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth-Century Toronto (Toronto, 1999), 148-152.
126 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 40-41.
women was inferior because a wage discrepancy made it inferior. In this instance, “work” was constructed as a male domain that naturally excluded women:

Q. Is it a rule that women who do go to work at the printing business consider it a temporary occupation; consider their business in life to get married and become the heads of families, while men consider it their life occupation? A. Certainly, it is a life occupation to the men.
Q. How is it with the women? A. Well, it is only a temporary occupation; it helps her get her clothing, and perhaps she is obliged to pay for her board.127

If we look closely at the initial question in the above citation, which describes a series of gendered understandings concerning men and women, and then at the answer that the witness offered for the Commission, we see that Dunlop thought only men could take up printing work as a ‘life occupation.’ When Dunlop does discuss women workers as temporary he does not bring up the issues that the commissioners raised in their questions: such as ‘business in life, getting married or heads of families.’ Dunlop addresses the everyday issues of the industrial woman in terms of costs such as clothes and board. Yet, he also reinforced the notion that women, focused on marriage and the household, were in the industrial workforce only on a temporary basis.128

Notwithstanding the seeming solidity of separate spheres, the Reports of the Commission also exhibit all the signs of an emerging process of gender contestation. As

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127 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 48. It is interesting to note the notion of marriage as it is presented here in comparison to the relation between marriage and the allocation of expertise earlier.

128 This idea was prevalent in organized labour circles as well. For example the Knights of Labor, arguably the most vocal advocates for industrial women’s rights, also foresaw the eventual return of women to the home. Christina Burr notes, “[w]hile the Knights sought to improve the conditions of women in the workplace, they looked forward to a time when women would ‘return’ to their ‘natural’ sphere in the home.” See Burr, Spreading the Light, 150.
the Armstrong Report remarks, “given these conditions, it is not a matter for surprise that [women are] occasionally driven in despair to a life of sin. But it is monstrous to condemn a whole class because of an occasional sinner, as has been far too frequently done in this matter.”\textsuperscript{129} In fact, the report goes on to state that the experience and discipline of work is also indicative of some respectability: “the bare fact that a girl is willing to work hard during a long and tedious day for a very small allowance ought to be conclusive evidence that she is not inclined to sin.”\textsuperscript{130} In this instance, the discipline and hardship of factory production kept the morality of industrial women in line. Yet, a similar argument was used by some factory owners as a justification of corporal punishment to discipline women and children who stepped out of line. Ultimately, the discussion on women’s place in the workforce echoed larger social concerns of sexuality and morality. It also unified seemingly different factions such as social reform movements and organized labour. For some, the morality of working women was premised on the dichotomy of good and bad womanhood. For others, industrialism forced working women into a daily battle with vice. Women had to fend off advances from employers and battle the temptations of sin that came with extreme poverty. In the Commission, male witnesses and the commissioners alike, rather than women themselves, were authorities on women’s chastity, morality and class position.

The published testimony of the Commission exhibits many plays of power and authority. The commissioners’ attitudes and opinions frequently surfaced in their

\textsuperscript{129} GC, RCRLC, Armstrong Report (1889), 90.
\textsuperscript{130} GC, RCRLC, Armstrong Report (1889), 90.
questions. Expertise in the Commission was a combination of many factors such as years of experience, credibility, gender and even marital status. The allocation of expertise mediated whose testimony was “better” than others. If some witnesses were clueless and others insightful, for reasons that had little to do with the Commission, others were seen as “experts,” due solely to how the commission constructed them. Ultimately, expertise was allotted by the commissioners based on a variety of factors sometimes unrelated to the supposed relations of labour and capital. The dialogues that occurred between commissioners and witnesses were, in turn, rife with power plays. Commissioners Freed and Judge Armstrong sometimes redefined the mandate of the Commission according to whom they were speaking and if their political views were ‘acceptable’ as evidence. Similar distinctions were made with respect to who was asked to disclose personal information and who was given the option to answer. It is clear throughout the hearings that the commissioners took the opportunity to make known their own solutions to the issues between labour and capital, suggested by their invocation of government-coordinated arbitration and women’s morality. The commissioners were active participants not only in the investigation of the relations of labour and capital, but in the creation of knowledge on the subject and the solutions that were required to advance ‘the nation.’

Yet, interestingly, the world created by the Commission could not be shielded from unexpected interventions and challenges. Many witnesses came forward to complain about conditions and to catch the ear of the state. Many witnesses complained to the Commission because they thought, somewhat unrealistically, that it could do
something about their problems. John Tapley appeared before the Commission in Saint John. Tapley, a lumber merchant, was simply concerned that a railway company was building a bridge across the St. John River and would block the movement of his logs:

I don’t know how the logs from above Fredericton can be brought down now. I know that we bring down about 20,000,000 from Glasier’s mill, and don’t see how we will get them down now. I only speak about this matter so that you may be able to, if it lies in your power, to make a representation of the case to the Government at Ottawa.\textsuperscript{131}

James A. White appeared before the Commission because of a problem he had had with Ottawa. White was an earthenware manufacturer. He had recently upgraded his factory with new machinery. Now the tariff threatened to undo his good work.

[W]e have also prepared ourselves to manufacture fire-bricks and drain-pipes, and as I thought that this Commission would be the place to bring this matter up, I would state that the Government last year took the duty off imported fire-brick, and consequently the plant and all the machinery we got to go into that manufacture is lying idle in our hands.\textsuperscript{132}

Daniel J. Doherty, a book keeper for a boot and shoe company in St. John, was equally troubled by tariff issues. As he told the Commission:

if this Commission is authorized to take such evidence, I would say that we feel we are treated unfairly by the Government in some matters. A greater part of the machinery used in our business is made in the United States and controlled by patents there; they are not made in Canada, and there is very little prospect of their ever being made in this country. We therefore feel that the machinery we require to use in our business we should be allowed to import at a less rate of duty than we do now.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{131} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 91.
\textsuperscript{132} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 221.
\textsuperscript{133} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 102.
For these and many other witnesses, the Commission was a direct link to the federal government. It could do something about issues, even some far removed from its apparent mandate.

Of course, that the Commission was in no position to do anything about some of the issues that concerned witnesses was seldom brought into the open. Many people thought they were talking to authoritative officials of the state, in the hope that these emissaries might do something about particular problems. This expectation bestowed legitimacy upon the Commission as a vehicle with which to manage the tensions between labour and capital. This dynamic was obvious in the case of Saint George, New Brunswick stonecutter Guy Clinch. Clinch testified that there was no recourse for workers who had been left without back pay by failed companies. The Commission asked if he had approached his local legislature concerning the matter. Clinch replied that he was under the impression that representatives for his county in the Provincial legislature were looking into it.

Q.- Of course, you know that this commission is not appointed by the Local Government, and have no power to act in such matters? A.- Yes.
Q.- Still, we will make a note of what you say? A.- Thank you.134

The only “note” made of the issue was in the Commission’s bound volumes of evidence. The Commission was able to appease social tensions temporarily by addressing people’s concerns and leaving the impression that something could be done about them.

134 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 549.
The complaints that witnesses brought to the attention of the Commission often addressed unfair treatment about a specific situation. As can be expected, many were concerned about the effects new machines were having on their lives. For example, Oliver David Beniot testified that machinery had lowered wages in the boot and shoe trade: “[...] and that is the reason why I came here, before this Commission to say that our wages have been lowered, and not only the wages but the work has decreased, inasmuch as to-day one machine most certainly takes the place, on average, of five or six men.”

The testimony of Herménégilde Morin, a policeman in Quebec, was very short and to the point:

Q.-Have you anything in particular to state to the Commission? A.- I would say that I have been thirty years in the Police force. When I joined we were sworn in as Policemen and we had the fire to attend to during ten years. In winter it was hard; we got our boots full of water sometimes, and then contracted the following trouble: my legs are now weak from having had them in the water, and today when I am advanced in years and suffer from pains in my legs, they do not give me the wages of others.

Q.- Do you do the same duty as the others? A.- I am on duty every day. I am on the Jacques-Cartier market were I was ordered by the Chief. I am on duty every day, and at night I do not go out, by order of the Chief.

Q.- Do you know of any persons in the same position as yourself who have complaints to make? A.- I don’t see many. In consequence of the length of time I have served in the Police, I am pretty well tired, worn out: thirty years service in the Police Force; and because I have been so frequently wet during fires I have contracted a weakness in the legs and am not as active as a young man. It is on account of this that the Chief orders me to be on duty all day, and to remain at home at night.

Apart from a short comment about wages, this is the extent of Morin’s testimony. Based on the first question the Commission asked, it appears that the complaint was the only

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135 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 365.
136 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 853. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 502.
reason why this witness testified. Jean Brisson, a labourer in Quebec, appeared before
the Commission voluntarily with a very specific complaint:

Q.- Will you state why you come before the Commission? A.- I worked, last
summer, for nearly two months, for a company that worked in the Basin, and we
were badly treated there. We worked at a canal. As long as we did not work into
the tide, things went pretty well. We worked ten hours a day, and as soon as we
got to the tide – the tide went out at eleven at night, or in the morning, we had to
work according to it. The tide varies three quarters of an hour a day, and we had
to work two tides to make a day, whilst in other places it is one tide for one day;
and we were badly treated, with that; we had only $1 a day, and we had to work
in mud up to our knees.
Q.- Was that job done by a contractor? A.- By a government contractor.¹³⁷

After a few questions about the tide and working hours, Brisson’s testimony ended. It
would seem that the Commission had merely provided these workers with a chance to
air specific grievances.

Sometimes commissioners admitted they could do nothing to address such
specific issues. William Boulé, a tanner, testified before the Commission in Quebec:

Q.- What have you to state to this Commission? A.- I find it very queer
that a boss comes and hires us for a year, and then in winter, in the time
of greatest misery, turns us off, and, moreover, takes fifty cents from us
without warning. They make us work, and take fifty cents at a time from
us.
Q.- But this Commission can do nothing for you. A.- I want to speak of
the misery they cause us.¹³⁸

The chair’s admission that the Commission could do nothing about the problems Boulé
encountered working in Quebec did not deter him. His testimony continued to describe
poor working conditions, occupational hazards and extraordinarily hard work. For

¹³⁷ GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1070.
¹³⁸ GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 863. This witness’s testimony was given in French and
translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 503-504.
Napoleon Ruel, a joiner in Quebec, the Commission asked if he had done anything to improve his condition individually:

Q.- The gentleman asks you if you have ever tried to get a better place?
A.- When we work in a shanty the joiners have to stay there until the work is finished, we cannot stop to look for work elsewhere.
Q.- Did the carpenters themselves complain to the masters to try and improve matters?
A.- It is of no use for when the masters have an important work on hand it has got to be finished as quickly as possible.
Q.- How do you think the Commission can improve your position, can assist you, if you yourselves make no complaint? How do you think he can assist you?
A.- I have no means to suggest. I come here simply to give my evidence.
Q.- Tell us how we can assist you?
A.- I would ask this Commission to regulate properly the hours of work.

By the Chairman:
The Commission cannot do that.139

It appears that Ruel was under the impression he was doing something about excessive hours by appearing before the Commission.

The Commission’s ambiguous status — seemingly involved in and removed from the situation of witnesses — gave rise to rare moments of cynicism, in which the egalitarian pretensions of liberal utopianism were no longer sustainable. When Zotique Gauthier appeared before the Commission in St. Hyacinthe, he was asked the routine questions about where and for whom he worked, about the sanitary conditions of factories in the area and fines for bad work. Then, as though tired of these repetitious questions, commissioner Boivin asked: “Have you any suggestion to make of this Commission about matters concerning yourself? Any suggestion by which you would

139 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1126. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 505.
be enabled to earn money without working, something in that way?  

Boivin was making a statement about this witnesses in his sarcasm. As mentioned in earlier chapters, historians consider Boivin to typify the ‘self-made man.’ He had apprenticed as a shoemaker, acquired knowledge of the machinery of modern shoemaking in the United States and eventually opened his own successful shoe making business near Montreal. His treatment of Gauthier thinly cloaks his opinion that the complaints of this and other witnesses fell into the domain of their own ‘private’ business. Real individuals would not be belabouring such issues with the Commission.

Witnesses sought the ear and the approval of the state, in the hope that it might help, even if only in a highly abstract way, to address some pressing issues. Even though the Commission admitted it could do nothing to help, witnesses continued to disclose their problems, an act that legitimized not only the Commission’s authority on the relations of labour and capital, but its value as a means of manufacturing consent. The Labour Commission provided a space for the many views and opinions that witness brought before it. However, the commissioners were also active agents in imposing respectable and moral order upon the evidence.

In Making Native Space, Cole Harris addresses the McKenna-McBride commission assembled to address Native land claims in British Columbia in the early twentieth century. His discussion suggests many parallels with my treatment of the Labour

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140 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1316. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 506-507.
Commission. Harris is particularly interested by the interactions of First Nations witnesses with the commissioners. He describes the commission as a “theatre of power:”

Five Commissioners in dark suits behind a table, their commission, signed by the governor general and bearing his seal, in front of them; stenographer, translator, and witness solemnly sworn in; the commission and the commissioners oath read by the secretary and then translated by the interpreter. Some Native people, especially in the north where they had seen nothing comparable, appear from the transcripts to be terrified by the display.\footnote{Cole Harris, \textit{Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia} (Vancouver, 2002), 231.}

Furthermore, Harris notes, the commissioners were active participants in manufacturing an environment that privileged facts and objective methodology in spite of the understandings Native people had to offer:

\[\text{[t]he commissioners were participating in a bureaucratized, early twentieth-century form of venerable colonial strategy, and automatically and quite unconsciously were privileging “facts,” maps, and their sense of “scientific analysis” over more local and densely textured modes of understanding. Moreover, their assigned task required such abstract methods.} \footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 233.}\]

Harris concludes that the commission’s methods and procedures were a “discourse in the Foucaultian sense (a body of related ideas, assumptions, and practices) ….” However, as Harris points out, many of the native people who appeared before the commission “returned a subtle, if relatively powerless, theatre of their own. Eloquence was often their repertoire, so too was a good deal of irony, sarcasm, and flattery.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 231.} For Harris, the evidence given before the McKenna-McBride commission reflects the
confrontation of knowledge and power, a confrontation that would shape the landscape of British Columbia. Yet, how native understandings were negotiated and balanced with state objectives to achieve consent to oppressive conditions is key to understanding the development of native/government relations as well as the relations of labour and capital.

Like the McKenna-McBride commission, the earlier Labour Commission also suggests the usefulness of Foucault’s concept of ‘governmentality,’ the rationality that underpins the relations between a governor and a subject. Understanding this rationality, for Foucault, means focusing on the relation between knowledge and power. From the perspective of the Labour Commission, accurate knowledge about labour and capital was intimately linked to a host of social attributes. In this loop, to be respectable made it possible to have one’s ‘capacity to judge’ validated in the public sphere. Conversely, the marginalization or belittlement of one’s opinion often confirmed one’s prior and lower status in the social order. Middle-class gender, class and racial ideals structured the ‘factual’ testimony left behind by the Commission. To a surprising extent, a common sociology runs through the implied position of both the ‘capital’ and ‘labour’ factions. Some witnesses were allowed to expand upon certain subjects. Others were preemptively cut short because they did not stick to ‘the facts.’ Witnesses who disrupted the easy flow of liberal assumptions about social order were shut down.

The Commission as a public sphere had many limitations and functioned within a set of social understandings — such as sexual morality, class respectability and even patriotic support for the National Policy — that most witnesses took for granted. The
power that many people bestowed upon the Commission is reflected in the sheer number of witnesses who complained to it. Even though it was occasionally stated outright that the Commission could do nothing for complainants, witness after witness brought their concerns to it and, in the process, tacitly consented to a particular political and economic order. This economic and political order was not necessarily “outside” the Commission. In fact it was reinforced by it.
Chapter Six

The Public Sphere, the ‘Naturalization’ of Labour and Capital, and the Political Theory of Individual Rights

A.-It is perhaps a mistake to narrow the acceptation of the word workingmen to those who labor with their hands. It should be extended so as to cover every form of useful work, those who labor by the brain as well as those who labor physically. Take my department, journalism: surely a man who gathers intelligence or writes editorials is as truly a laborer as the man who sets the type. One gets a salary and the other wages, but I do not see much difference; I never found one dollar of salary to go further than one dollar of wages.

Q.-We like to be specific and know what words mean and in what sense we use them. A.- True.¹

Commissioner Freed’s injunction — to “be specific and know what words mean and in what sense we use them” — is not always easily followed in looking at the Commission’s treatment of such core relationships as labour and capital, worker and owner, employee and employer. These relations were shifting amidst the hearings of the Commission. There were fundamental changes occurring in master-apprentice relations. Families were moving to urban centers to work in factories. ‘Skills’ were devalued by the introduction of the machine. In the evidence of the Commission, traditions and assumptions about workplace relations typical of the period of handicrafts persisted in the language used to describe labour and capital.

At the same time, the language of class was changing. Not only were many workplaces undergoing technological revolutions in many cases, but the middle class had also emerged as a powerful force. The ‘contract’ between master and apprentice was

¹ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 99-100.
changing. In the world described by the Commission, foremen/managers/superintendents were hiring workers to operate machines, disciplining them into doing the same activity over and over again, and mass producing articles such as shoes and cloth. In another, parallel world, also described by the Commission, masters and men were bound together by shared notions of respectability, expertise and morality. The Commission was an ‘open’ forum for discussions between labour and capital. It could impose a kind of discursive order upon such perplexing issues as government involvement in industrial relations, workers’ rights and freedoms, and technical education. The Commission’s emphasis on middling categories of foremen and managers in the relation of labour and capital is indicative of how the line(s) between these sociological categories were changing. Were foremen and supervisors ‘labour’ or ‘capital’ — or something else?

The Commission’s portrait of labour relations consisted of interviewing citizens about the ‘key issues’ that stemmed from rapidly changing productive relations. It also worked, collectively, to ‘naturalize’ certain contingent and contestable cultural understandings.² Doing so, as we have seen, required intricate plays of power and authority. Notions of morality, authority, expertise, and respectability were all involved in the exchanges between commissioners and witnesses. Much of the work of the Commission was involved with the subtle and pervasive use of metaphors and

² By ‘naturalized’ I am referring to Norman Fairclough’s theory concerning how regularized uses of language can perpetuate ideological and political meanings. Fairclough notes that certain terms inherently carry ideological assumptions that appear ‘natural’ or unnoticed and unquestioned. Fairclough’s method of discourse analysis is intended to ‘denaturalize’ ideological understandings that are embedded or hidden in language. See Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, 1992), 64.
pronouns. Foremen used pronouns such as “I,” “we” and “them” to assume or deflect responsibility for the conditions in their respective workplaces. This absence of workplace accountability by some foremen and managers was in stark contrast with the concerns for respectability and morality of workingmen and women by others. On a similar note, many ‘employers’ envisioned an intimate relationship with their employees and were in the business of making ‘good workers.’ The commissioners and witnesses alike created knowledge about the relations of production (with all their cultural, ideological and class implications) through their discussion of labour and capital. The testimony they produced together suggests an inner coherence in these discussions of labour and capital that centres around liberalism generally and rights specifically. Thus, in the effort to account for this debate, I have chosen to highlight the language of these ‘social’ debates using two methodologies: attention to key words and the identification of binaries. Through this methodology, this chapter shall address the various ways in which power positions were articulated between ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ and how these articulations privileged a set of values and beliefs that were central to middle-class, and state, formation.

One of the central ‘social understandings’ in the Commission was the frequent reference to a broad notion of liberalism and “rights.” Similar to morality, respectability and expertise, rights also entail tacit power relationships based on legislative initiatives and existing laws, political traditions as well as ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions. Furthermore, as mentioned in previous chapters, Canada’s political culture is steeped in a broad tradition of liberalism of which the individual (and her rights) is central. Ian
McKay argues for an approach to Canadian history that posits liberalism as a unifying theme wherein Canada – politically, economically and culturally – is a ‘liberal order.’ Referring to Canada as a continuing liberal project, McKay claims that the Dominion “can be defined as an attempt to plant and nurture ... the philosophical assumptions, and the related political and economic practices, of a liberal order.” McKay views Canada as a project “becomes less a self evident and obvious unit, and a more arrestingly contradictory, complicated, and yet coherent process of liberal rule.” However, it should be remembered that the term liberalism can be amorphous, suffering from overabundance and poverty; as Fernande Roy remarks, “it is too easily confounded with capitalism on the one hand and democracy on the other.” Liberalism undoubtedly encompasses a wide range of philosophical principles. However, as McKay argues, at the centre of the concept is the individual: “Liberalism begins when one accords a prior ontological and epistemological status to ‘the individual’ – the human being who is proprietor of him- or herself, and whose freedom should be limited only by voluntary obligations to others or to God, and by the rules necessary to obtain the equal freedom of other individuals.”

The state, in this reading “lacks any finality on its own as [it is] the individual, whose rights are predicated on self-possession and property, whose purposes, knowledges, and

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
practices truly exist, and whose interests are obvious." Roy suggests that liberalism is best grasped as an ideology performing both a cognitive and a mobilizing function, which resolves antinomies by ranking three core elements, liberty, equality and property:

‘Liberty,’ which gives its name to the entire ideology (and from a basic affirmation of an individual’s ‘natural right’ to liberty ...); ‘Equality,’ which is always subordinated to the first principal of individualism, and interpreted in ways that render ‘commonsensical’ the particular inequalities stemming from the exercise of the individual’s liberty; ‘Property’ – more exactly, the individual’s right to hold property – which is in a sense even more ‘fundamental’ than ‘liberty,’ for if one’s property in oneself is the precondition of one’s liberty in the first place, the pursuit of property requires the further development of those characteristics that define the free standing individual. In its classical nineteenth-century form, liberalism entailed a hierarchy of principals, with formal equality at the bottom and property at the top.

However, as McKay clarifies, in the ideology of liberalism, the individual “at its conceptual nucleus [is] not to be confused with actual living beings. Rather ‘the individual’ is an abstract principle of the entity each one of them might, if purified and rationalized, aspire to become. In the classical liberal model, ... a true individual was he who was self-possessed – whose body and soul was his alone ....” Thus, there is a rather close relationship between the individual and right in a liberal ethos.

The relationship between individual rights and the collective ‘good’ has engaged liberal theorists for centuries. The Anglo-American liberal tradition since the mid-seventeenth century is the subject of Ian Shapiro’s work, The Evolution of Rights in Liberal

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7 Ibid., 624.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 625.
Theory. Shapiro’s account of the individual in liberal philosophy particularly addresses the evolution of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ freedoms. For Hobbes and Locke, and countless other theorists who followed them, liberal debate has centered on the extent of the individual’s rights. ‘Negative’ liberalism, for example, or “the notion of private-law rights of exclusive dominion having force against the state first achieved currency with Locke and the Whigs … in the early 1680s. This view of man’s negative freedom, of a private sphere surrounding him that cannot be entered (first by other individuals and eventually the state) without his consent, became the standard view of freedom in the liberal tradition ….”

On the other hand, ‘positive’ liberalism, influential in the fin de siècle, argued for a pluralist account of the collective ‘good’ and for a more all-inclusive, interventionist state. Both Hobbes and Locke both acknowledged, amidst the development of market relationships, the necessity of some such counterbalance: “Hobbes recognized, somewhat equivocally, the inevitability of market relationships in large areas of social life, and although Locke openly endorsed such relationships, both believed they would have to be actively regulated, and in some critical areas even created, by the state.” Shapiro concludes that the evolution of individual rights, in its various incarnations, is closely tied to capitalist development:

[T]he principal reasons for the tenacity of the liberal conception of individual rights, problems and all, are ideological: its Cartesian view of the subject of rights, its negative libertarian view of the substance of rights, its view of individual consent as the legitimate basis for rights, and its essentially pluralist and utilitarian conception of the purposes of

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11 *Ibid.*, 282
rights have, in their various formulations, combined to express a view of politics that is required by and legitimates capitalist market practices.\textsuperscript{12}

Herbert Spencer was, in the 1880s, a pervasively influential theorist whose writings on private property can be closely aligned with the twentieth-century notion of ‘negative freedoms.’ There is tension within Spencer’s thought between his defense of the inherent right of individual ownership, and his recommendation of various forms of social control to protect the social organism from the misuse of property by private owners. Spencer argued that the right to private property was inherent and inalienable and, despite claims that communal permission mediated land ownership, he also believed that ‘social recognition’ was not a condition of land ownership. Yet, this individualistic defense of the rights of private ownership contrasted with his view that private property was conditional upon social recognition and was qualified by considerations of social welfare. In discussing property rights Spencer evoked Locke’s ‘labour-mixing’ criterion: by mixing his labour with property a man may have gained a greater right to that property than any other single person, but this does not necessarily outweigh ‘the pre-existing rights of all other men put together.’\textsuperscript{13} When an individual obtained the agreement of society to use a given plot of land, he also established a right to that land: “his claim to them is in this case valid, because he obtained the consent of society before so expending his

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 302-303.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 49-50.
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labour. Thus, when considering an individual’s right to land, the acceptance of
society becomes central, thereby making rights conditional on consent:

[i]f we decide that the claims of individual ownership must give way, then we imply that the right of the nation at large to the soil is supreme – that the right of private possession only exists by general consent – that general consent being withdrawn it ceases – or, in other words, that it is no right at all. … if a right so elementary as that of property involves social recognition, it is difficult to see how rights can in their nature be independent of social recognition.15

From this tension, Spencer eventually argued for the state’s involvement in land ownership. His concept of the ‘nationalization’ of land — “all users of the land would become tenants of the state, and would be required to fulfill the conditions laid down by the government to ensure that the public interest was served” — had a radical edge in North American ears.16 The Commissioners who occasionally expressed their irritation with Georgeite economics were responding to the North American extension and elaboration of this Spencerian conception of the land question.

The discussion of individual rights was not only the domain of liberal theorists. Indeed, late-Victorian North America witnessed many public debates centered on the relationship between the individual and rights. In the United States, the courts were one pivotal arena in which this debate occurred. For example, the Lockner v. New York case concerned a rather broad and extensive questioning of that political culture by addressing “the place of liberty, equality, and the redistribution of wealth in the larger

15 Ibid, 50.
16 Ibid, 51. It is entirely possible North Americans misinterpreted Spencer, who may have been primarily aiming his polemic at the large landed estates in Britain.
American constitutional order.” R.B.C. Risk and R. P. Vipond argue that the concept of individual rights in the United States received far more specialized attention than in Britain or Canada. In Canada, on the other hand, in legislative debates, such rights were often trumped by ‘social’ or ‘collective’ concerns. Risk and Vipond remark,

> [I]ndividual and political liberties were at once mutually reinforcing and mutually limiting. It followed that legislatures, not courts, were the appropriate bodies to determine the limits on rights, and at the same time to protect individual liberty …. [I]ndividual rights did not play as large a role in defining public issues or the nation; second, the courts played a correspondingly lesser role.18

In Canada, Risk and Vipond argue, there was a tension between the individual and ‘the social’ concerning rights. Citing the Manitoba Schools Question and the North West Language debate, Risk and Vipond claim that many were calling on provincial legislatures to limit rights: “individual rights were relatively unimportant in posing and resolving public issues and in defining the nature and values of the young nation.”19 Edward Blake, when leader of the Liberal party of Canada, promoted a similar position in the House of Commons in 1882 when he claimed: “I am a friend to the preservation of the rights of property ... but I believe in the subordination of those rights to the public

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17 R.C.B. Risk and R.C. Vipond, “Rights Talk in the Late Nineteenth Century: ‘the Good Sense and Right feeling of the People’,” in R.C.B. Risk (ed.) History of Canadian Legal Thought (Toronto, 2000), 95. Karen Orren argues that the courts were integral to the development of labor relations in the United States, enacting several key liberal principals such as liberty and freedom. See Karen Orren, Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States (New York, 1991), 91-117.

18 Risk and Vipond, “Rights Talk in the Late Nineteenth Century,” 95-96

19 Ibid., 118
good.” \(^{20}\) In the Labour Commission, one frequently encountered arguments for the state to be much more involved in the management of labour/capital relations.

I earlier made the suggestion that the Commission was “public sphere:” an imagined space or a virtual community “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society within the state.” \(^{21}\) Ultimately, the Canadian state’s shift from largely small, insular and unpublicized commissions on industrialization to the Labour Commission coincided with a larger shift to a liberal public sphere. There was a growing tension in the ‘social’ relations of labour and capital that had come to a head in 1886 and had to be addressed by the Prime Minister. Habermas’s concept of a public sphere works nicely as a means to interpret the testimony of the Labour Commission and understand this transformation. Simply put, the state was responsible for providing the means through which various social elements could negotiate the unfamiliar territory of ‘industrialized society’ and push toward a specific end. Jeffrey McNairn’s attention to the development or ‘transformation’ of the public sphere makes a similar point and is worth quoting at length for the sake of clarity:

Indeed the concept of the public sphere ‘cannot be applied to the actual conditions of an industrially advanced mass democracy organized in the form of the social welfare state.’ To sketch Habermas’s argument: the public expanded to include social classes that he assumes had incompatible interests that generated selfish demands in welfare policy and taxation. The state, forced to regulate items once left to the private market, became the battleground for competing interest groups in a zero-

\(^{20}\) GC, House of Commons, *Debates*, April 14, 1882.

sum game. State decisions appeared to reflect the balance of power among classes preoccupied by their own material benefit rather than rational deliberation among citizens seeking the common good.\textsuperscript{22}

In this respect, the Labour Commission was a forum for discussions on the relation of labour and capital, a forum that became a field of competition among class-based interests that the state could manage. In other words, the Labour Commission was a forum for social contestation and the negotiation of power relations. In this forum, not only were broad sociological categories created for the sake of the investigation, but language was central to the creation and maintenance of class-based social relations.\textsuperscript{23}

Often, historians who use the public sphere as a theoretical reference to interpret power relations do not address Habermas’s extensive work on how language is central to supporting social power structures.\textsuperscript{24} Habermas, however, is clear on this relation. He argues that “[t]he public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (ie. opinions expressing affirmative of negative attitudes) … it is tailored to the general comprehensibility of everyday communicative practice [or] specialized systems of action and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, “[t]hese [specialized] systems fall into one of two categories. Systems like religion, education and the family

\textsuperscript{22} Jeffrey McNairn, \textit{The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854} (Toronto, 2000), 433.

\textsuperscript{23} For example, in his largely unnoticed work \textit{Legitimation Crisis}, Habermas addressed the ways in which a particular social vision becomes hegemonic. Harold Mah’s analysis of the historians’ use of Habermas focuses with particular intensity upon this theme. Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere.: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians,” \textit{Journal of Modern History} 72 (2000)), 153-182.

\textsuperscript{24} An obvious exception to this is Harold Mah’s critique on “the Habermas of historians.” See Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere.”

\textsuperscript{25} Jurgen Habermas, \textit{Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy} (Cambridge, 1998), 360.
become associated with ... cultural reproduction, social integration, or socialization. Systems like science, morality, and art take up different validity aspects of everyday communicative action (truth, rightness, or veracity).”

This mention of “communicative action, validity, truth, rightness and veracity” is also a reference to his theories on language. In the *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas expresses how these concepts are central to the creation of power structures within debate (such as those that occur in the public sphere). McNairn also acknowledges the place of language in the public sphere: “[r]ather than highly abstract coherent paradigms, traditions, or languages, what emerges is contemporaries’ ability to choose vocabularies and arguments from a broad and rich repertoire. Participants shifted, manipulated, and merged their choices to fashion the most effective argument possible.” For Habermas, exchanges in the public sphere came to focus on the formation of reasoned, expert-generated ‘public opinion.’ This was “weighted by the affirmative versus negative responses they receive” and was contingent on “the resonance and indeed the approval of a lay public whose composition is egalitarian.” Such debates helped frame people’s experiences. As McNairn points out, “debates about the nature and power of public opinion were not only matters of political rhetoric; they were also part of people’s experience of concrete social, economic and cultural change.”

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The processes of opinion-formation, especially when they have to do with political questions, certainly cannot be separated from the transformation of the participants’ preferences and attitudes, but they can be separated from putting these dispositions into action. To this extent, the communication structures of the public sphere relieve the public of the burden of decision making, the postponed decisions are reserved for the institutionalized political process.\textsuperscript{31}

In sum, the relation between the state and the bourgeoisie is a particular feature of the public sphere: reasoned discussions in the public sphere are dominated by bourgeois individuals and organizations.

Habermas’s theories of language have also elicited criticism of the public sphere as a means of writing history. For some historians, his concept of language and the public sphere does not account for cultural considerations. As John L. Brooks remarks, “[a]s a philosopher ... Habermas is interested in ideal conditions, not messy realities. He ... has little to say ... about the complexities of culture, of what I shall call the domain of persuasion, which cultural historians are showing to be equally fundamental in building consent.”\textsuperscript{32} Yet, Brooke continues, Habermas implicitly leaves room for such considerations. His latest theories bridge new and old historiographical traditions.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Habermas, \textit{Between Facts and Norms}, 360

\textsuperscript{32} John L. Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic,” in J. Pasley, A. Robertson and D. Waldstreicher, \textit{Beyond the Founders} (Chapel Hill, 2004), 208. Brooke claims that cultural historians, literary theorists and historicists have viewed the public sphere as a ‘hard’ socially real space from which to visualize the creation and consumption of cultural forms and literary texts. In essence, “they reject Habermas’s original and ongoing insistence that the public sphere should be a site of rational discourse and deliberation, while ignoring his implied understanding that things are not always so neat and tidy.” Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere,” 210.

\textsuperscript{33} Brooke claims, “... the older political history would posit the enactment of statute and constitutional law as the ultimate manifestation of power; the newest cultural-political history
attention to consent and legitimacy, deliberation and public opinion tacitly allows for cultural understandings in the free flow of deliberation within the public sphere:

Suitably dissected, qualified, stretched, and amplified, his framework allows us to begin to visualize in a single interpretative field the requirement and variants of consent, the domains of the state, public sphere, and civil society, and the overlapping agencies of deliberation, persuasion, and force, which I propose encompass [in] a vast field of intersection between the old and the new histories, as they bear on the problem of power.34

Furthermore, in Habermas’s latter works, the market economy is integral to different public spheres. In the public sphere of civil society, competing voices, indeed publics, contest with one another. This stage in the political process is followed by a more formal public sphere centered around lawmaking, administration and justice and in which deliberation is bound by constitutions, statute law and legislative rules.35 Modern governments and citizens alike are tied to processes of law-making based on the consent of people: “modern governments and the policies they enact are subject to the consent of the people; they are to be open to inspection and criticism and routinely renewed in elections. Citizens engage in that inspection, criticism, and renewal, and their participation in these processes of deliberation conveys their grant of express consent to that government. To be legitimate, this grant of consent must be uncoerced by violence or intimidation, and protected by constitutional procedure.”36

would posit subtle but profound shifts in cultural meaning as fundamentally determinative.” Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere,” 208.

34 Ibid., 208-9.
36 Ibid, 211.
Unfortunately, however, Habermas and many other theorists do not provide a recognizable methodology. Historians interested in exploring language for insights into ‘public opinion’ are obliged to manufacture their own. For example, in The Capacity to Judge, McNairn used the public sphere to address the debate over constitutional monarchy and the formation of Upper Canadian political order by examining the views of voluntary organizations and the periodical press. McNairn’s attention to the contours of this debate provides a map of the issues that were at stake and suggests a related methodology for my purposes.

This work will also identify the contours of the debate between capital and labour, a rather focused debate that occurred as a royal commission. In an effort to understand this debate, I have chosen to discuss particular binaries — employee/employer, normal/pathological, respectable/disrespectable, individual/state, equality/inequality, right/wrong — to map out the contours of the morality and respectability of an emerging middle class.

In addition to the acknowledgement and discussion of binaries, I have also chosen key words as a means to identify ‘social’ understandings. This method of discourse analysis is prominent amongst social theorists. In sum, the recognition of key words allows investigators not only to grasp how meanings change over time, but also

37 Brooke specifically identifies commissions in his attention to the formal public sphere (which follows the deliberative public sphere of civil society) that is “closely regulated by constitutions and rules, operating inside government’s themselves, in legislature, committees, and commissions, in courts and bureaucracies.” Brooke, “Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere,” 210.

to develop an understanding of the links between language and power. Key to this process is the ways in which social understandings become naturalized and taken for granted. As the last chapter argued, the Commission is full of references to power relationships between employed and employer. Understanding how these power positions were naturalized helps us comprehend the underlying power relations at work in the 1880s.39

Throughout the Commission, employers and employees, and productive relationships in general, were often described in terms of ownership, using vertical metaphors and in reference to the body. Indeed, the body was by far the most obvious way of articulating employee and employer relationships. It must be acknowledged that this language did not afford a neutral, ‘accurate’ description of labour relations. Rather, it provided an easily understood reference that tacitly bestowed a power position upon certain individuals. Why would an employer be considered “above” an employee? Why would an employee be considered a “hand” of an employer? These references are constant throughout the testimony by witnesses and commissioners alike. The Commission endorsed these powerful metaphors by recording and thereby reinforcing this language in such a way as to make these hierarchies appear ‘natural.’

**Employer & Employee**

For a royal commission on the relations of labour and capital, the identification of who was an employer and who was an employee was far from straightforward. As

39 In Habermas’s terms, these positions were achieved in relation to how social structures were argued and whether they were truthful, legitimized and valid. This is addressed specifically in Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol. 1 and 2 (Boston, 1984).
we have seen, commissioners treated witnesses differently according to tacit notions of respectability and morality. Indeed, it appears that the commissioners manufactured witnesses in the ‘employer/employee’ frame for the sake of the investigation, as a way of privileging a ‘middling’ category in the relations of labour and capital. As detailed in earlier chapters, ‘middling’ witnesses frequently testified in the Commission. They had achieved a certain status — as managers, bookkeepers and even as overseers — which bestowed upon them specific roles in the relations of labour and capital. Yet, they were dually classified as employees and employers. As the Commission worked with the categories of capital and labour, it necessarily also wrestled with these complex ‘middling’ positions.

The intricacies of the language of employee/employer were apparent in the use of pronouns, which subtly hinted at broader social understandings. Pronouns both suggested where a given witness located him or herself in the workplace and referred to broader notions of morality and respectability. Simply put, witnesses either took personal responsibility for workplace conditions in their shops – for instance, child labour or unsanitary conditions – or they did not. For example, W.E. Cheswell appeared before the Commission in New Brunswick and described himself as an overseer in the Marysville Cotton Mill. In the questions posed to Cheswell, the commissioners use pronouns that suggest he was an employer: “[h]ow many women have you employed in that department?; [d]o you employ the help in your room?; [h]ave you many that make
In Cheswell’s answers, this ownership claim was reciprocated: “I have not any girls at present as young as fourteen.” Then, at other times, Cheswell used the word “we” to describe this relation: “we have not any hands in the mill as young as twelve years of age.” To use this example as a representation of many others, the lines of employer and employee were contingent on the specific subject matter in the questions the commissioners asked and their social implications. Cheswell assumed personal responsibility for not employing girls under fourteen, but used “we” when denying the employment of girls under twelve. In comparison, George Groat appeared before the Commission a day after Cheswell. His testimony starts with questions concerning his specific tasks, his experience and the pay of machinists in Chatham. Not long before the interview was over, Commissioner Armstrong asked if Groat was a “foreman of the place where you work in? A.- Yes. Q.- Have you got men to work under you? A.- Yes.” Yet, in spite of his position, Groat’s testimony lasted only a brief time. It included no suggestion that he felt himself responsible for or ‘owned’ the problems of the men ‘under’ him. For some reason, the commissioners did not hold him accountable as they had Cheswell a day earlier. Similarly, John Hearn, who testified the same day, disclosed that he was a foreman in his shop in his first answer. None of the pronouns conventionally used to suggest a witness’ responsibility for workplace problems were present in the commissioners’ questions. In fact, his interview went from his being a foreman to how consistent his employment was throughout the year, a question often

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40 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 453-4.
41 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 453-4.
42 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 453-4.
43 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 391.
reserved for seasonal workers. Thus, not all foremen were equal in the world of the Commission. Based on how their positions were discussed before the Commission, some foremen were constructed as employers and others were simply workers. More importantly, these key words suggest a more complex, underlying association between morality, respectability and expertise.

Notions of expertise and respectability were frequently and particularly associated with ‘middling’ witnesses such as (some) foremen and white collar workers. For example, Daniel Doherty was a book-keeper for J.T. Hurley, Boots and Shoes in Saint John. Commissioner Walsh asked Hurley “[w]hat number of hands do you employ in that factory,” suggesting that, even though Doherty was an employee, he employed workers because of the respectability associated with his position. Similarly, Joshua Peters, a manager of a foundry in Moncton, was asked by Heakes if he had “any labour troubles with your men?” and “Are your men contented?” John Walmsley, an overseer in a cotton mill in New Brunswick, was asked “how many women he employed in the weaving room?” Some foremen were employers and others simply employees; once this determination was made, witnesses were often subjected to different treatment before the Commission. In some instances, the personality of the witness determined whether they were an employee or employer. For example, Noel Boucher appeared

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44 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 100.  
45 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 306.  
46 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 322.  
47 As mentioned in previous chapters, the concepts of ‘employer’ and ‘employee’ operated at a micro level, to evoke a relationship in which one party employed another to carry out a certain task. Labour and capital were broader categories, with an undertone of potential conflict between them.
before the Commission and was asked his position, to which he replied “foreman.” Yet he was then asked questions which were more directed at employees: how much did he make, how long he worked in a day, and who he had to answer to on the issue of shift work? When issues such as fining, discharge or working hours came up, Boucher continually referred to the “rules” of his factory. He implied that he was not responsible for these rules and was subject to the same codes of conduct as the other employees.\(^{48}\)

A comparison of Boucher’s experience before the Commission to other foremen suggests that many factors went into the symbolic construction of labour and capital. George Ferguson, who appeared before the Commission in Quebec, began his testimony with a question about how long he had been employed with Messrs. Botterel and Co.. Soon afterwards, however, the questions he was asked assumed a different tone. Ferguson was now implicitly responsible for the conditions of the factory: “[h]ave you many people working in your factory?; [w]hat is the sanitary condition of your factory?”\(^{49}\) In some ways, Ferguson was a representative of his company who appeared before the Commission and had to answer for that company’s conduct. This notion of responsibility was overtly clear in the testimony of Francois Drouin. Drouin’s testimony began by his answering why his employees appeared before the Commission at a different time from that stipulated by the subpoena. Because of complaints from the previous witness about his shop, Drouin was forced to answer for all the alleged problems in his workplace: whether the women could sit down while working, the

\(^{48}\) GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 1287. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 508-509.  

\(^{49}\) GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 965.
wages of women, the cleanliness of the factory, separate water-closets, hours, establishing fault for broken machinery and whether the engineer was certified.\textsuperscript{50} Many foremen were asked the particulars of the business where they were employed. For example, Joseph Côté, a foreman at a boot and shoe factory in St. Hyacinthe, was asked whether the company he worked for exported their goods and for particulars on the sale of goods in Ontario. Not all foremen were asked these kinds of questions. Some factors related to respectability and responsibility affected their treatment before the Commission.\textsuperscript{51}

Gender also had an impact on how forepersons were perceived. Again, within days of the aforementioned testimony in Quebec, several women who were fore(wo)men came before the Commission. Miss Virginie Léonard was five witnesses before Joseph Côté. However, her testimony reads very similarly to the workers who appeared before her: where do you work, do you work by the day or the job and what is your wage? Eventually it was disclosed that she was in a position of some authority: “Q.- Do they ever impose fines in your department? A.- No, sir. Q.- Are you a forewoman in your department? A.- Yes, sir.”\textsuperscript{52} Three questions later, including one inquiring whether she was fined when she was late, her interview was over. She was asked none of the questions posed to the other male foremen: none on the particulars of the business of the company she worked for, no questions on any misconduct in her

\textsuperscript{50} GC, RCRLC, Québec Evidence (1889), 972. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 510-511.

\textsuperscript{51} For example, it would insightful to see how body language, dress and department related to perceived status and expertise.

\textsuperscript{52} GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1311-2. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 512-513.
department, and no questions concerning whether the company she worked for exported goods to other provinces. There were also no questions about foul language or water-closets. Miss Rose Dechenes appeared before the Commission in Hull where she disclosed that she was a forewoman in a match factory. She was asked how long she had worked at that factory, the earnings of young workers and ventilation. When Dechenes disclosed that a young boy of nine would come to work and help his older sister in the packing department, she was asked: “[d]id the foreman, who is above you, not make any objection when that child entered the factory?” Unlike the foremen discussed, the commissioners did not hold Dechenes responsible for the children working in her department. She was not subject to the same grueling questions.

The conditions for a witness being an employer or an employee were not determined solely by the commissioners. At times some witnesses would leave no room for error in the subject. For example, Isadore Parent appeared before the Commission in Quebec. His testimony began with: “Q.- Are you in business, and do you employ others? A.- I employ other men. Q.- How many men are in your employment? A.- Ten, just now.” Alexander Bissett’s questioning began with his stating his position: “You are a moulder I believe? A.- Well, I superintend moulding.” His testimony reads like that of an employer in that he was asked about the business and employment practices in his workplace. He continually qualified his answers with “we”: “[w]e pay higher wages

53 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1350. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 514-515.
54 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 938. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 516.
55 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 831.
than that; [w]e pay double time, or time and a half; [w]e had a couple of strikes.”  

A similar qualification exists in Jason F. Scriver’s testimony: “Q.- Do you employ many hands? A.- We do.”  

Compare this with E.C. Pelton’s testimony in Amherst, Nova Scotia. Pelton was described as an employee alongside his name in the beginning of his testimony. His first question asks, “What particular position do you hold?

A.- I have charge of all departments in the shop.
Q.- How long have you been in their employ? A.- 10 years.
Q.- Have you ever had any business troubles with your employers? A.- Nothing of any extent.

There was an obvious difference in how the Commission addressed Pelton in comparison to their treatment of Parent and Bissett. Questions concerning wages and “business troubles with your employers,” were asked of some foremen, and not of others.

The relations between employer and employee, with respect to foremen, managers and the like, also entailed more complex social attitudes and allegiances. The discrepancy between skilled and unskilled workers was a particular feature of Arthur Lessel’s testimony. Lessel was a Halifax carpenter who, like many of the leaders of the union movement in late-19th-century Halifax, was both a self-employed artisan with a small carpentry shop and a worker. Lessel’s efforts at organizing skilled carpenters

56 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 831-834.
57 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 567.
58 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 333.
59 See Ian McKay’s portrait of Arthur Lessel for a detailed account of his work in Halifax. See Ian McKay, “Arthur C. Lessel,” in Ramsay Cook and Jean Hamelin (eds.), DCB Vol. XII (Toronto,
sought to strengthen the position of the Halifax carpenters by improving their organization and by excluding from the union those who did not measure up to the standards of the craft: “[w]e suffer here most terribly from unskilled labor, especially during the busy season; this unskilled labor has now crept in and destroyed the trade.”60 Lessel was both an employer and an employee who was instrumental in organizing Halifax carpenters; he founded the Local 83 of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. He believed that in organizing skilled craftsmen, he was bettering the trade as a whole: “[w]e are indeed very particular as to the men we take in. We desire to take none but skilled workmen, but in a community like this we cannot get all skilled men, yet we do the best we can.”61 Of course, it was employers who were responsible for hiring these unskilled workers: “It is a well known fact that in our trade the most money is in the rough work, and if you get unskilled labor to do the rough work it is better for the employer.”62

The grey area between employer and employee surfaced in other areas as well. One was provided by the testimony of Jacob S. Clarke who appeared before the Commission in New Brunswick. Clarke was a foreman in the Globe office in Saint John. His testimony starts as such: “Q.- [h]ow many hands are in the composing room? A.- We have thirteen or fourteen.”63 Clarke uses “we” as a way of including many people within the employer-employee relation. Yet, when he discussed some labour troubles with the

60 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 37.
61 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 39.
62 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 37.
63 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 137.
workers at the *Globe*, he disclosed that he was a member in the Typographical Union himself but had decided not to walk out. However, he harboured no resentment against the workers who had done so. In fact, he agreed that “there is now a very good understanding between employers and employed.” Clarke’s testimony and position came under the scrutiny of John Gilmour who appeared before the Commission several days later:

> In themselves these unions may be very good for the men and also for their employers, but I certainly do not think that it is a fair thing for the Typographical Union to admit foremen of newspaper offices into membership in their union. The foreman of a printing office is employed and paid by the employer; he gets his remuneration from him direct; so do the other men, for that matter, but the printers have a chairman in every office, who represents the interests of the printers and the Typographical Union, while the foreman is supposed to represent the interests of the employer, which I think is the correct principle.

Thus, in some contexts, foremen were controversially liminal figures.

In the text of the Commission some forepersons willingly (or unwillingly) were put in the position of having to assume responsibility for labour relations in their place of employment. In addition, witnesses employing forepersons would often avoid questions from the Commission, by passing the buck to their more knowledgeable deputies. For example, Jonathan Ward appeared in Montreal and was asked about the system of fining in factories in his region to which he answered, “I am not prepared to say anything on that point, because I am not generally posted. I think you would get it

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In the witness box, commissioners wanted answers to questions regarding the relations of employees and employers but there was some uncertainty about who was an employer and who was an employee. Being an “employer” was a distinction the Commission was forced to make, but on often uncertain grounds. Joseph Risten, the owner of a sash and door factory in New Brunswick, described the responsibilities of his foremen in these terms:

we do not have a regular foreman, in the sense of a foreman, in most of the factories, for I am a practical man myself; but I have a foreman who acts in my place when I am absent, and who represents me. Of course, the men take their orders from the foreman, but he is not placed in the same position as the most [sic] of foremen in the same kind of factories.67

Risten’s fairly incomprehensible description of his foreman’s ‘responsibilities’ is indicative of a larger vagueness concerning the changing roles of production that accompanied industrial discipline. A sociology of respectability and expertise mediated how individuals, including the commissioners, organized the individuals who arrived before them.

These changing roles had much bigger, cultural implications in regard to the relations of labour and capital. For example, these cultural associations often incorporated bourgeois notions of management, thrift, responsibility and respectability. William Houston, the Librarian for the Ontario Legislative Assembly, spoke quite

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66 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 542. See also John Callow in GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 53: “Let me exonerate the employer; Mr. McCord had no intercourse with me but through his foreman.”

67 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 436.
eloquently on the subject of the ‘new’ economy in Ontario. According to Houston, modern industry meant the decay of the ‘old guild spirit.’

The guilds which grew up in the different callings were not close corporations in the legal sense but they were close corporations in a very practical sense. It was extremely difficult to get into one of them and when a man did get in he had some reason to be proud of his position. [...] We all know that for one reason or another the guild spirit has almost entirely disappeared from modern industry, and its place has been taken as far as its has been taken at all, by voluntary organization amongst the industrial classes themselves; and I think the most valuable feature of trades unionism is that it tends to some extent to supply the place of the old guild system.68

For Houston, the organization of labour that had occurred in the 1870s and 1880s was “going to go on the next twenty-five years with perhaps even greater rapidity ....”69 For Houston, organization was certainly an advantage for workingmen, as the key to success in the new economy was harmony between employers and employed. Yet, he also attributed much of a company’s success to the abilities of those new men, the managers:

I mean that kind of management which not merely keeps the men at work but includes taking cognizance of the markets, and so on – men of brains, energy and organizing power. A capitalist may have his capital or borrow it; it does not make much difference which, but I think it is entirely a misnomer to call the present a struggle between capital and labor. It is a struggle between employer and employed, between men of energy and activity and power to organize labor and the individual who is the subject of organization.70

68 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 231.  
69 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 231.  
70 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 234.
Management skills, knowledge and respectability created new players in the new industrial order. For Houston, this individual initiative was the basis for the new ‘aristocratic’ face of labour.

The Commission appeared to have agreed. Those who might be called ‘labour aristocrats’ enjoyed a different status before the commissioners, one which reflected and reinforced a particular sociology well grounded in individual initiative and respectability.\(^\text{71}\) Michael O’Brien of Halifax, for example, was a dominant player in the Shipwrights’ and Caulkers’ Association of Halifax and Dartmouth. It is stated of him that he was “proud of being a highly skilled worker, one who had mastered all the arts of land-based carpentry, but had also learned to adapt them to the building and repair of sailing vessels.”\(^\text{72}\) In spite of the difficulties faced by his union in the nineteenth century, O’Brien was a very successful worker and union organizer. It was said of O’Brien that “he was one of the most thrifty residents of Halifax, [of] steady and industrious habits, a good and sincere friend and foremost in all works that tended to the welfare of the city.”\(^\text{73}\) He was involved with many organizations such as the Union Engine Company, the Young Men’s Literary Association, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In his

\(^{71}\) Chapter Four deals extensively with my thoughts on the inclusion of labour aristocrats within the confines of a broadly-stratified middle class. Robert Gray suggests a similar treatment when he claims that aristocratic labour was not “the carrier of accommodative responses to industrial capitalism.” Rather, the topic of stratification within the working class allows us an opportunity to “examine the articulation of differences in socio-economic experience with structures of ideological hegemony, and with the formation of a labour movement whose aspirations were largely defined by the upper strata of the working classes.” See Robert Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976), 2.


\(^{73}\) *Ibid.*
testimony before the Labour Commission O’Brien’s expertise on the subject of labour was vividly evoked in the questioning:

By Mr. Walsh:-
Q. I want you to tell me now as to the class of houses, the rate of living here, and other points of interest to us in relation to the workingmen here? (To the members of the Commission: Perhaps there is not in the city of Halifax a man that more thoroughly understands these matters than does Mr. O’Brien). A. I can remember mechanics, their clothing and their residence for forty years at all events, and I know the houses they used to live in some twenty years ago and the houses they live in now, and I have many opportunities in going to their houses from having been 24 years as secretary of that association and my duties called me to their houses on many occasions.74

O’Brien continued in his testimony to detail the earnings and savings of shipwrights and caulkers in Halifax, the state of their homes, and the fluctuations in price of provisions such as sugar, flour and cotton over a ten- to fifteen-year period. The compliment was paralleled by the questions: both allowed the labour-aristocratic O’Brien to become an ‘expert’ on the Halifax working class, some of whom rented his six houses in Halifax’s North End. Many working-class men appeared before the Commission as ‘experts’ of their own lives and the lives of their communities. They were able to distinguish themselves from other workers and spoke with a sense of authority, suggesting that the relations of labour and capital entailed many levels and conditions. They were treated very differently, and their texts were organized much more respectfully, than were other workers and their words.

Society was changing rapidly in this period. The relations between employed and employer were actively creating new categories of worker(s). The commissioners’

74 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 109.
questions were reflective of larger social understandings about the relations between employers and employees that, at times, echoed older craft understandings as well as new managerial conceptions of economic life. This complicated language of class both reflected and reinforced power relationships that worked in tandem with social attitudes of morality and respectability. Ultimately, contemporary working realities did not always generate binaries, allowing each individual to fit snugly into the mould of employer or employee, let alone capital and labour. Relations of production were a product of the workplace. They were also intimately tied to cultural notions of respectability, morality and expertise.

**Normal & Pathological**

For witnesses and commissioners alike, employers (like masters) had an obligation to ‘teach’ their employees. In many discussions of the relations of employers and employees, this lesson on factory employment was described in many ways. Some described employers as fathers. Others saw employing children as the performance of a community a service, in that it kept children off the streets. Even though conditions had changed and employees were working on machines, many employers perpetuated a paternal relationship with their employees. This paternal relationship was rationalized in the Commission to very different ends: some used it as a means to create ‘good workers,’ while others used it to justify corporal punishment.

The relationships between employers and employees were often normalized in vertical metaphors. The commissioners described productive relations as vertical quite frequently in their questions. For example, John Fraser appeared before the Commission
in Nova Scotia and was asked who employed him and what he was in charge of at Nova Scotia Steel Works. When he replied that he was in charge of the melting furnaces, Freed asked, “[h]ow many men have you under you?” William Garrioch was identified as a manager when he appeared before the Commission. His second question was, “what number of men have you under your charge?” Similarly, Hormisdas Dupuis was introduced as a foreman when he appeared before the Commission; his first question was “[h]ow many men have you under your control?” These are only several instances (amongst hundreds) where productive relationships were equated with a vertical line. However, not everybody was comfortable with this arrangement. Charles Robataille appeared before the Commission in Quebec and was grilled about conditions and the wages paid to children in the carriage works where he was employed. Helbronner asked “[d]o the men working under you, and the foreman complain of their wages?” Robataille responded that “… there is no one under me, I am simply a workman. We all work under the foreman.” The commissioners had assumed Robataille was of some stature in his workplace, as the harsh questions he was asked concerning employing children suggest. Here we see the direct ‘individualization’ of labour and capital: as a foreman, he would have been responsible for child labour, whereas as a worker he was not.

75 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 404.
76 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1344.
77 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1354.
78 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 786. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 517-518.
Similarly, the frequent use of the word “hands” metaphorically condensed a very complex power relationship. For example, August Eichhorm, a cigar manufacturer in Toronto, was asked about employing union workers in his establishment to which he replied, “I never put that question to my hands.” In this instance, hands referred to an issue of mediated ownership; Eichhorm employed “his” hands, but his own hands were not his direct concern. When asked whether he preferred union men over non-union men he replied: “I do not find any difference. I never ask that question when men come to me for work. If I have work I give it without asking whether they are union or not. If a man does his work properly it does not concern me whether [he] is a union man or not.” For Eichhorm, hands were employees hired to do a specific job, and that was the end of it: hands were not brains.

Notions of equality and fair-play were common in the discussion of labour and capital but describing employees as ‘hands’ also entailed a power construct with its own meaning. For Samuel Peddle, the notion of ownership of hands was more personal. Commissioner Heakes asked Peddle if he thought profit-sharing would lessen difficulties between employers and employed: “Yes; it would lessen difficulties and influence a man to be more careful in the use of raw material, and they would work into

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79 It could be argued successfully that hands were a metonymy rather than a metaphor which could explain its frequent use in the evidence. However, there are power implications in the term, the most obvious being that workers were hands and not brains. Indeed, it appears that the term entails an entire social theory of the relations of labour and capital evoking understandings of workplace roles and power relationships. My attention to these body metaphors was inspired by Michel Foucault’s, *History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (New York, 1990).

80 GC, RCRLE, Ontario Evidence (1889), 306.

81 GC, RCRLE, Ontario Evidence (1889), 306.
each others hands better than they do now.” In the context of profit sharing, “hands” entailed a loose notion of equality, as suggested by the corporate, organic links implied by the word. Body images and metaphors assumed a more patronizing tone when Robert Taylor, a boot and shoe manufacturer in Halifax, was questioned about a strike at his factory. His use of the hand metaphor was rather pointed:

Q.- Have you ever had labor troubles with your men? A.- Not for about 12 years. There was something then but never since.
Q.- How did you fix it, or how would you fix it in a similar case now? A.- We fixed it then by letting them go about their business and they came back with their fingers in their mouths wanting work again.

What Taylor meant by “fingers in their mouths” is not entirely clear — perhaps he was referencing the “hand-to-mouth” existence of those who had defied his authority — but his condescension is palpable. The link between body images, hands and fingers, cloaked a series of complex power relationships.

Hands had a distinct meaning for the commissioners: hands were employees. Harry Osburn testified before the Commission in New Brunswick. Osburn’s interview began with a question about where and how many others worked in the Marysville Cotton Mill. The fourth question, asked by commissioner Kelly, was “[a]re you just one of the hands?” In this instance, a hand was just one of the workers in the dyeing department. The reference was used with a little more discrimination when Jenny Morell appeared before the Commission in Cornwall. She and her husband worked at

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82 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 632.
83 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 18.
84 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 467.
the Stormont Cotton Mill. Morell was asked by commissioner Heakes if the “treatment of the hands [is] fairly good?” She replied, “[w]ell, he always used me well.”85 That Morell described her job as her body being “used” by her employer is similarly indicative of this power relationship. Furthermore, Morell was implying that her employer was not only an individual but a “he.”86 By Morell being asked about her workplace, she appears to have quite easily interpreted this relation as one between herself and another individual who has control or “uses” her. This “he” was not the owner of the factory but the foreman of her department. These metaphors of above/below and hands entail some reciprocity as employers, employees and the commissioners frequently used them to describe productive relations. Yet, at the same time, they subtly created a power dynamic. They represent structures within structures, one created by social/productive relations and the other by language.87

The notion of ownership was normalized by these metaphors. They also frequently implicated foremen, managers and other ‘middling’ groups. Vertical and body metaphors naturalized the placement of individuals in specific positions in capitalist production relations. These articulations worked in tandem and supported more powerful methods of domination and subordination. While these references were subtle, they provide an example of how witnesses, as well as commissioners, continually

85 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1087.
86 She was specific about gender later in her testimony when asked if “any of the overseers use obscene language” to which she replied “he never used bad language to me.” GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1087.
87 Foucault claims that attitudes of sexuality and the body, in combination with institutions such as the state, “acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.” See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol.1 (New York, 1990), 141.
described employer and employee relations in both general and specific terms. These descriptions were not neutral: on one hand, these references provided convenient ways in which order was made of productive relations; on the other hand they were loaded with other understandings that disciplined witnesses into a model of workplace hierarchy with its own notions of expertise, respectability and responsibility.

This model of workplace hierarchy was rather complex in itself. It had direct, material implications. Children who offended against it could be beaten or placed in black holes, “for their own good.” How could one distinguish between the natural and normal exercise of an individual’s workplace power and its abuse? What was one allowed to do with one’s hands? For example, employers were generally under the impression that they were assisting working families when they hired children as ‘hands.’ The following discussion between commissioner Freed and William Birkett, the secretary treasurer of the Dundas Cotton Mill in Hamilton, makes this issue quite clear.

Q.- How were the parents of those children able to live before their children had an opportunity to earn anything? A.- I do not think they were as well off as they are to-day.
Q.- Do you think they are better off by the wages their children earn? A.- I think so. That is proved by the anxiety of the people to get the children employed.
Q.- Where do these children live mostly – where do they come from? A.- They live with their parents, in Dundas. […]
Q.- But when they grow up and have obtained some skill in connection with factory work, do they continue, as a rule, in your mill? A.- Some of the people have been employed there ten or fifteen years. They advance from one department to another, just as they are qualified.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{88} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 898.
Another example surfaces in the evidence of Geo. T. Tuckett, a tobacco manufacturer in Hamilton, Ontario:

Q.- Is it necessary to employ young persons in this business? A.- Yes; in order to strip the tobacco; the older hands would not be so nimble.
Q.- Are these children living with their parents generally? A.- Generally they are mechanics’ families and poor people. Some are the children of widows.
Q.- Would it be better for them to go to school than to work for you? A.- Well, the mothers come to me and say their children will not go to school, and in order to keep them off the streets, they send them to me.
Q.- Have you reason to know that many of them are the children of such mothers? A.- I could not say. At times we have children of that sort. As a rule we have the parents come to the factory, and have a bargain made between the roller and the mother or father, in our presence, the first time, and we see that the children go with the proper man and get properly paid for their work.89

As these witnesses described it, there was a quasi-intimate relationship between employers and families with respect to the employment of children. Employers thought they were performing a fatherly service for working families as well as society in general by keeping children, who would otherwise be idle, off the streets. Ovide Grothé, a cigar manufacturer in Montreal, put the issue quite clearly. Grothé had young apprentices working from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., three or four days a week in his factory. Commissioner Helbronner asked if he thought that the health of an apprentice of sixteen or seventeen years was not put in danger by working such hours. The witnesses replied, “[m]y intention is to make workmen out of them.”90

89 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 743.
90 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 147.
The relationship between employers and employees was frequently associated with family structures in the Commission. Quebec city merchant, Zephirin Paquette, made this association quite clearly in his testimony: “I take pride in the fact that I have always been well liked by my employees, and whatever has happened, has been so trifling as to be unnoticeable; the disagreement has been no more serious, and even less so, than may occur among the members of a well conducted family.”91 However not all correlations between ‘family’ and ‘work’ were as positive. Similar to the relationship between a master and an apprentice, many witnesses thought of themselves as taking on a personal responsibility by hiring children, a process that came with rights over them. This relationship entered into the pathological when this language was used to justify or explain corporal punishment. The testimony of J. L. Fortier, a cigar manufacturer in Montreal, is often hailed as the classic example of nineteenth century workplace abuse. He justified his harsh treatment of women and children in his factory by associating his punishments with those common in other Victorian institutions, such as the family and the school:

Q.- How are those apprentices treated by the foreman? A.- Those apprentices are treated by the foreman in the same manner as if they were his own children, or in other words, as they would be treated at school. 
Q.- It is not to your knowledge that those children have been beaten? A.- It is not to my personal knowledge that those boys have been beaten, other than what they have deserved for wrongs they have committed, the same as a parent would punish his child, or I would punish my child, or a school master would punish a child who does not do what is right at school. […]

91 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 807. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 519-521.
Q.- Do you correct your child with such a mould as this? A.- If he
deserved it, it would not hurt him to hit on the backside with that as
much as with the hand.
Q.- Would you allow the school-master to hit your child with such a
machine as this? A.- Yes; if he did it the same as I did. […]
Q.- Do you believe it is decent for a man to place a girl of eighteen in that
position? A.- When she is very disobedient and there are about fifty or
sixty other girls there, I think it is only right that she should be taught a
lesson when she deserves it.
Q.- One of the Commissioners is anxious to know would you allow one of
your daughters, if you have any, to be placed in that position? A.- If she
deserved it, I would.
Q.- By a stranger? A.- By a person to whom I had entrusted her, the same
as this girl was to me; she was bound to me, and I was to represent her
father. It is very important you should know that these girls and boys are
bound to me. They are engaged by indentures, and, of course, under the
engagement the mother and father must help me along as much as they
can.92

In justifying his abuse of children, Fortier referenced other relationships – of child with
parent or child with teacher – that placed him within the “normal,” not the
“pathological.” Indeed, Fortier was under the impression that parents had a role in
supporting his actions. He was not alone. Alexander McGregor, the manager of Fortier’s
cigar factory, testified that beating children and locking them in rooms both involved
parental consent:

Q.- Did you ever know of any boys having been locked in a room in order
to be afterwards flogged or beaten? A.- I have had parents come to me
and instruct me to do it.
Q.- Have you ever known it to be done? A.- Just indirectly. I have told the
foreman at different times that such and such a parent had come and told
me that I might remove any part of the boy’s clothing and chastise them,
as I would my own children. I have instructed foremen this way, that

92 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 124-126.
such and such a boy is a very bad boy, and if he does anything, his
parents have instructed me to do so and so."93

Another avenue of legitimation was provided by the traditional language of
‘apprenticeship’ itself, as Fortier suggested in his testimony. But the practice of
indenturing a young apprentice to a master, wherein a binding contract was signed for a
certain number of years and the child lived in the master’s house, was being replaced by
owners simply employing children in factories. It was an arrangement that, allegedly,
had the consent of parents and by implication gave the foreman parental rights of
discipline. Fortier described his actions as those of a right to treat his “family children”
as he wished. His young employees were no longer ‘free standing individuals.’ Fortier
had bought their time and was thus acting upon some generally-acknowledged
assumptions about his rights in loco parentis. Of course, very few parents were asked to
come before the Commission to verify this arrangement. Furthermore, despite the fact
that many were appalled by his actions, no witness or commissioner denied Fortier the
right to conduct his business in this way.

The Commission was keenly interested in evidence concerning children who
were injured in various factories. From this evidence two themes emerge: children were
often not trained to run machines properly and when accidents did occur they were
largely the result of carelessness on the part of individual workers. There were many
examples of young people being put to work on machines without any training. A

93 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 94.
London, Ontario agricultural wood-worker, John Davidson, testified that this was a fairly common practice in his field:

Q.- Are there any boys running machinery in your shop? A.- Yes.
Q.- What kind of machinery do they run? A.- They work on the planer, the rip-saw, the cross-cut saw, sand-papering machines. Every week or two an accident happens.
Q.- Do the boys get hurt? A.- Yes; their fingers are cut off.
Q.- What becomes of the boys when they get their fingers cut off? A.- I saw a case of an apprentice to the woodworking business. After he had been working four weeks he had been put to running a machine; probably he had never seen a machine before, and four of his fingers were cut off. The boys in this town, and the firm kept him about a month and then discharged him, and this boy is now working at painting. […]
Q.- Is a boy put to these dangerous machines when he first enters the employment? A.- He may work around a week or two, but I have known a boy not there a month before he was put to a very dangerous machine.
Q.- You do not think at that time he knows sufficient to be familiar with the working of the machine? A.- No; he would not. […]
Q.- The boy you spoke of as being on the machine and as being hurt – was he hired to run that particular machine? Is that the practice? A.- Not when they hire; they generally hire with the intention of learning the trade.
Q.- What about the boy who was injured by the Universal? Was he put on the machine by the firm, or by the foreman, or for his own amusement? A.- He was there under the foreman’s instruction.
Q.- How long had he been working at machinery in the shop before he was put on that machine? A.- Not over three weeks before he was put on that machine.94

Later in the testimony it was disclosed that the injured boy had had “no parents to look after his interests or make any representation.”95 In this establishment there was clearly little effort put toward training children to operate machines as the frequency of

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94 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 623-624.
95 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 626.
accidents suggests. However, as Davidson testified, children were hired “with the intention of learning the trade.” Clearly, their ‘hands’ were expendable.

In this world, employers bore scant responsibility for accidents. For most employers who testified, the problem did not reside in unprotected machinery or other hazardous conditions, but in worker error. W. Anderson, a bookkeeper for J.R. Booth on Ottawa, was quite clear on the subject:

Q.- Have you ever had any accidents about the mill? A.- Yes; there have been a few.
Q.- Did they occur from the carelessness of the hands or from carelessly erected machinery? A.- Largely from carelessness of the men.
Q.- Is it the desire of your concern to use every precaution to protect life and limb in the mill? A.- Mr. Booth is particularly careful in matters in matters of that kind.96

That the commissioners often followed up every query into factory accidents with another, asking whether factory inspectors had visited these establishments, or if the (provincial) Factory Act had been imposed, suggests their conviction that industrial dangers called out for state solutions.

**Individual & State**

The identification of, and response to, the evils of the factory system and the changes it imposed upon productive relations were grounded in a powerful social ethic and notion of order central to the middle class. In the U.S. context, Mary Furner, among others, has noted that the labour question wrought a transformation of liberal thought, claiming that in the post-1870 period: “Self-reliance no longer bore the fruit of personal

96 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1106.
independence; and in the realm of ideas and principles, the old words failed. Laissez-faire collapsed as a creditable basis for policy, and the failure reopened discussion of the proper role of government.”  

Many inquiries in the U.S. during the 1870-1890 period were overtly concerned with collectivist alternatives to classical liberalism. As the Labour Question was frequently the issue that warranted these state investigations, labour and capital alike were interested in negotiating some semblance of social order and looked to the state to legislate problems. Furner notes that the middle class was central to this trend:

Reflecting generalized longing among middle-class Americans for an alternative to disruptive strikes, the committee’s interest in arbitration also rested on the conviction ... that bureaucratic processes of investigation, negotiation, and expert judgment rather than contests of will and force could break the deadlocks over control of production and division of income.  

Roger Davidson notes a similar approach in Britain. He claims that, while not uniform within the middle class, the policy-making process “... incorporated a range of competing elites, including bureaucratic and professional groups whose status and aspirations were less directly and less critically dependent on the imperatives of the market. Nonetheless, an analysis of the rationale and scope of civil intelligence in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain clearly registers the need to recognize the more elitist

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98 Ibid., 207.
and manipulative aspects of social reform.” The notion of the individual was alive and well, the ‘self-made-man’ still commanded much respect, and the notion that the state had any role in regulating labour relations was not without its critics. Yet the transformation in liberal thought from the individual to the state was nevertheless a marked feature of this period in the Anglo-American world.

The Commission and contemporaneous moral and social reform campaigns had much in common. There were many social issues incorporated into the labour question and, consequently, many ‘reformer’ citizens who were ‘socially’ concerned. Notions of respectability, responsibility and morality were intricately tied to the shift in thinking from individual problems into “social” concerns. For the commissioners and witnesses alike, the obvious choice for managing these social issues was the state. The commissioners’ mandate was dominated by questions that evoked extended state responsibilities such as technical education, arbitration and immigration. Many witnesses were asked about these subjects. They often expressed preferences for government involvement that would control the stormy relations of labour and capital and develop policies for the advancement of the ‘nation’ and its citizens. Constituted by the state, the Commission itself represented a new public sphere in which a vast discussion between the supposed representatives of ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ could engage with others.

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Technical education was one frequently-discussed ‘social’ issue. It entailed notions of individual achievement, social order and national interest. As Edward Hawkins explained in his testimony, technical education had direct implications for nation and class:

Q.- Do you know of any institution where apprentices could go to learn the theoretical part of the trade? A.- No; we have not got that institution. The great need of this country is a practical school for engineers, where they could be educated and their children after them. In England an engineer has to go to a regular, practical school of science. Here we have not got such an institution, and it is a want greatly felt, and the Government should do something in regard to the matter. It would be a great benefit to the country if we had a school of engineers.100

George Stalker suggested a similar sentiment when he testified in Ottawa. Stalker claimed that in his personal experience, technical education had a “positive benefit” for trades people, men and women alike. Furthermore, the federal government should administer the initiative: “I think the Government should establish a thorough system of technical education in all large centers, at all events.”101 Ottawa carpenter William Garvock, who testified after Stalker, began with the questions of technical education and working people:

Q.- Are you able to tell us anything of the benefits of technical training to yourself or others? A.- I can testify that it has been of benefit to me, and I think it has been a benefit to others.
Q.- Would you favor a Government system of education, or by private means? A.- I think it would be better if the Government took hold of it.102

100 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 259.
101 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1128.
102 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1128-9.
Of course, not everyone agreed with the principle of government funding education. D.G. Smith in New Brunswick argued that the government’s role in education should be limited because of the harmful effects it had on the state. According to Smith, higher education was calling young people away from farming with the intention of entering “professional occupations:”

Q.- Of those who go to the higher school do you think that many of them enter upon farming? A.- I think that very few of them indeed do so.
Q.- Then you think that whatever good the higher schools might impart to the country is lost by the present way in which people use it? A.- I think that State should go no further in the matter of education than giving a good education – into what is called the three “R’s” – and the rest should be left to private enterprise, or some such system.103

For Smith, the state would be better served by providing a common educational system wherein professional and agricultural traditions, with their class traditions, were kept alive. A similar sentiment was expressed by C.T. Campbell in London, Ontario. According to this witness, “the State – I mean the State in Canada and the United States – provides too much education; that is the general tendency on this continent. I think if the State provided a practical education, which every man, woman and child is likely to need, or can find serviceable, it would be better.”104 While these views may appear to be completely opposite to one another they share a belief in the relation between educational policy and the betterment of society and nation. The discussion of technical education incorporated notions of individual initiative and private enterprise as well as the classic dichotomy of the negative and positive state. Of course, the state was already

103 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 383.
104 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 587.
involved inasmuch as it had constructed the public sphere in which this discussion took place.\textsuperscript{105}

Kealey argues that the Commission split on class questions.\textsuperscript{106} For example, Kealey states that “the paternalists recommend increased education for the development of a more highly skilled work force; the workers discuss the class based nature of the system which deprives their children of education.”\textsuperscript{107} These allegiances were also discussed by some commissioners. However, class allegiances — such as the ones Kealey described — were not always easy to distinguish. For example, commissioner John Armstrong had the following exchange with Alfred Stevens, a manufacturer in Moncton, New Brunswick:

Q.- Do you ever find your beginners who are coming to ask for work are girls who have never learned anything about knitting or sewing at school? A.- I do not think there is anything of that kind taught in the schools here; we have had girls come in for work who never saw a knitting machine before they came to our place, but some of them have become very good knitters in two or three weeks.

Q.- Do you think that if young girls were taught that kind of work, to a certain extent, in school, they would become more expert at it when they began to follow the business for a living? A.- I think very likely they would.\textsuperscript{108}

In this example, Armstrong was not necessarily challenging the class-based nature of the ‘system’ but suggesting that technical education would help make better workers. In fact, the technical education issue was frequently discussed in a context that suggested

\textsuperscript{105} At the same time similar discussions were occurring nationally concerning schools in Manitoba and New Brunswick. Another similar discussion was occurring in provincial legislatures where debate concerning compulsory education for children was rather directly related to factory legislation.

\textsuperscript{106} “The class nature of this split can be seen not only in the invectives of 1889 ... but in every session of the hearings.” Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates Industrialism} (Toronto, 1973), xviii.

\textsuperscript{107} Kealey, \textit{Canada Investigates}, xix.

\textsuperscript{108} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 336.
an education was not necessarily about social mobility, but the larger goal of healthy society and good workers. Freed, in questioning E.C. Pelton of Amherst, Nova Scotia drove this point home:

... [w]ould you favor an educational system which would make that part of the instruction either a part of the common school system, or be given in separate schools under the direction for the Government? A.- I would. Q.- You believe that boys taking some course instruction would turn out better mechanics? A.- I certainly do.\textsuperscript{109}

Class assumptions undoubtedly play a role in these comments but we must take care not to silence other implications and assumptions about social order inherent in them. There were many understandings about ‘the social’ in the debate on the issue of technical education. This state-appointed investigative body displayed not only the entrenchment of liberalism in this political order but also the ways in which class tensions could be massaged via discussions that appealed to both “labour” and “capital.”

The issue of arbitration was similarly of much importance throughout the 1880s and surfaced often in the Commission’s hearings. Arbitration was conceived by many as an alternative to disruptive strikes.\textsuperscript{110} It was loosely thought of as a cordial process, meant to be a fair-minded reconciliation between employers and employees based on broad notions of communal equality and justice. Kealey and Palmer note that the Knights of Labor were particularly in favor of arbitration. The Knights were not afraid to

\textsuperscript{109} GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 333.

\textsuperscript{110} Kealey and Palmer note that the cautious attitude toward strikes (punctuated by the Haymarket disaster) was espoused by T.V. Powderly and brought to Canadian towns by such ‘labour spokesmen.’ See *Palladium of Labor* (December 8, 1883), *Journal of United Labor* (October 22, 1888); *London Advisor* (February 19, 1886); as noted in Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be* (Cambridge, New York, 1982), 333.
enter into strikes; in fact several successful battles occurred in the 1880s. However, financial and moral support was not always available to sustain a cause. There was a strong notion of community in the notion of arbitration: “[i]t reflected workers’ faith in the community, which they felt would not deny them a well-deserved justice.”\textsuperscript{111} Herbert Gutman similarly noted that arbitration was premised on communal relations whereby merchants, small industrialists and politicians often sided with workers in the midst of conflicts.\textsuperscript{112} Yet, as Kealey and Palmer note, this popular panacea also represented the limits of Knights of Labor thought: “arbitration was premised on the assumption that the capitalists would deal fairly with their workers if they were simply informed of the facts.”\textsuperscript{113} The plethora of strikes in the United State and Canada in the 1880s, however, did not suggest harmonious class relations. Kealey and Palmer note that when the right to organize was denied, arbitration was simply not on the table:

... in many cases, especially in situations where hostile employers or their hirelings denied the right of any labor organization to intrude upon their managerial prerogatives, arbitration was little more that a wishful hope. This became especially clear in the 1880s and 1890s as the community basis of power wilted in the face of the emergence of a national bourgeoisie, reliant upon the force of the state and the troops and national guardsman it could muster to crush dissident workers.\textsuperscript{114}

In the end, strikes and arbitration were deeply imbued with notions of the ‘good of the community.’ On the other hand, these communities are not so easily identifiable: sometimes merchants, small industrialists and politicians sided with workers’ rights; at

\textsuperscript{111} Kealey and Palmer, \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, 331
\textsuperscript{113} Kealey and Palmer, \textit{Dreaming of What Might Be}, 331-332.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, 332.
the same time a ‘national bourgeoisie,’ with the help of the state, was instrumental in denying many workers’ rights. The issue of arbitration encompasses broad social and political understandings that require careful unpacking.

Guidelines for the arbitration of conflict between employers and employed were very vague in the Labour Commission and opinions concerning who should actually arbitrate between ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ were many. However, based on the questions of the commissioners, the Canadian state was already moving toward a role as arbitrator. As Judge Armstrong ‘clarified’ for a witness in Toronto, “[a]rbitration, as you understand it, is each party choosing a friend and these two choosing an umpire?”\(^\text{115}\) That Armstrong described the appointment of a representative for labour and capital as a “friend” not only downplays the significant tensions in productive relations but imagines the state to be a central force in adjudicating such conflicts.\(^\text{116}\) For example, witnesses often described the state as a ‘neutral party’ between labour and capital. Commissioner McLean asked W.J. McFarlane the following questions in Ontario:

> [w]hat kind of arbitration do the men in your business prefer – a board appointed by the government, or that each side should call in a party and let them choose a third? In the event of the employers and the men not coming together in that shape do you consider that government interference would be justifiable?\(^\text{117}\)

Commissioner Walsh asked similarly leading questions: “Q.- What kind of arbitration would you advise? A.- In which way do you mean? Q.- What kind of arbitration would

\(^{115}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 141.

\(^{116}\) Paul Craven argues that this state role as occurring later with Mackenzie King’s Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. See Paul Craven, An Impartial Umpire: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911 (Toronto, 1980).

\(^{117}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 115.
you advise – compulsory arbitrators appointed by the Government or arbitrators chosen by the two parties interested.”\(^\text{118}\) John Armstrong was equally suggestive: “Provided both parties could not come together, do you think the Government should appoint an arbitration board to step in and arbitrate either from a voluntary or from a compulsory standpoint.”\(^\text{119}\) Of course, the Labour Commission and the other inquiries assembled through the period suggest that the state was already beginning to position itself in the role of mediator.

Many witnesses wanted it to go further. Archibald Campbell, a miller who testified in Chatham, Ontario, claimed: “I think if the Government established a board of arbitrators, so that those disputes could be referred to them, and they could take them into consideration and settle them, it would be an advantage to both parties.”\(^\text{120}\) On this issue, some labour spokesmen enjoyed the Commission’s favour as experts. Several witnesses, including Campbell, cited international examples of successful state arbitration. Henry Thomas Benson, a member of the Builders’ Laborers’ Union in Toronto, clearly argued the case for arbitration: “I think it would be acceptable to our union to have a compulsory board of arbitration, because there is loss to the country when the men strike and loss to the workmen themselves.”\(^\text{121}\) This trade unionist came to the Commission very well informed about the international success stories of arbitration, especially the French: “[b]efore employers can lower wages they have to submit reasons for lowering to a board of Government arbitrators, and when the men

\(^{118}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 532.

\(^{119}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 172.

\(^{120}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 491.

\(^{121}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 268.
want the advance they have to send grievances and reasons to this board before they can go out."\textsuperscript{122} Similarly, Henry Lloyd, a carpenter in Toronto, described the New York regulations: "I think it would be the best thing for the Commissioners to recommend. There is what we call a local board and a State board. The local board, when a difficulty occurs, meets representatives of the two parties for arbitration, and inside of ten days either party can appeal to the State board."\textsuperscript{123} These ‘worker’ experts, like the commissioners, were well versed in the issue of arbitration and were familiar with international examples that advocated the placement of the state squarely in between the relations of labour and capital.

Not all witnesses were behind government’s involvement in arbitration. James Boyle, an iron founder in Toronto, was very clear about the government not being involved in arbitration:

I do not think the government should interfere with it, for two or three reasons. I would sooner have a man as arbitrator who understood the working of the business, even if he had left it, than a man who did not understand it. I do not think he should have to depend on what he hears from other [sic.]; he should know run of the business on which he is told to arbitrate. I do not think you can show me men in the employ of the Government who know all the different trades.\textsuperscript{124}

For Boyle, the government being involved in arbitration was a problem because of a lack of legitimacy and expertise necessary for effective arbitration. A similar

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\textsuperscript{122} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 268.
\textsuperscript{123} As mentioned in earlier chapters, international examples of arbitration boards are a prominent feature in the Reports, a feature that is not reciprocated in the evidence. This discrepancy appears to bestow a level of expertise on these particular witnesses. GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 272.
\textsuperscript{124} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 172.
\end{flushleft}
sentiment was expressed by printer William McAndrews in Hamilton.

McAndrews testified that:

I would say that printers should appoint their arbitrators and the employers should appoint theirs, but they should be people who understand the printing business ....

Q.- Your answer would be, then, that in that case, you would not go for Government arbitration, or enforced arbitration? A.- No.125

It was not just some workers who were wary of government’s involvement in arbitration. Fredrick Nichols, the secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, was also against it: “I am not all together in favour of Government arbitration.”126 However, the government was already involved in the relations of labour and capital and was working, albeit very slowly and partially, toward establishing itself as an arbitrator through such strategies as the Commission. Both Reports of the Labour Commission advance government involvement in avoiding strikes in their discussion of arbitration. The ‘capitalist’ report claims: “… it is wise to have good legislation which will facilitate the prompt and equitable settlement of differences which may arise between employers and employees.”127 The ‘labour’ report claims, “[a]s the condition of our people so closely resembles that of the citizens of the United States it is much more probable that the legislation they have found to be beneficial would meet with an equal measure of success on this side of the line.”128

125 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 750.
126 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 183.
127 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 60.
128 GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 94.
The discussion of arbitration also entailed implicit understandings about mediating the relations of labour and capital through notions of equality. Thomas Crowley was asked if he “had given the subject of arbitration any thought? A.- I have. Q.- Will you give us the benefit of your ideas? A.- I think it is something which is absolutely necessary to create peace and harmony between employer and employed.”129 However, no questions about the extent of the government’s involvement in this process were brought before this witness. John Sullivan, a brick layer in London, claimed that “I would prefer any arbitration, I do not care whether by Government or not, so long as it was fair to both sides.”130 For J.B. Murphy, a journeyman moulder, the important issue was that of finding a legitimate means of settling disputes and avoiding strikes:

Q.- In the case of labor troubles, do you prefer a system of arbitration in the settlement of such troubles? A.- Do you mean rather than to fight it out?
Q.- Rather than to strike – in order to prevent a strike taking place? A.- Certainly. I believe in settling that trouble by arbitration, or the most legitimate way it can be done, in order to save trouble.131

Arbitration was presented as an equal, fair and legitimate way to settle disputes between labour and capital. Most witnesses preferred some state involvement in the process. As W.A. Clarke testified:

If the Government were to have an arbitration board which could step in and settle matters to suit themselves I don’t think it would be satisfactory to every one. But if it was one to which they could appeal, in case they

129 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 431.
130 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 680.
131 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 686.
wished to arbitrate, I think it would be a good thing, if both parties were agreeable.\textsuperscript{132}

The Commission positioned the state in the relations of labour and capital not only by promoting this discussion, but by reflecting and reinforcing a position that the national interest was intimately tied to its involvement through such programs as technical education and arbitration.

For most witnesses, the state exercised a quality control function: regulating, ensuring equality, inspecting and protecting working Canadians. In the process, the problems or concerns of individual Canadians became ‘national’ issues. Throughout this period the state took steps toward regulating weights and measures, insuring benefit societies, creating currency standards and fostering economic growth through tariffs and railway construction. Such measures fell within the parameters of conventional liberalism. “Arbitration,” at least in some eyes, did not.

Others saw it as a part of a broader movement towards a kind of government that acknowledged responsibilities to working-class Canadians. Toronto carpenter John Callow was quite clear on the relation between government and working citizens:

\ldots [t]he Government [builds] asylums and workhouses for people who cannot assist themselves and they make the rest of the people pay the taxes, and therefore they ought to protect workingmen, but as far as I can judge he is in this country the victim every time.

Q.- You would believe in the Government compelling the settlement of dispute? A.- Yes, and that they should protect those classes that cannot protect themselves. They make us pay taxes, and we are entitled to their protection; but we do not get it.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{132} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), 596.

\textsuperscript{133} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), 53.
This ‘worker’ felt that he and others were entitled to government protection. The
government’s responsibility to working Canadians was very important to labour
journalist and single taxer Phillips Thompson. In his testimony he spoke on skyrocketing
housing prices: “… there should be an appropriation of the land value or a considerable
proportion of the land value either by the Government or the State, it does not matter
which.”

The ideal of the government as a paternal agent for working Canadians was very
obvious in discussions of issues relating to benefit societies. For example, the
management and protection of the funds gathered by benefit societies was important to
Dr. Oronhyatekha of London, Ontario:

I would like to call attention to the question of the Government providing
some means for investigating the funds of these societies. With us, it is
getting to be a matter of embarrassment, because it is of very great
importance that these funds, which belong, as a rule, to workingmen,
which are funds accumulated to pay benefits to workingmen, should be
safely invested. It has seemed to me that it would greatly benefit the
working classes, the industrial classes, if the Government would receive
the funds of those societies, and allow a certain rate of interest, making
some general law of rule by which any society of this character having
surplus funds could deposit such in the Post-Office Savings Bank.

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134 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 99.
135 Oronhyatekha was a Canadian of Aboriginal descent, born near Brantford, Ontario. He was
educated in various states in the United States, the University of Toronto and eventually at
Oxford where he became a medical doctor personally trained by the doctor to the Prince of
Wales. Upon his return to Canada he build an extensive medical practice in London, Ontario,
where he joined (and eventually became the chief executive of) the Industrial Order of Foresters.
He was also a Freemason of high degree, a Good templar and an Orangeman. See Henry James
Morgan, Men and Women of the Time (Toronto, 1898), 785-786.
136 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 644.
John Smith, a merchant tailor in Toronto, drew upon British examples in making the same case:

I think it would be in the interests of the benevolent societies if the Government exercised jurisdiction over them somewhat the same way as the Government of Great Britain does over Friendly Societies there; that the constitution of each society should be registered, and that no amendment should be legal unless it was authorized by the Government.\textsuperscript{137}

Smith was not alone in his view. Dr. C.T. Campbell of London, Ontario testified that the government could regulate benefit societies so that claims for injury and death could be protected: “Government supervision might be had to some extent, that is, receiving from these societies proper reports of their operations, and fixing the proper dues of admission by the Government, and requiring all societies who come up to the proper requirements to be duly registered.”\textsuperscript{138}

References to the government as the obvious choice for a body to standardize weights and measures were frequent in the Commission. For David Mills, an oil producer in Petrolia, the establishment of government-controlled measurements and inspectors was imperative:

We have no way of finding out whether these companies are doing business right or not, and I have often wondered that the Government do not appoint an inspector to see that we get our right measure. […] Q.- You wish the government to appoint an inspector to see that standard is carried out? A.- Yes; I think it is nothing more than right.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 138.
\textsuperscript{138} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 585.
\textsuperscript{139} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 692.
A Petrolia builder, John Kerr, was not as enthusiastic about any further involvement by the government:

Do you think it would be beneficial to the oil business if the Government would appoint an inspector to test the burning qualities of the oil as well as the measurement, too? A.- I do not know whether it would be well for the trade to be hampered any further by government inspection than what it is hampered to day.\textsuperscript{140}

Robert Menzis, a manager of the Producers' Oil Refining Company, was continually asked questions about the government’s involvement in the oil business:

Q.- Who are the parties in Petrolia who do not wish any government inspection of the boilers and engines? A.- I am not aware of any. They may be all against it, so far as I know, but I consider personally that it should be done; I consider it a necessity. […]
Q.- Is there a general desire to have the oil measured by the Government inspection? A.- Yes; I have heard something about that, and there is quite a stir among producers in this regard, and I think they are right. They want a standard measure, whereby they can test the measure the tanking companies give them. […]
Q.- What is your idea in regard to Government inspection of the burning quality of oil?\textsuperscript{141}

Menzis concluded by offering a liberal blessing to limited government involvement:

“[s]upply and demand control this business, to some extent, and want of confidence and lack of money has an effect on the price. If the Government can send us lots of money in here the price will undoubtedly go up.”\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 706.
\textsuperscript{141} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 708-712.
\textsuperscript{142} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 713.
Some witnesses had little faith that the government could work for them. Thomas Brick, a carter in Hamilton, viewed the federal government as an institution in which friends favoured friends, equality and fairness be damned:

Q.-If the railway companies choose to make those arrangements with the Hendry and Sheddon companies how can we interfere to prevent them? A.- I don't know whether the law or the Government could interfere. The Government, as a general thing, always favors monopolies of any kind.
Q.- Has the Government favored these monopolies? A.- I believe so.
Q.- In what way? A.- They give the general trunk railway business and everything else to the Hendry Company.
Q.- How did they give it to the Hendry Company? A.- The Hendry Company gets a share of the Government money that is distributed around for the railways.
Q.- In what ways does the Hendry Company get Government money? A. I don't know whether I am right or wrong, but if William Hendry goes before the Railway Committee of Parliament he will get privileges that Thomas Brick would not get. I went once as a deputation from Hamilton to the Railway Committee, and I had the pleasure of having William Hendry and some other gentlemen along with me, and I found that the Government always fears such men.143

Brick’s assumptions about the relations between local business men and the Railway Committee did not fall under the Commission’s tacit mandate as a “fact finding” body. The commissioners did not ask him whether he was basing his opinions on fact. Brick was a Knight of Labor alderman and city councillor for several years where he “championed the Knights’ causes” before his appearance on the Commission.144 In all respects Brick was a “respectable” working man and was allowed to critique the state’s ties with monopolies.

143 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 817.
144 Bryan Palmer, A Culture in Conflict (Montreal, 1979), 168.
Many, including the Commissioners, were of the opinion that the government should legislate on the issue of water-closets. Samuel Carsley, a dry goods merchant from Montreal, went to Ottawa to testify before the Commission on the issue of water-closets in retail establishments. Carsley testified that he, and the undisclosed organization he represented, had visited establishments in Montreal, Brockville, Ottawa and Toronto in the past year and found the conveniences in most establishments to be “equally bad:”

Q.- What would you suggest as the best means of remedying these evils, with regard to the treatment of women and children and the employment of children? A.- I think the employers themselves will never remedy it in any way, and the only way that I can see of mending it is legislating so as to compel employers to dismiss them at certain hours, and have the water-closets and other places so that women and children will not be compelled to go down into the cellar, or use the same conveniences as the opposite sex.
Q.- You would have the conveniences for males located in a different part of the building? A.- I would
Q.- You believe the helpless classes – women and children – shall be the wards of the Government, and the Government shall be responsible for them? A.- Yes; and from what I have seen, the employers will never do it until compelled – at least, that is my opinion.145

For Carsley, the government was an arbitrator that could force employers to comply with regulations on water-closets. In his opinion, employers would not impose these moral standards if left to themselves.

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145 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1166-1167.
Yet, middle-class opinion on this issue was divided. For example, William Thurston, a boot and shoe upper manufacturer in Toronto, testified that a single convenience for his male and female employees was simply not an issue:

Q.- Do you not consider that using the same conveniences has an immoral tendency? A.- No; not in my place, because we have a key, and no two could be there while the key is here.
Q.- Have you had any protests from people in your employ concerning these conveniences? A.- No.

James Hargraves, the superintendent of the New Brunswick Cotton Mill in Saint John testified that providing separate water-closets in his establishment was similarly not an issue of morality:

Q.- Have you separate conveniences – separate water-closets for male and female operatives throughout the mill? A.- Not throughout the mill; but the principal part of the men, they have separate water-closets – but there are rooms in which the males and females use one water-closet.
Q.- Do you think that is a matter that ought to be rectified? A.- We have never had any trouble.
Q.- But you may have had trouble and not know anything of it? A.- There are too many people working there in the same room.
Q.- It has happened elsewhere? A.- I have been there seventeen years and there has been no complaint.
Q.- You know that where there are factory laws these things are not permitted? A.- I have stated the facts of the case, and these things have never happened. I have worked in Mills in England where they had only

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147 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 307.
one water-closet with a greater number of hands, and I think the morality here is as good as it is there and as good there as it is here.\textsuperscript{148}

It is difficult to determine if these employers were, as Samuel Carsey suggested, being ‘employers’ about the water-closet issue by not doing anything, or whether they were taking their lead from the people who worked in their factories. There are other alternatives. For Andrew Carroll, a printer in St. Catherines, Ontario, the water-closet issue was simply tied to the individual: “Q.- Where the men and the women work together in the same room do you consider it is conducive to morality on the part of those working there? A.- That is a rather hard question to answer, as it would depend more on the parties themselves than on any incidental circumstance of that nature.”\textsuperscript{149}

The Commission encouraged, at least to a limited extent, open debate about labour and capital, the economy and the state. It provided a public sphere, albeit one that was closely regulated, designed to encourage open discussion about these subjects and secure consent to a particular notion of social order. In the process, we see mutual understandings and aspirations between seemingly vying social entities. The state and the individual were at the heart of this discussion about social order. Witnesses discussed the merits and demerits of government involvement in arbitration and technical education. For many, the state was duty bound to protect citizens, particularly working people, from the evils of factory production.

\textbf{Right & Wrong}

\textsuperscript{148} GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 255. Alexander Watson, the Superintendent of the Canada Cotton Manufacturing Company in Cornwall was equally unconcerned with the issue.

\textsuperscript{149} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 927.
Although categories of labour and capital were constantly changing throughout this period, others related to morality seemed to be less fluid. Ultimately many issues, especially those relating to equality, labour organization, wages and worth — were grounded in a sociology that privileged notions of morality, respectability and expertise.\footnote{150}

Every witness who appeared before the Commission brought his or her own understanding of class relations to a public debate. For some witnesses, labour organizations prevented strikes and elevated workers whereby they enjoyed an ‘equal’ status with employers. For example, John Callow testified on strikes, organization and the nature of the economy in these terms:

Q.- Do you know any good results to ever come from strikes? A.- I do not think there are any – not really any tangible good results.
Q.- Nothing lasting? A.- There is nothing lasting in it. A strike only compels employers to do a little more justly to the men, but it passes away like a morning cloud. And after a time they return to their evil doings and the wages of the men come down again. […]
Q.- What I want to get at is this; would the wages be as good if there were no organization amongst the men? A.- I think that would largely depend on the surplus of labor in the country. I do not think that organization would affect it all together; it might have a slight effect, but the surplus population is what I think would affect it. It is supply and demand all the way through; when supply is greater than the demand wages come down; when supply is less than the demand wages go up.\footnote{151}

Callow was a carpenter who belonged to the Brotherhood of Carpenters in Toronto and was in favour of the government’s involvement in arbitration: “Q.- You are in favour of arbitration? A.- Of Government interference under whatever name it is called. They

\footnote{150} The notion of worth itself was complex. It was the mantra for labour and employers with regard to wages, but who actually determined “worth” was never defined.
\footnote{151} GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 53.
make us pay taxes, and we are entitled to their protection; but we do not get it.”

Callow’s understanding of the laws of supply and demand, like that of many other witnesses, was grounded in a liberal-Smithian conception of the ‘free’ economy and upon a class-based understanding of labour and capital. But, as his understanding of arbitration suggests, liberal notions were changing. The primacy of the individual was being challenged by more communal notions of the ‘community’ and the state’s involvement in ‘protecting’ the public good. As Callow’s testimony suggests, liberal conceptions of society and the economy were intricately intertwined with labour organization. For example, Callow’s comprehension of economy and class had direct ties to organized labour’s perspective on immigration in Canada.

The onset of new workplace discipline and the negotiation of power relations between employed and employer created much confusion and contradiction. For example, the notion that workers should be “paid what they are worth” was another topic upon which ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ agreed: ability, knowledge and sound work ethic made for a valuable employee, a sound wage and a prosperous nation. Henry Gnosill touched upon this when he testified in Hamilton, Ontario. The brass-finisher responded to a question about his employment in a rather self-flattering light: “[a]re you employed all the year around? A.- When they get a man who is anyways what he ought to be he

152 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 53.
153 One of the first motions passed by the Trades and Labor Congress in 1886 was an objection to the use of public money to assist the immigration of “paupers, indigents, and orphans” and urged the Dominion to “abolish the existing immigration system.” See Proceedings of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada 1886, 24. For an outstanding recent discussion, see David Goutor, Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872-1934 (Vancouver and Toronto, 2007).
gets regular employment.”154 In this testimony and elsewhere, being a ‘good worker’ was noticed by employers and rewarded accordingly. Yet, it fell to the employer alone to determine what a worker was worth. As Gnosill described, “[w]hat would be the average pay? A.- Different prices; there is no regular price. They pay a man according to what he is worth – blacksmiths, and finishers, and wire workers, and other men.”155

Gnosill championed the Knights in his testimony for their part in determining wages: “[w]orking people within the last year and a-half have been improving as to wages since the Knights of Labor took it up. We have got on wonderfully better.”156 A similar example surfaced in the testimony of F. McDonald, an employee of Rhodes, Curry and Company in Amherst, Nova Scotia:

Q.- Who fixes the rate of wages in your department, the foreman or the manager? A.- I think it is understood by both.
Q.- Do the men frequently think they are worth more than they receive and ask for an increase in wages? A.- Not often, to my knowledge.157

William Nesbitt, a pressman in St. Catherine, Ontario argued that employees and employers, in his experience, negotiated wages on equal footing:

Q.- When a pressman or printer offers himself for work, does he stand on an equality with the employer in the transaction? A.- When he applies for a situation?
Q.- Yes. Or do you think the employer has any advantage? A.- I don't think my employer does; I think I am just as good a man as he is.
Q.- You stand on equal footing? A.- Yes.158

154 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 427.
155 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 427.
156 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 427.
157 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 325.
158 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 929.
Not everyone was placed on such “equal footing.” As John Gaskin, manager for the Montreal Transportation and Forwarding Company in Kingston testified:

Q.- You would have no objection to employing men belonging to organized labor, I suppose? A.- My own opinion is this; that it is not necessary to have an organized body to place every man on a par. Some men are better than others, and I believe in every man according to his merits, according to what a man is worth. If a company employs a man and he does not receive good wages, or wages he is worth, he should not work for the company any longer.\(^{159}\)

In Gaskin’s opinion, individual workmen with different levels of skill rightly competed with each other in an unregulated labour market. For Quebec merchant Fredrick Andrews, workers were just not in an intellectual position to understand the greater good transcending the interests of labour and capital:

… Then, do you not think the ship laborers are better judges than men who do understand the business practically? A.- Not entirely. I cannot admit that. They are not entirely the judges as regards the matter of wages. As regards the point of working on board ship, and going where the merchants have never been, or are likely to go, I admit the propriety of the men composing a Society and framing rules, if necessary, to protect themselves; but not as regards outside matters which affect the trade and business of the Port. I think it is quite possible that the merchants can get facts brought out clearer, and can form a sounder judgement, than the labourers.\(^{160}\)

The catalyst for ‘equalizing’ labour and capital was, for many witnesses, labour organization. In their eyes, the appropriate answer to the Labour Question was simply to devise those arrangements that would work in the respective interests of labour and capital. Alec. Simpson testified that unions:

\(^{159}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 968-9.
\(^{160}\) GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 806.
... have had an effect for good, so far as I have seen the working of them – that is to say, if they are properly organized and carried out. The working classes want to be organized in order to understand their position toward capital.

Q.- Are labor organizations, so far as you knowledge goes, antagonistic to the interests of employers? A.- No.

Q.- You think it is beneficial to employers if the workingmen were well organized? A.- I do; a man will look to his own and his employers interests also.

Q.- Do labor organizations educate their members to take an interest in their employers? A.- So far as regards any organization to which I have been attached, I may say that they have made that a special question, to look at their employers’ interest.\(^{161}\)

W.R. James, a printer in St. Catherine, made a similar point:

Q.- [w]hat is the effect of organized labor on the working people? A.- The effect of it throughout this section has been to increase wages and reduce the hours of labor. [...] 

Q.- Have you ever found in them spirit of antagonism to employers? A.- No, sir. In answering that question, there are a number of people who are antagonistic to employers at all times, but I mean the general mass of the people.\(^{162}\)

John Hogan, a baker in Halifax testified that unions brought workers together and, in turn, gave them strength:

Q.- Has the formation of your union been of benefit to the bakers? A.- Yes; a big benefit.

Q.- Is there any other benefit than keeping up the price of wages? A.- Yes; they assist you if you are sick. There is a great deal of benefit in that way.

Q.- If you had no union would you be receiving the same wages you are to-day? A.- No; I do not think so.

Q.- What reason have you for supposing that? A.- Well, union is strength, I have always considered it was an advantage for men to stick together.\(^{163}\)

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\(^{161}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 714.

\(^{162}\) GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 932.

\(^{163}\) GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 174.
For these witnesses, labour organization levelled the playing field of labour and capital. Furthermore, on the basis of this equality, both sides could pursue their mutual interests.

Other witnesses were against trade union organization on liberal principles. For example, Joseph Dussault, a master printer in Quebec testified:

... [i]t was a matter of principle. We would not allow ourselves to be ruled by the Typographical Union and the Knight of Labor. We wished to deal with our men, man to man, so that a good workman would be well paid, and an inferior hand receive less wages.

Q.- Therefore, the only objection, if I understand, was being dictated to by the Typographical Union? A.- Yes. We would not deal with any body of persons; we would only deal with our employees.164

His reading of trade unionism implied that it entailed damage to the individual rights of the employer.

A language of rights and freedoms permeates the evidence the Commission collected and was central to legitimizing the position(s) of labour and capital. Of course, it cannot be considered surprising that in an official investigation into such a contentious issue as the Labour Question, and within a liberal order, one would frequently encounter references to the ‘freedom’ of the workers or the ‘rights’ of capital. Rights-talk was intricately articulated with conceptions of morality, respectability and expertise. As Zygmunt Bauman remarks, the modern concept of freedom is tightly connected with the notion of individualism and is intricately intertwined with modern capitalism.165 In the

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164 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 942. This witness’s testimony was given in French and translated. To view this witness’s testimony in French see Appendix 1, pages 522-526.

context of the labour question, rights and freedoms were fundamentally connected with notions of morality, respectability and expertise. As Michael Ignatieff claims, recourse to rights in public debate represents an attempt to “give legal meaning to [certain social] values .... Rights are not just instruments of the law, they are expressions of our moral identity as a people.” Describing an action as the reflection of one’s underlying ‘right’ is a move with deep ideological implications. As Michael Freeden remarks, “the relationship between rights and action [is] cemented through moral and/or legal obligations.” Given these legal and moral obligations, rights have, in one way or another, a particular potency in the Canadian context. Ignatieff points out that “... there is no more effective way to deny the rights of others than to claim that they are denying your own.” Freeden similarly claims that rights “ascribe a special status or worth to the rights bearer. In their protective capacity for certain human (or group) attributes rights signal the special importance of the entity endowed with those attributes. Hence rights are more than the reflection of duties toward passive individuals.” In other words, rights are devices for first identifying and then prioritizing crucial attributes and requirements of the rights-bearing entity. As a consequence, they require action or inaction by others to protect those attributes and requirements. “Rights talk” cannot really take place in isolation. Rights require not only legal recognition, but also social consent.

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Rights talk was a particular feature in late-Victorian society. In spite of the different approaches in the United States and Canada, both countries were profoundly influenced by British concepts of rights. For example, historians have frequently noted the prevalence of the “rights of Englishmen” as an underlying notion throughout the Empire.\textsuperscript{170} E.P. Thompson writes on the “Freeborn Englishman” or the “English Birthright” in \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}. For Thompson, these terms reveal a widely held common sense of social order that includes the freedom from absolutism and from arbitrary arrest and search, trial by jury, and equality before the law. They included limited liberty of thought, speech and of conscience, and the freedom to travel, trade and sell one’s own labour. These freedoms were a social contract that was inherent in Englishmen and softened the relations between rulers and ruled: “[n]or were these freedoms insignificant; taken together, they both embody and reflect a moral consensus in which authority was at times shared, and of which at all times it was bound to take account.”\textsuperscript{171} Patrick Joyce locates the “rights of Englishmen” in the constitution: “[t]he notion of the ‘free-born Englishmen,’ and the defense of English rights, liberty and truth were concerns as dear to the heart of many a Liberal workingman as they were to his Tory counterpart.”\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{170} Patrick Joyce claims this is true particularly among Marxist historians: “The ways in which such cultural motifs as ‘the Norman Yoke’ and ‘the Free Born Englishmen’ weave their way in and out of these historians’ accounts of popular susceptibilities from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries are evidence of how they see this powerful radical tradition at work.” See Patrick Joyce, \textit{Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England} (Cambridge, 1994), 159. See also R. Johnson “Culture and the Historians,” in R. Johnson \textit{et al.} (eds.) \textit{Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory} (London, 1979).


\textsuperscript{172} P. Joyce, \textit{Work, Society and Politics}, 250.
What did witnesses mean when they discussed ‘rights’ in the Commission? In one sense, when witnesses used the word ‘right,’ it described something that was right or wrong. Of course, determining what was right and wrong — similar to the discussion of right as a legal and political obligation — also entailed overarching moral and social obligations. Indeed, employee and employer relations, union organization and other dynamics of the Labour Question often invoked these social and moral obligations. For example, Kealey and Palmer note a similar use of the word right when they cite Albert C. Carman’s fictional work on Ryerson Embury. In *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*, the main character enters into a debate wherein he describes his father’s support for a strike:

> It’s, it’s a religion to him to stand by his brother working men. He looks at it as you do patriotism. If you went into the army in time of war you wouldn’t expect to get paid for the risk you ran. Well, that’s his position in regard to the strike. He believes it’s right. He thinks men are being defrauded out of their just earnings, and he is making this fight to get them justice.174

A similar sentiment surfaced when Elisha Paul testified in Springhill, Nova Scotia. His use of right was indicative of an overarching notion of right and wrong. Miners often complained to the Commission that they would often lose a whole box of coal if there was too much rock in their box or container. Responding to this situation, Paul testified:

> “I do not know there is any way of remedying it; it would hardly do to stop docking but

173 Freeden notes this discrepancy in the notion of rights claiming: “Righteousness is the opposite of wrong and refers to what is correct, true or virtuous. Although we may have a right to what is ‘right,’ no objective moral position is necessarily implied by a right.” See Freeden, *Rights*, 8.

there should be some scale arranged so that we would not lose the whole box; but it is right, when it is done, that we should lose some portion of the box.” 175 Paul’s description of this issue incorporates the interests of employers and workers in an approach grounded in an overarching conception of right and wrong: it is right that the worker should be docked and wrong that he should lose the whole box. This overarching notion of right and wrong existed in many other areas. George McAndrews, a foreman at the Ganong factory in New Brunswick, discussed employee/employer relations in the following terms: “[w]e expect them to use us as we use them; we try to use them right, and we expect them to do the same by us. This is a matter that we leave to a man’s judgement.” 176 For McAndrews, the company (we) deals with its employees (them) on an individual basis. Both parties were vying to benefit from the relationship as each had a stake in the relations of production. The extent of this employment policy was rather naively displayed earlier in his testimony: “[t]here is one thing about our factory that I have noticed, and it is, that I have never seen any one ask for an increase of wages, but, if they were deserving of it, they got it. All the hands get paid good wages, but if they are not suitable hands they are not kept on.” 177 Again in this reference there appears to be a general notion of right and wrong that employers and workers tacitly agreed upon, with the happy result of harmony amidst employers and employees. 178 However, it was seldom that both parties agreed to similar terms concerning what was ‘right.’

175 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 275.
176 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 493.
177 GC, RCRLC, New Brunswick Evidence (1889), 492.
178 There is also recourse to pronouns and the language of hands in this respect.
The more glaring reference to rights occurred within a legal or constitutional context. For example, when witnesses engaged in “rights talk” they were often referring to their legal right to something. In turn, “rights talk” not only often suggested that the state had legal and moral obligations, but also evoked a wide range of liberal concepts. Arguing for the ‘right’ to join or form labour organizations not only gave ‘labour’s’ arguments legal and moral weight, but also suggested that the state had a central role in the debate between labour and capital. As Michael Ignatieff observes:

... rights not only help to make disputes precise, and therefore manageable, but also help each party appreciate that the other has some right on its side. [...] governments and legislatures exist to protect, defend, and where we deem necessary, extend our rights. Rights define not only the limits of government power, but also its very purpose.\(^\text{179}\)

It would be absurd to suggest that the Commission directly encouraged witnesses to articulate their issues using a language of rights. Yet, they did so often enough, in an innovative public sphere the state had itself defined as an important part of its agenda.\(^\text{180}\)

This process is touched upon by Corrigan and Sayer who argue that the state attains power by providing the conditions under which people speak “in particular ways — as voters, ‘respectable’ trades unionists, plaintiffs in the courts — if they are able to say anything at all. Not the least of the ‘State’s’ monopolies is of the means of legitimized

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\(^\text{180}\) Corrigan and Sayer refer to rights as a form of state sanctioned “legitimate power.” For example, voting is a means for a democratic society to select a government. Although democratic societies can only exercise this “right” when parties in power select when an election can happen. Also, the only means to change a regime is to participate in this institution suggesting that, even though people have power in democratic societies, how they exercise that power is mediated by institutions, rules and regulations that are imposed by “legitimate” state authorities. P. Corrigan and D. Sayer, *The Great Arch: english State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (New York, 1985), 198-199.
speech.”\textsuperscript{181} The articulation of rights in the negotiation between labour and capital naturally placed the state in the role of arbitrator, managing the stormy relations of employer and employed amidst the changes wrought by the Great Transformation. With this in mind I have flagged the use of the word “right” in the testimony from the Commission.\textsuperscript{182}

The question of rights was addressed quite frequently in the testimony of J.J. Franklin, a superintendent of the Toronto Street Railway. The commissioners asked Franklin if he and the Toronto Street Railway Company had any objection to employees belonging to a secret society of any kind. Franklin responded, “[w]e have no objection to men belonging to anything except labor organizations; we do not employ men who belong to labor organizations.”\textsuperscript{183} In fact, when asked what the result would be if an employee did join a labour organization Franklin replied, “it is optional with us whether we keep him or not.”\textsuperscript{184} Franklin’s perspective was echoed by many managers who testified before the Commission. By virtue of their powerful and respectable position, employers had the right to refuse employment to those who disagreed with them.

In a similar vein, a reference to ‘freedom’ surfaced when Franklin explained his conception of the equality between employers and employees in terms of their relation to the means of production. With respect to fining employees for lateness, for example, Franklin remarked:

\textsuperscript{181} Corrigan and Sayer, \textit{The Great Arch}, 198.
\textsuperscript{182} The rights of labour and capital were described in these terms 262 times in the testimony.
\textsuperscript{183} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), 330.
\textsuperscript{184} GC, \textit{RCRLC}, Ontario Evidence (1889), 330.
[w]e never fine a man whatever. We tell a man when we hire him: whenever you think you can better yourself we do not require any notice and you can go and say that you want to go. There are times and occasions when we do not want the service of men, and if you do anything that is not quite proper we will do the same by you, namely, we will tell you that we do not want you. We do not expect to receive any notice and we do not give any.\footnote{GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 330.}

This statement equally suggests a power position on the part of the company couched in a notion of freedom. There was an implicit equality articulated in this instance which did not, in effect, have the same meaning for employers as it did for employees: labour did not have the freedom to fire capital.\footnote{Management’s freedom to fire without notice was a source of complaint among witnesses. For example, Francois Lainé: “He sent me off without my notice, whilst we are obliged to give notice to the shop.” See GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 595. See also Pierre Pleau: “… and when their time had expired they were unwilling to pay them saying that they had not been notified, and they made them put in another fifteen days. The Company, for instance, never gave notice. When they wished to discharge anyone they discharged him. They only gave notice to the foreman.” GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 317.} There was also an obvious imbalance in the employee/employer relationship. Individual workmen were free to pursue whatever was best for themselves individually. Companies similarly exercised their freedom in the ‘free market.’\footnote{This dynamic between employers and individual workers in a free market was also the basis for a more broad notion of industrial legality in the late nineteenth century. See Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, \textit{Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers’ Collective Action in Canada 1900 – 1948} (Toronto, 2001); and, Eric Tucker, “Making the Workplace Safe in Capitalism: The Enforcement of Factory Legislation in Nineteenth Century Ontario,” \textit{Labour/Le Travail} 21 (Spring 1988), 45-85.} Yet, in the end, it was the company which was in a position to decide when buyers and sellers of labour were on equal ground.

Franklin addressed this last point in terms of the inherent rights of both labour and capital. Ultimately, Franklin’s rationalization was that if someone ‘chose’ to work for ‘his’ company they were subject to the wishes of that company. The purchase of
labour-power gave the Toronto Street Railway the right to stop its employees from organizing. A formal “reciprocity” of rights cloaked an actual “inequality” of rights. The tensions this posed for liberal theory were acute:

Q. After a man puts in a square, honest day’s work to your satisfaction, do you think that you should tamper with his liberty in regard to saying whether he should belong to a society or not? A.- We never thought so until we had it proved to us. When this was unmistakably proven we made up our minds that we would not interfere with labor organizations so long as they interfered simply with the men’s rights, but when they interfered with the company’s rights that was a different question altogether.188

According to Franklin, the organization of workers infringed upon the rights of the Toronto Street Railway. The company allowed individual workmen to organize and protect their rights but when people worked for the Toronto Street Railway, their individual rights were trumped by the collective rights of the company which included workers and management. In the end, this conception of individual and collective rights translated into a very distinct power position: the company felt justified in enforcing control over their employees in the effort to maintain their rights. Compare this example with the statement of J. B. Moreford, the superintendent of the Michigan Central Railway:

I have never to my knowledge since I have been in Canada discharged or suspended a man except for a just cause – either for drinking intoxicating liquors to excess or direct violation of the time-card rules. I don’t hold anything against a man in that way. Any man on our road has a right to his opinion; we don’t care what his religious principles or his politics are, or what association he belongs to, as long as he conducts himself in a mannerly way, so as not to disgrace the officers of the company who employ him.189

188 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 334-335.
189 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 556.
For Moreford, individuals were free to their (respectable) opinions – their religion, politics, and associations. However, a line was drawn when this individual right infringed upon the collective rights of the company. As these examples suggest, the articulation of rights had the effect of determining a very distinct power relationship between employers and employees. These two witnesses show a very different view of their employee’s involvement in labour organizations but the rationality behind their stance was based on the notion of rights and grounded in a broad discourse of liberalism.

Another example of how rights talk surfaced when shoe factory owner Robert Taylor -- who had driven the local Knights of St. Crispin out of existence more than a decade earlier -- testified in Halifax. Commissioner Heakes asked Taylor if he had any objections to employing men belonging to labour organizations, to which the latter replied “yes:”

Q. If you knew men belonged to such organizations would you employ them? A. No.
Q. What objection have you with them? A. I think there is no necessity for them, and for that reason I would not employ men belonging to them.
Q. Do you employ a man for what he is worth according to your opinion? A. Yes. Q. Has not a man the right to put a price on his labor? A. Yes; and I have the same right.190

Marx discusses this very principle in Capital: the barrier between labour and capital stemmed in part not only from rival conceptions about their relation to production, but

190 GC, RCRLC, Nova Scotia Evidence (1889), 17-18.
in terms of competing rights. According to Taylor, employees’ rights were only a factor on an individual basis. But, when workers organized in the effort to guarantee wage levels, Taylor felt he was in a position to take away that right because it infringed on his individual rights. Interestingly, commissioner Heakes did not question Taylor further so as to understand why the latter was in a position to usurp the right of workers to organize. A similar conception of rights was conceded by a worker in Quebec but the conditions for the right were determined by the church and not his employer:

Q.- Do you not think if a man gives a full day’s work, he has the right to belong to any society he chooses? A.- If the society was approved of by our Ecclesiastical superiors, I am ready to acknowledge it.

Q.- You were asked if a man has the right to fix the price of his own work? A.- Certainly he has.

This witness obviously acknowledged his right to organize and determine the price of his labour. However, this individual right was conditional upon another community deeply ensconced in questions of morality and respectability: the church. Indeed, he was prepared to concede these rights based upon the church’s opinion of labour organization. The liberal understandings inherent in the debate between labour and capital in the Commission often turned upon the notions of individual and collective rights. Indeed, rights were evoked by witnesses as an appeal for the state to recognize a


192 This is a traditional bugbear of 19th century liberal theory. For an important study of the liberal critique of ‘associationalism,’ see Jean-Marie Fecteau, “État et associationnisme au xix siècle québécois: elements pour une problématique des rapports État / société dans la transition au capitalisme,” in Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada (Toronto, 1992).

193 GC, RCRLC, Quebec Evidence (1889), 1161.
social and moral ‘obligation’ and respond in such a way that the ‘right’ thing would be done. Capital and labour used this language because ‘rights talk’ had particular potency in this liberal order, all parties apparently agreeing upon the sanctity of rights.

The antagonism of class relations described in the language of the Labour Commission paradoxically suggests, at a deeper level of analysis, relations of reciprocity between ‘labour’ and ‘capital.’ Both sides agreed that there was such a thing as rights which the government should enforce. Furthermore, the state provided the very public sphere within which these relations of reciprocal rights were articulated. In this way the state can be seen as the vehicle that negotiated, even balanced, the conflicting and contradictory reciprocities of class relations. This process was personified in the testimony of William Collins, an engineer and machinist from Ontario. In discussing the introduction of machines into the workplace and the effects upon workers Collins stated, “[u]nfortunately for the employee … the object of the manufacture of those machines is to reduce manual labour. Now it would be alright if the whole community equally benefited — I do not go for the laboring classes enjoying all the benefits — but I want the working people to enjoy their portion. I am prepared to assert here or anywhere that the working people as a class do not enjoy these rights.”

According to one witness, labour conflict resulted from the ignorance of their rights shared by both parties:

The moulders walked out last summer upon us on one occasion making a demand for increased wages. I think myself they were somewhat hasty; perhaps there was a little haste on both sides; a little hastiness perhaps on

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194 GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 826-827.
the part of the superintendent, in the way he asked them, and a little haste on their part in the way they made the demand. The matter could have been very easily arranged and settled if there had been better understanding between the two parties, when they came together, as to their rights. It was settled satisfactorily to the men within a fortnight, and we have had no trouble since.¹⁹⁵

In a sense, then, we can look at the testimony of many of these ‘ordinary Canadians,’ both working-class and middle-class, as suggestive of an implicit political theory. In combination with the metaphors of power that naturalized these relations (vertical lines, pronouns, hands, etc.) we are allowed much more insight into the complexities — cultural and otherwise — surrounding the Labour Question as well as the relations between the state, labour and capital. The Labour Commission can be seen not only as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital but as a reflection of their reciprocal interests and shared imagined community.

This Commission — and arguably Canadian royal commissions in general — operated ‘hegemonically’ in an attempt to secure consent to inequalitarian social and political relations. Exploring the relationship between labour and capital as it was constructed in this public sphere is a fundamental aspect of understanding the culture from which such commonsense understandings were derived. A liberal discourse of rights and freedoms worked alongside other cultural associations to create and naturalize power relationships.

¹⁹⁵ GC, RCRLC, Ontario Evidence (1889), 1025.
between labour and capital and to forward a vision of social order compatible with an emergent middle class.
Conclusion: Commissioning Consent

As a testament to the late-Victorian period, the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital has a dual purpose. It displays signs of tried and tested political maneuvering in the traditions of patronage and royal commissions in Canada. It also reveals evidence of the transition in social/liberal values that envisioned, even anticipated expanded roles for the state and the management of economic development that would become prominent in the next century. In the end, the Labour Commission offers historians much more general insight into late-Victorian social thought than particular insight into the world of workers.

On the surface, the Commission was intended to get votes for Macdonald’s Conservative Party on the eve of a federal election. The selection(s) of commissioners as well as the composition of witnesses, the timing of the announcement of the Commission and the industries it chose to investigate support this interpretation. Yet, in order to achieve these partisan objectives, the federal government needed to appease, not so much ‘labour’ or ‘capital,’ but the growing ranks of the reform-minded middle class. Indeed, the Commission was a means of mobilizing ‘middle-most’ Canadians by offering them the opportunity to engage in national affairs and generalize about patterns of wealth and poverty in their society. In the process, the discussion of the relations between labour and capital easily encompassed a series of social and moral beliefs about social order.

The commissioners were central players in this dialogue. The attitudes and values of the commissioners had a profound effect on the selection and treatment of
witnesses. They were largely responsible for engaging witnesses and bringing out particular social and political understandings. The Commissioners did little to hide their own personal and political preferences when they were questioning witnesses. Similarly, the Labour Commission’s witnesses were not a random or representative sample of Canada’s working population. Many were prominent members of their respective communities chosen in part for their political affiliation, but also because of their experience and ‘expertise’ in industrial matters. Yet, because many ‘worker’ witnesses were asked (or perhaps compelled) by their employers to give evidence, the Commission cannot be considered a spontaneous and free ‘public sphere.’ Engagement with a royal commission held, for some witnesses, the possibility of recognition of their social standing and personal worth. For others, criticism of their workplace or their employer might cost them their jobs. Rather than providing the unmediated ‘voice of the workers,’ we see in the evidence the privileging of a series of social and moral understandings reflective of middle-class Canadians.

The Labour Commission operated in such a way as to provide a space for the negotiation of contestable definitions and implicit sociologies about social order. It provided a means for the people most vocal about the labour question to comment on a range of issues, from factory discipline to arbitration, from the morality of factory workers to urban housing. In principle, all witnesses were equal before the Commission as each was formally allowed to take the stand. Those who were relatively inarticulate and spoke very little about their experiences were witnesses just as those who spoke at length about their thoughts on the social condition. Inherent in the Commission’s
composition, then, is a notion of “liberal utopianism” whereby witnesses could deposit their class prejudices and interests at the door and objectively discuss Canada’s industrial transformation. Yet, not all witnesses were comfortable or willing to express their views about their jobs, their employers or their thoughts on the ‘social’ before a federally-appointed commission.

There were many plays of power and authority in the Commission that should also be considered when its evidence is cited. The commissioners decided whose sociologies and philosophical assumptions about social order were acceptable and whose were not. Accurate knowledge about labour and capital was intimately linked to a host of social attributes. Middle-class gender, class and racial ideals structured the ‘factual’ testimony taken by the Commission. This common sociology runs through the position of both ‘capital’ and ‘labour,’ ‘employers’ and ‘employed’ whereby notions of respectability, morality and expertise were valued. The Commissioners allowed some witnesses to expand upon certain subjects. Others were cut short because they did not stick to ‘the facts.’ Witnesses who disrupted the easy flow of liberal assumptions about social order were sometimes shut down. Thus, it should be clear that this public sphere suffered severe limitations. Based on the number of people who complained to the Commission in the hopes that their condition could be helped, many witnesses saw it as a powerful extension of the state. Even though it was occasionally stated outright that the Commission could do nothing for complainants, witness after witness brought their concerns to it and, in the process, tacitly consented to a particular political and economic order.
The Commission worked to ‘naturalize’ certain contingent and contestable cultural understandings. Notions of morality, authority, expertise, and respectability were all involved in the exchanges between commissioners and witnesses. Much of the work of the Commission was involved with the subtle and pervasive use of metaphors and pronouns, concerns for respectability and morality of workingmen and women, and the production of ‘good workers.’ Commissioners and witnesses alike created knowledge about the relations of production (with all their cultural, ideological and class implications) through their discussion of industrial relations. The testimony they produced suggests an inner coherence in these discussions of labour and capital that centres around liberalism generally and rights specifically. In a sense, then, we can look at the testimony of many of these ‘ordinary Canadians,’ both working-class and middle-class, as suggestive of an implicit political theory.

The Commission proclaimed in its very title a dualism that was a prominent feature of the period: the relations of ‘labour’ and ‘capital.’ It culminated in the release of two reports, conventionally associated with these very factions. Yet, as we have seen, the Commission complicated this apparent binary. On the surface it supported a starkly polarized vision of Canada in the 1880s. The ‘labour’ and ‘capital’ commissioners fought openly with one another as witnesses were called to represent these social abstractions. However, the evidence suggests that social reciprocity and mutual interest not only influenced many witnesses, but also the commissioners themselves. The acute attention paid to the relations of labour and capital in the 1880s (in the form of many commissions) also suggested that the Dominion, like other industrializing countries, was
in the throes of a ‘modern’ dilemma that the state was closely monitoring. However, state officials – commissioners and members of parliament alike – continually demonstrated that the industrial evils normally associated with Britain and the United States were distant from Victorian Canada.

The Labour Commission was not only a forum for competing social factions but a means of building consensus. As an exercise in state formation, the Labour Commission represents the active involvement of the Canadian state as a mediator of labour and capital. By providing a public sphere for an ‘open’ debate between labour and capital, the Canadian state not only relieved social tension by providing citizens a means to voice their concerns, but also endorsed a series of social and moral understandings about society and social order. Relations of subordination and domination were ‘naturalized’ in the published testimony in ways that not only confirmed the prominence of the middle class, but also relegated ‘labour’ to the periphery of the “Labour Question.” Its overall message was not one of class polarization but of class reciprocity and harmony, one it achieved by rigorously selecting out certain industries and people for the bulk of attention.

Employing royal commissions as a means of addressing national issues fits nicely with a tacit agenda of advancing and legitimizing bourgeois beliefs and values. The Canadian government, similar to that in the United States and Britain, was busy sanctioning state investigations into the ‘labour question’ in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Although this gave Canadian investigations a nuanced vision of late-Victorian values and understandings, it also meant that the Dominion was well
behind other countries in accessing new concepts from social science and statistics. For example, even though the Commission collected thousands of bits of data about economic life (particularly national wage scales), and put at least some energy into massaging them into patterns, there was no evidence that this data influenced any decision-making body within the bureaucracy or gave rise to a more systematic or rigorous interpretation of the Canadian labour market or the Canadian economy. In spite of repeated calls for a labour bureau – Macdonald himself had suggested its creation in the same speech that announced the formation of the Labour Commission -- there was no scope within the Canadian bureaucracy for the scientific analysis of such data.

The Labour Commission, as is the case with Canadian royal commissions in general, not only reflected, but also actively created, social issues. In the process it supported a series of social understandings that advanced a larger program of state formation. With the active participation of the middle class, the Labour Commission operated ‘hegemonically’ in an attempt to secure consent to inegalitarian social and political relations through a public sphere steeped in notions of morality, respectability and expertise. In addition to being valuable source for understanding late-nineteenth century working-class formation, the Labour Commission also sheds much light on the ‘culture’ from which commonsense understandings were derived. By creating this public sphere in which individuals could, in principle, drop their ideological baggage and iron out a mutual path for the advancement of the ‘Nation,’ the Labour Commission
was a prominent feature in securing consent to social relations of domination and subordination.
Appendix One – French Language Evidence

All of the Québec evidence is translated into English in the version of the Commission I have consulted, and indeed most of the bound versions of the Commission held by the Library and Archives Canada. However, French language evidence for witnesses who gave evidence in French and were translated when they testified to the Commission is available at the University of Laval and at the Québec Provincial archives. What follows is the French language evidence of the witnesses who were translated by the Commission and whom I cite. They are arranged here in the order in which they appear in this dissertation.
I. FORMATION

A. OBJECTIF

1. BUT

2. COMPOSITION

3. DURÉE

II. PROGRAMME

A. PHASES

1. INTRODUCTION

2. CONNAISSANCE

3. APPLICATION

IV. APPENDICE

1. ANNEXE

2. APPENDICE
Chansons Domestiques extraordinaires.

Char de l'épinal. — Les oiseaux de jàtou.

Char de l'épinal. — Les oiseaux de jàtou.

Char de l'épinal. — Les oiseaux de jàtou.

Char de l'épinal. — Les oiseaux de jàtou.

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Char de l'épinal. — Les oiseaux de jàtou.
Par M. W. W.-

Q. — Que fait le décret de la haute cour ?

R. — Le décret de la haute cour donne un avantage à la haute cour.

Q. — Mais, qu'est-ce que vous voulez dire par avantage ?

R. — Avantage, c'est un avantage à la haute cour.

Q. — Mais, vous ne comprenez pas le décret de la haute cour.

R. — Oh ! mais...
Appendix Two – Labour Commission Circular

The following is a copy of the circular issued by the Commission. See GC, RCRLC, Reports (1889), 5-6.

The following Circular was issued by the Commission:

ROYAL LABOR COMMISSION,

OTTAWA, 16th November, 1887.

The Royal Commission appointed for the purpose of making enquiries into all subjects connected with labor and its relations to capital will hold meetings from time to time (as may be announced) at various centres of industry.

The Commission will be glad to hear any evidence that may be offered bearing on the subject of labor, its relation to capital, the hours of labor, the earnings of laboring men and women, methods of arbitration for the settlement of disputes between employers and employees, and generally any means that may be advanced for promoting the material, social, moral and intellectual prosperity of the working classes.

For the purpose of giving a better idea of what subjects are considered pertinent to these enquiries the following general heads are given, viz.:—

Factory laws.
Laws regarding machinery.
Liens law and garnishment of wages.
Proportionate profits of capital and labor.
Cheapering of production by use of machinery.
Has the use of machinery lowered wages?
Profit-sharing.
Iron-clad contracts.
Conspiracy laws and black-lists.
Masters and servants Acts.
Child labor.
Female labor.
Employers' liability.
Truck system.
Foreign contract labor.
Land and other rents.
Weekly payments and pay days.
The apprentice system.
Hours of labor and rates of wages.
Purchasing power of wages.
Wages in Canada as compared with those in Great Britain and the United States.
Arbitration.
Effects arising from organized labor upon the working classes.
Strikes and their results.
Labor combinations.
Difference between manufacturers' prices and cost to consumers; and is this difference greater or less in the case of imported articles as compared with articles of home production?
Trusts.
Workingmen's co-operative benefit societies.
Execution of judgments.
Fining of employees.
Sunday labor.
Industrial schools.
Tenement houses and workingmen's dwellings.
Building societies.
Immigration.
Sanitary arrangements of factories, workshops and workingmen's dwellings.
Co-operation in production and distribution.
Bureaus of labor statistics.
Convict labor.
Savings of the working classes, and their investments.

Although it is believed that these subjects will fairly cover the field of investigation, it must be distinctly understood that evidence may be taken on any other subject, not here enumerated, that may be deemed to come within the scope of these inquiries.

Special enquiry will also be made into the condition of persons employed in the agricultural, mining, lumbering and fishing industries.

A. H. BLACKEBY,
Secretary.
Appendix Three – Collective Biography of Witnesses

The following collective biography lists the witnesses (who testified in Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Saint John, Halifax and New Glasgow) who I was able to locate in various published collective biographies. I present this material so as to provide some detailed background -- social involvement, political affiliation, economic activities, experience (education/professional), religious belief -- of the witnesses who appeared before the Commission.

Alexander, Charles (Montreal) was born and educated in Scotland. His professional career was in Montreal where he owned his own business. He sat on the Montreal City Council and was elected to the provincial legislature in 1874. He was regarded as one of the leaders of philanthropic works among Protestants in Montreal. He was the founder and president of the Institute for Protestant Deaf Mutes, the Protestant House of Industry and Refuge, the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Protestant hospital for the Insane. He was a founder of the Female Prison and build the “Alexander Wing” in the Boys’ Home where he was on the Board of Trustees. He was on the management committee for the Montreal General Hospital and the Society for the Protection of Women and Children; he was vice-president of the Sailors’ Institute, Chairman of the Board for Outdoor Relief, president of the Montreal Homoeopathic Association and Hospital, and vice president of the Institute Canadien. In politics he was a Liberal.


Allan, Andrew (Montreal) was born and educated in Scotland, immigrated to Canada when he was 17 and worked in his family’s shipping business. The Allen steamship line
blossomed in the nineteenth century and received a long list of contracts from the federal government of Canada. His family was, thus, very successful: Allen was the president of the Merchants Bank, the Montreal Telegraph Company, the Manitoba and North West Railway Company, the Canadian Rubber Company, the Windsor Hotel Company and the Montreal Lumber Company. He was also a Harbour Commissioner for Montreal.


**Allan, Sir Hugh (Montreal)** was born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada at an early age. His education was obtained through working at his families shipping interest and in the dry goods industry. He became affiliated with a Montreal shipping interest and quickly became a junior member of the firm and eventually running his own shipping interest. He was also the director of the Montreal Telegraph Company, the Montreal Warehousing Company, the Merchants’ Bank of Canada, the Mulgrave Gold Mining Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway.


**Archibald, Charles (New Glasgow)** was born in North Sydney and was the son of Senator D.T. Archabald. Educated in Canada and in the United States Archibald began his career working in New York as a mining engineer. He came to own and manage an extensive colliery in Cape Breton and was a partner in the firm Archibald and Company in North Sydney. He was the Vice President of the Nova Scotia Mining Society and of the Bank of Nova Scotia; a director of Camaguey Electrical Traction Company, Trinidad Electric Company, the Joint Benevolent Company and the School for the Blind. Archibald was also a governor of Dalhousie University and a promoter of the Nova Scotia League for the Protection of the Feeble-minded. He was a Presbyterian.
Archibald, Lewis (Halifax) was a baker and trade union leader. Archibald was a journeyman baker whose activities in organized labour, namely the Journeyman Baker’s Friendly Society, brought him into direct conflict with W.C. Moir (who also appeared before the Commission) on several occasions. Championing the rights of small shops and craft workers he worked toward establishing the Halifax local 89 of the Journeymen Bakers’ and Confectioners’ International Union of America. Archibald was an avid and articulate critic of industrial capitalism and its effects on working people and children.


Bain, James (Toronto) was born in England and educated in Toronto. He began his professional career working with his father, a bookseller and stationer in Toronto. Bain then began working for J. Campbell and Son where he eventually opened a branch of their establishment in London. In 1878 he joined another bookseller by the name of John Nimmo and Son which eventually became Nimmo and Bain publishers. In 1882, upon returning to Toronto, he was soon appointed as the Chief Librarian for the Toronto Public Library where his efforts resulted in the holdings of the Library increasing five-fold. Bain was the Secretary of the Canadian Institute from 1882-1886. After that time he became the Treasurer. He was also the Secretary of the St. Andrew’s Society and President of the Caledonian and Gaelic Societies. He also became the Secretary for the Toronto branch of the British Association. Bain was a protestant in religious faith. It was said Bain was “… an insatiable reader, he was, and is, thoroughly posted with regard to the best of everything in literature. Add to this fine business qualities, and it is easily understood why the Toronto Public Library occupies so high a place amongst the libraries on this continent.”
Baumgarten, Alfred (Montreal) was born and educated in Germany. His business activities in Canada and the United States were vast. He was an inspector of sugar in Germany before moving to North America where he pursued the same career. He became the president of the St. Lawrence Sugar Refining Company in Montreal and a manager of the Long Island Sugar refinery in New York. Baumgarten was a councilor and life member of the Mount Royal Club, a governor of the Montreal Western Hospital, director of the Banks of Montreal, and a director for C. Meresith and Company Limited. Baumgarten was a Lutheran and a Liberal.

Benoit, O.D. (Montreal) became the president of the Ville-Marie Assembly of the Knights of Labor soon after it was founded. While in that position he fought to have the poll tax (obliging citizens to pay a fee to vote) abolished as it affected labour’s voice in municipal politics. The Ville-Marie assembly eventually rallied several other unions in the city to instigate a broad program of social reform. This program consisted of a list of 14 measures addressing working conditions and workers political rights in Montreal. This Assembly of union interests eventually culminated in the formation of the Central Trades and Labour Council of Montreal, a union organization specifically designed to operate on the political level. Benoit was also involved in the development of a shoe manufacturing cooperative in the 1890s which ultimately failed and lead him to disassociate with the union movement.

Blue, Archibald (Toronto) was born and educated in Canada and began his career as a teacher. He soon began writing for newspapers such as the St. Thomas Journal and eventually moved to the Toronto Globe as a night editor and editorial writer. The following year, 1880, he moved to the Toronto World as an editorial writer. His work with Liberal leaning newspapers brought him to the attention of the provincial government which soon asked him to chair a commission to investigate the provinces agriculture industry (1882). His report highlighted the “resources and progress” of Ontario and eventually lead to the establishment of a Bureau of Industries of which he was appointed secretary. Blue’s efforts at collecting statistics of Ontario industries eventually lead to his becoming secretary of a royal commission on mineral resources in Ontario. His report, submitted in 1890, resulted in the establishment of a Bureau of Mines, with Blue as its director, to gather information on mining in the province. In 1900, he was recruited by the federal government to be a special commissioner in charge of preparations for the 1901 census. When a permanent census department was established he was appointed chief until his death.


Brookfield, Samuel M. (Halifax) was the president of his own company and, as such, successfully carried out important contracts in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. He built the Halifax graving dock and salvaged the steamer Ulunda and the steamship Mount Temple. He was a director of the Nova Scotia Cotton Company, Black Lake Consolidated Asbestos Company, Halifax Academy of Music, Nova Scotia Car Works, Mexican Northern Power Company, and the Empire Trust Company, and president of eastern Canada Savings and Loan Company; and, was Chief promoter of the Halifax, Liverpool and London steamship Company. He was awarded the contract
for erection of the Fleming Memorial Tower. Brookfield was a Methodist, a senator and a member of the Board of Regents and Founder of the S.M. Brookfield prize in engineering at Mt. Allison University. He was a member of the British and American Book and Tract Society, the Seaman’s Friend Society and a director and trustee of the Y.M.C.A. in Halifax. “A man of faith, energy and perseverance.”


**Bunting, William (Saint John)** was born and educated in Saint John. His public career began in the city as a clerk to the collector of taxes. He remained the same office for over 40 years. He was appointed clerk to the Board of Assessors in 1859 and chairman of the Board for a new tax law in the early 1880s. He was a member of the volunteer fire department throughout its existence and was appointed as a magistrate to the city in 1874. Bunting was an avid member of the Masonic lodge; he served in various capacities such as secretary, treasurer and master in the city but he also functioned on a province wide level serving as provincial grand secretary, deputy grand master and eventually grand master. He was a leading member of the Saint John Polymorphian Society and served as secretary to the Saint John Mechanics’ Institute as well as several sporting clubs. On his death the Saint John Daily Sun wrote, “the best years of his life were given to the service of the city and he discharged faithfully very difficult and onerous duties.”


**Carsley, Samuel (Montreal)** was born in England and worked as a dry goods clerk before coming to Canada in the 1850s. He had a shop in Kingston before moving to Montreal. In Montreal he established “the most extensive wholesale and retail dry goods firms existing in the Dominion.” He was an active member of the Montreal Board of Trade, President of the United Protestant Workingmen’s Society and the Society for the
Protection Women and Children. He was also the director of the Lachine Rapids Hydraulic and Land Company.


**Carter, Christopher Benfield (Montreal)** was born and educated in Montreal. Carter began his law career articling with E.C. Allan of Sorel. He was called to the bar in 1866 and made a Queen’s Council in 1889 as well as Bâtonnier of the Montreal bar in 1897. He was the treasurer of the Canadian Bar Association, president of the People’s Mutual Building Society and the Montreal and Sorel Railway. Politically he was a conservative.


**De Montigny, Benjaman Antoine Testard (Montreal)** was born and educated in Quebec. DeMontigny was called to the bar not long before he left for the Vatican to join the Pontifical Zouaves. Upon his return to Canada he was appointed a District Magistrate for Terrebonne and the Recorder for Montreal. He was an author, vice president of the Repatriation Society and received a Papal appointment for his military service. De Montigny was a Roman Catholic in religion.


**Douglas, George (Montreal)** began his career as a local preacher of Methodism in Montreal. His quest for further education lead him to some missionary work and several Canadian appointments in Kingston, Hamilton and Toronto. He eventually became known as a highly respected minister. In 1872, when a group of prominent Methodists were approved for a theological college in Montreal, Douglas was appointed as the principal and a professor of theology. The school grew significantly under his tutelage
because of his emphasis on contemporary issues and traditional religious training. Douglas was the president and vice president of the Montreal Conference and was involved with the Y.M.C.A., the Evangelical Alliance, and the Epworth League. His abilities as a public speaker and his concern for social purity lead him to become a spokesman for the White Cross movement. He was instrumental in founding the Equal Rights Association and a vocal opponent of the Jesuits Estate’s Act which lead him into direct conflict with national political figures such as John A. Macdonald and J.S.D Thompson.


**Douglas, William (Toronto)** was born and educated in Scotland and immigrated to Canada with his parents in the latter 1840s. Douglas completed his education in Canada, graduating from the University of Toronto in 1861 and entering the field of law. He was appointed clerk of the peace and county crown for Kent and was made a Queen’s Council in 1885. In religion Douglas was a Presbyterian and in politics a conservative.


**Drummond, Robert (Halifax)** was of Scottish origin. Drummond began his career as a coal miner and soon afterwards became a trade unionist. He was the editor and proprietor of the *Mining Record* and was for many years the secretary of the Provincial Workmen’s Association, an organization he was instrumental in founding. He was also a councilor and a royal Commander in the Nova Scotia Stationary Engineers. Late in his career, Drummond was a member of the Nova Scotia legislative Council in 1891. In politics Drummond was a Liberal.


**Dugas, Calixte Aimé (Montreal)** was born and educated in Montreal. Dugas was called to the bar in 1868. He was appointed a Police Magistrate and judge of the Sessions of the Peace and Chairman of the Quarter Sessions in Montreal ten years later. He was an Extradition Commissioner and served in the Military seeing service in the North-West rebellion. In religion he was a Roman Catholic.


**Edwards, Joseph Plimsoll (Montreal)** was born and educated in Montreal. Edwards was the editor of Dominion Illustrated and the Canadian Military Gazette. He was the secretary treasurer of Social Historical Studies in Montreal and other related publications. He was the manager of the Canadian Iron and Foundry Company in Londonderry, Nova Scotia. In religion he was an Anglican.


**Fairweather, C.H. (Saint John)** was born in New Brunswick, began his career as a wholesale clerk in Saint John and eventually opened his own business on the waterfront in that city. His business was described at the time as “one of a nucleus of smaller enterprises which helped establish Saint John in the mid ad late 19th century as the wholesale centre for the Maritimes.” Fairweather became a council member of the St. John Board of Trade in the 1860s and was active in organizing that group toward attracting new members in the city. He eventually became president of that body where he fought against the reciprocity treaty with the United States and strove to have Saint John establish itself as the port of call for the new Confederation and the eastern
terminus for the Canadian Pacific Railway. While Fairweather was interested in politics, he did not attempt to hold any office. His political leanings were with the Conservative party where he is alleged to have suggested the name of the Saint John Conservative paper the Daily Sun. He was involved in many community based organizations such as the Church of England’s Young Men’s Society and the board of city school trustees. He was also treasurer of the Relief and Aid Society set up after the fire of 1877. He was a director of the Bank of New Brunswick and was involved in the construction of railroads in the province.


**Fisher, Roswell Corse (Montreal)** was born in Montreal and called to the Quebec bar in 1871. Fisher was known for his work in political economy and social studies, subjects upon which he occasionally wrote and spoke. He was a member of the Philosophical Society of Canada and the Free Thought Association; a director of the Herald Publishing Company and vice president of the Good Government Association of Montreal. Politically he was a Liberal.


**Galbraith, John (Toronto)** was born in Quebec and educated in Ontario. He began his career surveying for railways in 1866 serving his apprenticeship on the Midland railway and afterwards moving on to the Intercolonial and the Canadian Pacific lines. Receiving a graduate degree in Engineering lead to Galbraith’s efforts toward re-organizing technical education in engineering. He eventually became the principal of a new school at the University of Toronto. In 1907 Galbraith was appointed to serve on a commission to investigate the failure of the Quebec Bridge. He occupied many honorary positions: vice-president of the Ontario Land Surveyors Association, the British and American
Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Canadian Institute. A member of the Institute of Civil Engineers and a founder (and eventual president) of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, Galbraith was also a founding member of the Madawaska Club.


**Gault, Andrew Fredrick (Montreal)** was born in Ireland and went to the High School of Montreal. He entered his professional career as a dry-goods clerk. Soon into his career he opened a whole-sale business with his brothers that prospered from the late 1850s well into the 20th century. His investment strategy was successful and lead to many posts such as directorships at Sun Mutual, the Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance company, the Royal Victoria Life Insurance Company, the Manufacturers’ Life Insurance Company, the City and District Savings Bank, the Royal Trust Company, the Molson’s Bank and the Bank of Montreal. A prominent member of the Montreal Board of Trade, Gault’s reputation was staked in cotton as he was a director at the Stormont Manufacturing Works, the Stormont Cotton Manufacturing Company and the Montreal Cotton Company. Eventually Gault would head a national cartel of cotton interests: the Canadian Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, the Dominion Cotton Manufacturers’ Association, the Dominion Cotton Mills Company Limited and the Canadian Colored Cotton Mills Company Limited which made him the president of Canada’s three largest cotton textile firms. Gault was involved in several other enterprises as well such as the Dominion Commercial Travellers’ Association, Farnham Beet and Root Sugar Company, Coirriveau Silk Manufacturing Company and the Citizens Gas Company to name a few. An active member of the Church of England (he was a treasurer in the Montreal Synod) he was also a prominent philanthropist: he founded the Gault Institute, was a treasurer of the Robert Jones Memorial Convalescent Hospital, president of the Montreal
Protestant House of Industry and Refuge, vice-president of Andrews Home, a member of the United Board of Outdoor Relief, a governor of McGill College and a warden and superintendent of St. George’s church.


**Gilpin, Edwin (Halifax)** was born and educated in Halifax. He was appointed inspector of Mines for Nova Scotia in 1879, became a member and secretary of the Board of Examiners of Colliery Officials in 1882 and, in 1886, became the Deputy Commissioner of Public Works and Mines for the Province. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the Geological Society of London, and a member of the American Institute of Mining Engineers as well as the author of a work on “the Mines and Mineral Lands of Nova Scotia.” In religious belief he was a member of the Church of England.


**Graham, Hugh (Montreal)** was born and educated in Scotland and began his apprenticeship on the *Commercial Advisor* and *The Evening Telegram* in Montreal. He then became the secretary treasurer of the Gazette Printing Company and began the publication of *The Evening Star*. Graham was one of the founders of the Good Government Association of Montreal, a director of the Society for the Protection of Women and Children as well as the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In religion he was a Presbyterian.
Grothé, Louis Ovide (Montreal) was born and educated in Montreal where he was involved in many commercial activities beginning in retail and eventually into the cigar trade where he operated a factory of over 300 employees. A Liberal, he was elected mayor of Cartierville in 1911, and unsuccessfully contested the Maisonneuve riding in a federal election in 1906. He was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and a Knight of Columbus.


Gurney, Edward (Toronto) was the son of the proprietor of E & C Gurney, a well known foundry in Hamilton. Born and educated in Hamilton, he began his professional career working in his father’s firm. He moved to Toronto in 1869 where he ran a branch of the business. This branch eventually became so large that the *Canadian Grocer* commented, “both are easily the largest of their class in the Dominion, and take rank with the large concerns in the U.S.” Gurney eventually became president of the company and expanded its operations into Boston. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Sanitarium Association and was selected as vice-president – and eventually president -- of the Toronto Board of Trade. Gurney was a conservative politically and religiously he was a Methodist.


Hall, John Smythe (Montreal) was born and educated in Montreal and was called to the Quebec bar in 1876. In 1881 he entered the Conservative firm of Carter, Church, Chapleau, Carter and Busteed where he eventually became senior partner and
associated with prominent members of Montreal society such as the premier of Quebec (Chapleau), Church (Conservative cabinet minister), and Alexander Smith (Bank of Montreal and the Canadian Pacific Railway). Hall was firmly established in the English-speaking, Conservative, Protestant business community of Montreal when he embarked into politics. He was elected to the provincial legislature from 1886 to 1897. He was best known as the cabinet minister (treasurer) who tried to arrange Quebec’s finances with English Canada and reorder that provinces fiscal policies. He eventually moved to Calgary where he became editor-in-chief of the Calgary Harold, a municipal councillor and city solicitor.


**Henshaw, Frederic Clarence (Montreal)** was born in Montreal. Henshaw was a director of the Richleau and Ontario Navigation Company, the Montreal Street Railway, and Standard Drain Pipe Company. He was president of the Citizens Gas Control Company. He was appointed vice-consul for Montreal the Republic of Uruguay and Consul for the Argentine Republic. Henshaw served with distinction in the military, eventually becoming the chairman of the Dominion Rifle Association. In religion he was an Anglican; politically he was a Conservative and, at one time, president of the Junior Conservative Club of Montreal.


**Hewitt, John (Toronto)** apprenticed as a cooper in Toronto during the 1860s. His experience in the labour movement began, however, in New York where he was a delegate to the National Labour Union assisting William Jessup, the secretary of the
Workingmen’s Union of New York City and correspondent for the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association. The Labour ideas to which Hewitt was exposed in New York remained with him upon his return to Toronto. Throughout 1871 he traveled around Ontario as a representative of the Coopers International Union and became its secretary and eventually vice-president. This put him in a position to not only assist in the establishment of the Toronto Trades Assembly (TTA) -- and eventually the Canadian Labour Union -- but become a central player in the “nine hour movement.” Hewitt was also involved in the establishment of the Canadian Workman. Hewitt campaigned for the Conservative Party in the early 1870s and was also the first Canadian labour leader to embrace the Tory platform of protective tariffs. Hewitt wrote many letters to the Canadian Workman where he advocated the removal of the property qualifications for voting, addressed social inequality and championed workers’ organization. In 1873 Hewitt was elected secretary of the Canadian Labour Union where he rallied against the government policy of assisted immigration. A prominent Conservative, he received a patronage appointment in as a clerk in Toronto’s waterworks department (a position he would hold for the duration of his life, eventually becoming the chief rating clerk) wherein he retired from the TTA. As prominent Orangeman and Tory, Hewitt was co-editor and part owner of the Orange orders paper the Sentinel and Orange Protestant Advocate. He served as a master of his Orange lodge and became the county master of the Royal Black Knights of Ireland. He was instrumental in securing labour representation for the Tories in the 1886 federal election and was a campaign leader for John Ross Robertson in 1896.


**Houston, William (Toronto)** was born and educated in Ontario. He began his newspaper career as a reporter for the Toronto Globe. His success at the Globe lead to his
establishment on its editorial staff but also similar positions with the St. John Daily Telegraph and the Toronto Liberal. Briefly a high school teacher in Toronto, he was also appointed as the librarian for the Ontario Provincial Library, Director of the Teachers Institute in Ontario and eventually president of the School of Pedagogy. Houston was elected a senator of the University of Toronto and was well published in historical and political issues. Houston was appointed as a commissioner to enquire into the working of the municipal systems of other countries in 1887 and was the president of the Toronto Political Science Association and the Orkney and Shetland Islanders’ Society. Politically he was a Liberal; in religion a Presbyterian.


**Howe, Jonas (Saint John)** had an Irish parentage but was born in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1840. He married Jane Elizabeth in 1878. He was the author of several articles on historical subjects and contributed to the publications of the New Brunswick Historical Society. He eventually became president of the New Brunswick historical society. In politics he was an imperial Federalist and a Liberal Conservative.


**Howland, William (Toronto)** born and educated in Toronto, Howland entered his professional life by working in his fathers firm. In 1872 he organized and was elected president of the Queen City Insurance Company, the youngest person to have done so at the time. He held a similar position with the Hand-in-Hand Insurance Company and Canadian Lloyd’s. Howland was also the vice-president of the Millers and Manufacturers’ Company, president of the Toronto Board of Underwriters and an executive officer of the Dominion Manufacturers’ Association and the Toronto Board of Trade. While largely independent in his political views, Howland was a strong
supporter of the National Policy; yet, he was also instrumental in the formation of the Canada First Party. Howland’s philanthropic works were expansive and included efforts toward temperance. He was a chairman on the Trust Board of the Toronto Hospital, was instrumental in the establishment of the Industrial School, was a chairman of the executive committee of the Prisoner’s Aid Association a big supporter of the Toronto Mission Union.


**Hughes, James Laughlin (Toronto)** was born and educated in Ontario and worked on his father’s farm before entering his career as a school teacher. In 1867 he was appointed an assistant in the Provincial Normal School in Toronto, he eventually became headmaster of that institution. In 1874 he was chosen as the Inspector of Public Schools in Toronto. Hughes was a member of the Central Committee of Examiners from 1877-1882 and was appointed by the provincial government to be a commissioner to investigate frauds in teachers’ exams in 1877. The province also sent him to St. Louis in 1883 to investigate their kindergarten system, an endeavor that eventually lead to the establishment of kindergarten classes in Ontario under his lead. In 1893 he was the Chairman of the World’s Congress of Elementry Education and president of the Chautauqua Literary and Science Circle in Canada. In 1895 he was elected a director of the Dominion Educational Association. Hughes also held high offices in the Orange, Masonic and Templar societies: he was the grand Master of the Orangemen of Ontario West, President of the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, President of the Toronto Social Services Association and Chairman of the Women’s Enfranchiseement Association. An author of various publications on history and teaching, he unsuccessfully ran for the Ontario House of Assembly in 1890. A member of the Methodist church and a
Conservative, he was an organizer for the Equal Rights Association. Hughes was described as “Observant, far-sighted, ambitious and energetic” and “Easily at the front among American school men.”


**Judah, Fredric Thomas (Montreal)** was born in Quebec. His family moved to Montreal in the 1830s where he studied law and was called to the bar in 1848. Soon after he accepted a position in the department of Crown Lands, putting him squarely in the middle of the Jesuits’ Estate debate. After Confederation he practiced law in Montreal and eventually became a Queen’s Council in 1887. He was a director of the Montreal City and District Bank and governor of the Protestant Hospital for the Insane.


**Keating, E.H. (Halifax)** was born and educated in Nova Scotia. In 1863 he secured an appointment as a rodman on the Nova Scotia government railways and, from that point on in his career, dedicated his interests in engineering pursuits. Working with the likes of George Whightman and Stanford Flemming, he was quickly recognized for his talents and appointed the duties of assistant engineer on the Pictou railway. In 1867 Keating worked on the Windsor-Annapolis line but quickly left the position so as to work in constructing the Intercolonial Railway between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. He was appointed to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Upon his return to Halifax, Keating found himself elected as the city engineer and the engineer of the water works. In this post Keating made a name for himself. Devoting himself to improving public works, Keating designed and patented a machine to clean sewer lines. Keating was also
involved with the establishment of a graving dock in Halifax harbour. He was connected with several societies such as member of the Civil Engineers of London, the American Society of Civil Engineers, and a member of the Water Works Association of Cincinnati.


**Kribbs, Louis (Toronto)** was born and educated in Ontario. He entered journalism early in his career and was engaged successfully at the *Globe, Mail, News, World* and *Empire* in Toronto. He was the news editor and parliamentary correspondent for the *Empire*. He was also an editor for the *Standard*, a conservative campaign journal. He was the President of the Dominion press Gallery and founded the *Advocate*, a journal on spirits and wine. Kribbs was a conservative and an Orangeman.


**Labelle, Jean Baptiste (Montreal)** was born and educated in Quebec and began his career as a navigator for the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company. He gave up sailing in 1880 and became a passenger agent with the Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Occidental Railway Company. He soon became the general manager of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company. In 1887 he was elected for a seat in the House of Commons, representing Richelieu county. In politics he was a Conservative and in religion a Roman Catholic.


**Laberge, Lois (Montreal)** was born and educated in Montreal where he practiced medicine early in his career. He eventually became the cities Health Officer in 1885. He was appointed to the Provincial Board of Health, represented Montreal at several
International Congress’ on public health. He was a member of the French Society of Hygene and the American Public Health Organization. Also, he founded the Alliance Scientific University and became its North and South America vice president. Henry James Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 623-624.

**Lessell, Arthur (Halifax)** was a carpenter and union organizer but not much is known about him save his efforts to organize workers in Halifax. Particularly skilled workers, Lessell tried to exclude workers whose abilities were not with the standards of the craft. He became president of the Local 83, Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. His most successful achievement as president was the 1889 carpentry strike that reduced hours for the same pay. “To him may be attributed the nucleus of the labor organizations which were set on foot and flourished in this community, and which, despite occasional illustrations to the contrary, are admitted by workingmen generally to have been fraught with good to them.”


**Lovell, John (Montreal)** immigrated to Canada when he was ten and apprenticed as a youth working on publications such as the *Canadian Times and Weekly* and the *Literary and Political Recorder*. Afterwards he began working at the Montreal Gazette before entering a partnership which produced the Tory newspaper, the *Montreal Daily Transcript* and began to print Canadian textbooks. Lovell was one of the first printers in Lower Canada to mechanize his presses. Lovell was a life long advocate for Canadian publications and was fully behind the protective tariff. His interest in school textbooks eventually lead to his establishing a printing factory in the United States so as to avoid the copyright infractions that, he argued, were unfairly imposed on Canadian publishers. Lovell was a devout Anglican and was a warden and member of Trinity
Chapel; he was prominent in the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society and took an active interest in the Grey Nuns.


**Mackasey, John (Halifax)** was a commission merchant, lieutenant in the 63rd Battalion of Rifles, liquor licence inspector and member of the Charitable Irish Society. Mackasey’s efforts as a labour leader has drawn the attention of Canadian historians. His efforts at organizing Halifax’s dock workers are notable given their less than favorable working conditions. Mackasey was successful in organizing over five hundred workers from 1882 to 1883. A vocal critic of the National Policy and the commercial antics of the merchant class in Halifax, Mackasey was instrumental in the 1884 longshoremen’s strike which brought him into direct conflict with the mayor (and witness to the Commission) James Mackintosh.


**MacKinnon, Tristiam A. (Montreal)** was born in Ireland and started working in the railway service in the United States. He became the superintendent of a line in Vermont not long before he assumed a similar position on the Brockville, Ottawa and Canada Central Railway. He was also the general manager of the South Eastern Railway before it was transferred over to the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Canadian Pacific company eventually retained his services and made him the general superintendent of the Ontario and Atlantic division.

Mackintosh, James Crosskill (Halifax) was born and educated in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. He started his career as a cashier at the Bank of Nova Scotia and eventually went into business for himself as a banker and stock broker. He sat for some time as an alderman and for three years was the mayor of Halifax. In his municipal dealings he changed the system of tax assessment and carried through a new system of tax collections and accounting. Mackintosh was the director of various charitable associations, was Vice President of the Halifax School for the Blind, president of the Starr Manufacturing Company, and President of the YMCA. He also became a major in the Nova Scotia militia. Mackintosh was a Presbyterian, a Conservative and a “believer in the National Policy for Canada.”


McAvity, George (Saint John) was born and educated in Saint John, New Brunswick. During his career he became president of T. McAvity and Sons Ltd., Vice president of the St. John Pulp and Paper Company, president of the New Brunswick Coal & Railway Co., Edmonton, Yukon And Pacific Railway, and the New Brunswick Cold Storage Company. He eventually served as commander of the New Brunswick Central Railway. In politics he was a Liberal and one of the principal organizers of that party.


McDonald, William C. (Montreal) was born and educated in P.E.I. McDonald moved to Montreal early in his career becoming an exporter and merchant. He eventually embarked on a career as a tobacco merchant with great commercial success. He was a governor of the Montreal General Hospital and a director and largest shareholder of the Bank of Montreal and vice president of the St. John Ambulance Association. McDonald was a governor of McGill University, an institution to which he donated, over several
decades, over 1.5 million dollars. McDonald was a Roman Catholic in religion and was unmarried.


**McGarvey, Owen (Montreal)** immigrated to Canada at 17 where he soon opened his own shop that expanded significantly over 40 years. A consistent prize winner at Dominion and international exhibitions, McGarvey’s business acumen was well known in Montreal where he was a member of the Board of Trade. He was a member of St. Patrick’s church, a vice-president of the St. Patrick’s Total Abstinence Society and a director of the Montreal St. Patrick’s Orphan Asylum and the Montreal St. Bridget’s Refuge. He was also a life time governor of the Montreal General Hospital, vice-president of the Notre-Dame Hospital, and vice-president of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company.


**McKay, Alexander (Halifax)** was born and educated in Nova Scotia and began teaching in the 1850s. He was the principle of schools in Dartmouth by 1872. By the 1880s he was appointed as a teacher of mathematics and physical science and eventually the supervisor Halifax city schools. McKay was able to coordinate with community interest groups and became secretary of the Victoria School of Art and Design where he was able to promote art education and industrial drawing for teachers and students. In the 1890s McKay worked with women’s groups in the city to advance a social programs and cooking schools; he established school-garden programs, worked towards having female representation on the Halifax Board of School Commissioners and implemented medical and dental services for city schools. McKay also helped organize the Teachers Protective Union and formal training for local educators. He was secretary and eventually
McKay, Alexander (Hamilton) was born and educated in Hamilton. He began his professional career in the grain and flour business and eventually became the President of the Grimsby and Beamsville Electric Railway. He served as an Alderman to Hamilton from 1879 to 1885 and afterwards was elected mayor. In the 1886 federal election McKay was elected as the representative of Hamilton in the House of Commons, a post which he held until 1896. Elected as a Conservative and served as that party’s ‘Whip.’ After 1896 he was appointed the Inspector of Customs for western Ontario. McKay was a Mason and was also involved with the Oddfellows, the Hamilton Club, the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club and the Canadian Club.


Milne, John (Hamilton) was born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada with his parents where he was educated. He began his career as a teacher but left that path for health reasons. Milne worked for a time in the Pennsylvanian oil fields whereupon he returned to Canada as a contractor and assisted in the construction of the Canadian Southern Railway. In 1873 Milne moved to Essex, Ontario where he embarked extensively in lumbering and manufacturing and was elected the first mayor of that town. Milne’s commercial interests eventually included real estate and banking. An ardent Liberal, he turned down nominations in his name to run for the House of
Commons. Milne was for a time the Grand Master of the A.O.U.W. and was regarded as a forcible lecturer and sound public speaker.


**Mitchell, James (Saint John)** was born and educated in New Brunswick. Mitchell taught before he became a lawyer and was admitted to the bar in 1870. He was a school inspector through the early 1870s when the Common Schools Act was implemented. He entered provincial politics in 1882 finishing third for the four-member constituency of Charlotte. He joined Liberal Andrew Blair and was awarded with the surveyor general’s position through three elections. As General surveyor, Mitchell toured the province and acquired a vast knowledge of New Brunswick’s economic position: its poverty, the changes in the ship building industry, the logging industry and New Brunswick’s railway system. When Mitchell lost the office of Surveyor General he was appointed provincial secretary and receiver general. Mitchell was also the commissioner of agriculture and was instrumental in the establishment of the New Brunswick dairy industry. “A lifelong Conservative, he none-the-less threw his weight behind the man who created New Brunswick’s Liberal Party. He was one of the last unaligned politicians in an arena where party lines were becoming firmly fixed.”


**Moir, W.C. . (Halifax)** took control of the family bakery upon his father’s death and turned the institution into a highly profitable business by incorporating new technologies such as steam power. Frequently in conflict with the journeymen bakers of Halifax, he regularly used strike-breakers as well as troops to address any labour problems. On occasion this approach amounted to firing his unionized workers and replacing them with more compliant employees. “His single-minded pursuit of capital
and profits suggests both the achievement and costs of 19th-century industrial capitalism in Canada.”


**Morrice, David (Montreal)** was born and educated in Scotland and began his professional career in the United Kingdom. He immigrated to Canada in the 1850s and soon settled in Montreal where he built a successful merchant and manufacturing company. He was an elder in the Presbyterian Church and Chairman of the Board of Management at the Presbyterian College in Montreal. A well known philanthropist, Morrice supported such institutions as the Y.M.C.A., the Sailors Institute, the Hospital of Refuge and the General Hospital. He was a director of the Royal Victoria Institute, president of the Montreal Investment and Freehold Company, a member of the Council of the Montreal Art Association and a long time member of the Montreal Board of Trade. Politically he was a Conservative.


**Motton, Robert (Halifax)** was educated in Halifax, and was admitted to the Nova Scotia bar in the 1850s. He was suspended from the bar in the early 1860 upon which he practiced in the lower courts and tried criminal cases. Upon his re-admission to the bar, Motton eventually became a Queen’s Council as well as a stipendiary magistrate and recorder for Dartmouth. Motton faced such adversaries as J.S.D. Thompson, Macdonald’s minister of finance, in court, and became one of two legal advisors to the Society for the Protection of Cruelty which eventually came to include the abuse of women, children, seamen and animals. Serving in several high-profile legal actions, Motton was eventually appointed as the stipendiary magistrate for the city of Halifax. He was politically involved, for a short time, in his career as the leader of the Young
Nova Scotia Party. Motton was also involved in municipal politics: he was an alderman for Ward 3 in Halifax and he unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Halifax in the 1880s. When Motton assumed a judgeship in 1886, he was confronted with the all the issues of social reform such as temperance, prostitution and family violence: “a Methodist active in such movements as temperance, social purity, and sabbitarianism, [he] readily displayed his social biases in court.” Motton was an able public speaker giving lectures on current affairs, moral questions and his legal experiences.


**Naylor, John (Halifax)** was born in India and moved to Halifax soon after he married where he acquired a vast knowledge of property values and made his living as a trusted appraiser and real estate broker. He was involved in many occupations such as an employment agent, contract carter, poultry farmer, census enumerator (in 1881) and chief license inspector in Halifax under the federal liquor Act. He was also involved as the secretary agent for the Nova Scotia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty. Naylor failed at securing a position as alderman to Ward 1 in Halifax. However, his personality was certainly known throughout that city. Many, particularly merchants, were behind his organizing the watering of downtown streets, his efforts with the Church of England and the St.George’s society. Other Haligonians were not so forgiving of his temperance bias as a liquor inspector. A lover of animals, Naylor broadened his prevention of cruelty to include women and children which, at times, brought him head to head with late-Victorian patriarchal values and changing industrial relationships.


**Nichols, Fredric (Toronto)** was born and educated in England and immigrated to Canada in his late teens with an interest in mining, insurance, and publishing. Largely
noted for his efforts in the development of electricity, he organized the first light company in Canada, the Toronto Incandescent Electric Light Company. Nichols was for seven years the Secretary of the Canadian Manufacturers Association where he took an active part in the development of the National Policy. He was also the founder and editor of the *Canadian Manufacturer*. He was the vice-president of the Toronto Press Club and President of the Athenaeum Club. The offices he held were quite extensive: director of the Toronto electric Light Company, Manufacturers’ Life Insurance Company and Star Newspaper Publishing Company; Secretary of the London Electric Company, vice-president of the Peterborough and Ashburnham Street Railway Company and the Victoria Consolidated Hydraulic Mining Company; President of the Brantford Street Railway Company, the Lake Manitoba Railway and Canal Company and the National Electric Light Association. Nichols was an honorary director of the Toronto Industrial Exhibition Association and a member of the council of the Haveergal Hall Ladies College. In religion he was a member of the Church of England and politically he was a Conservative.


**O’Brien, Michael (Halifax)** was a shipwright and caulker and a dominant player in the Shipwrights’ and Caulkers’ Association of Halifax and Dartmouth. O’Brien was a very successful worker and union organizer. It was said of O’Brien that “he was one of the most thrifty residents of Halifax, [of] steady and industrious habits, a good and sincere friend and foremost in all works that tended to the welfare of the city.” He was involved with many organizations such as the Union Engine Company, the Young Men’s Literary Association, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

O’Brien, Richard (Saint John) was the managing director and part proprietor of the Saint John Globe. He was a prominent Liberal politician, and unsuccessfully contested a federal seat Saint John. O’Brien sat on the Saint John city council and was chairman of the Free Public Library in that city. He was vice President of the Saint John Exhibition Association, a director of the Saint John relief and Aid Society; a prominent Roman Catholic; an ex-president of the Irish Literature and Benevolent Society; and frequently lectured on Catholicism and historical subjects.


Oldwright, William (Toronto) was educated in Canada and received his M.D. from the University of Toronto in 1865. He was a member of the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario from 1866-1872. He was also appointed chairman of the Provincial Board of Health in 1882 and became a professor of Hygene in Toronto University. Oldwright was also the vice-president of the Children’s Aid Society. Politically he sympathized with the Reform Party.


Perrault, Joseph-Xavier (Montreal) was born and educated in Quebec. He was the first French Canadian agronomist with university training. Upon his return from graduate studies in England he set up two educational institutions on farming which resulted in his being appointed principal and professor of the Scoiété Procinciale Agronomique. In 1864 Perrault chaired a special committee of the Legislative Assembly on agricultural instruction. He was the secretary of the Bureau of Agriculture and the Board of Agriculture of Lower Canada. He was elected for Richleau in the House of Commons and was a member of the Club Saint-Jean-Baptiste, a secret society founded to fight confederation. Perrault was concerned with improving the economic welfare of French
Canadians and was a president and vice-president of the Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, and was active in setting up the Chambre de Commerce du District de Montreal becoming its president in 1890. He was also appointed by the federal government to be the secretary of the Canadian commission in Philadelphia and Paris. He was the secretary-archivist of the Forestry Association of the Province of Quebec and secretary of the Société Générale de Colonisation et de Rapatriement. France recognized his talents and named him a chevalier of the Legion of Honor and member of the Société Royale d’Agriculture de Paris in 1889. Perrault was a Liberal in politics.


**Perodeau, Narcisse (Montreal)** was born and educated in Quebec. He graduated law school to become a successful notary. He was appointed the secretary of the Board of Notary’s for the province in the 1880s and became the president of the organization in 1912. He was the president of the board of control of the Provincial Bank of Canada and a director of the Montreal Light, Heat and Power Company. Perodeau was elected to the Provincial Assembly of Quebec in 1897, was a cabinet minister and eventually became the lieutenant governor of the Province. He was a staunch Liberal.


**Poole, Henry Skeffington (New Glasgow)** was born educated in Nova Scotia but also received an education at the Royal School of Mines in London, England. Poole began his career in the coal mines of Cape Breton and the silver mines in Utah. He was the inspector of mines for Nova Scotia from 1872-1878 and the general manager for the Acadia Coal Company and Chairman of the Board of Examiners for Mining Certificates.
He wrote several articles on mining and was an honorable member of the Federal Institute of Mining Engineers, a member of the American Institute of Mining Engineers and President of the Mining Society of Nova Scotia. He married the daughter of J.H. Gray, the premier of P.E.I.


**Pottinger, David (Saint John)** was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia and entered Canadian Railway service as a clerk in the office of the Nova Scotia Railway. At the consolidation of railway services in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick he was appointed station-master of the Intercolonial Railway at Halifax. In 1874 he was appointed general store-keeper and, 1879, was appointed chief superintendent thereof. In December 1892, he was appointed general manager of all the Canadian Government railways.


**Reed, Robert (Saint John)** was born in Ireland and arrived in Canada in 1820. Reed was the chief clerk in the shipping and steam boat office of James Whitney. In 1835 he and his brother began a business that lasted until 1886. Not known to be overtly interested in formal poilitcs, Reed was on a provincial election ticket designed to support prohibition and accepted a government appointment to purchase rails and bridge material for the European and North American Railway. Reed was the President of the Owen’s Art Institute (of which several representatives appeared before the Commission) and was an advocate of art education.

**Roche, William (Halifax)** was born and educated in Nova Scotia. His father was a Halifax merchant and his uncle was a representative in the legislative assembly during the 1830s. At the end of his school years Roche entered into commerce as a profession and ran a large coal and commission business. He was also the agent for several steamship companies. Roche was a member of the School Board and eventually became chairman in 1886 as well as a director of the Union Bank of Halifax. Roche was a Liberal and was chosen in 1886 to represent Halifax in the Provincial Assembly.


**Roy, Rouër (Montreal)** was born and educated in Montreal. Roy decided on a career in law and began his training with the solicitor general of Lower Canada until he was called to the bar in 1842. He served several years as an examiner for the Lower Canadian bar; he was a member of the library committee and the bâtonnier of the Montreal bar. He became a Queens Council in 1864. In 1862 he was appointed joint city attorney for Montreal and became the first head of the legal department for the city. He was the vice-president of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Montreal. A Catholic, he was a church warden of Notre-Dame parish.


**Shaughnessy, Thomas G. (Montreal)** was born in the United States where he began his railroad career as a storekeeper in Chicago and Milwaukee. He was brought to Montreal by prominent railway man W.C. Van Horne where he assumed management of the Canadian Pacific. Shaughnessy was quickly promoted to the general manager and,
eventually, vice-president of the Canadian Pacific line. He was a director of the Duluth, South Shore and Atlantic Railway; the Accident Insurance Company and the North-West Land Company. He was the vice-president of the Toronto, Hamilton and Buffalo Railway, the B.C. Southern Railway, and President of the Montreal and Western railway. In religion he was a Roman Catholic.


**Shorey, Hollis (Montreal)** was born and educated in Lower Canada and began his apprenticeship as a tailor in 1839 and soon afterward opened his own business with modest success. He entered into a partnership with E.A. Small in 1869 that resulted in the establishment of a sizable factory of over 300 employees (280 were women, 75 of which were girls under 16). G.M. Rose stated, “the firm, we are told, deals very liberally with their employees, and the most kindly feelings exist between them and their employers.” Shorey was an Anglican and a Conservative. He was an active member of the Montreal Board of Trade, a chairman of the Montreal Sanitary Association and a governor of several hospitals. He was chairman of the Citizens’ Association and a city alderman in Montreal.


**Simms, T.S. (Saint John)** was born in the United States and began his career there as a salesman servicing a territory from Boston to Saint John and Halifax. In the Maritimes he developed a relationship with James Logan (who also appeared before the Commission) and several other businessmen and together they formed a partnership. He moved to St. John in the early 1870s and set up an “extensive steam manufactory” where he manufactured booms and brushes. While not politically active he was involved the Baptist church where he was made a deacon and was treasurer for some time. He was
the first president of the New Brunswick Sunday School Association, he founded the Young Peoples Society of Christian Endeavour in Saint John and became the vice president of the Laymen’s Missionary Movement. His involvement in religious organizations continued upon his death as he willed funds for the construction of a church in Vizianagaram which became known as the Simms Memorial Church. Simm’s gave generously to the Y.M.C.A. and other church based charities including the Saint John Protestant Orphan Asylum of which he was the governor.


**Tuckett, George (Hamilton)** was a manufacturer in Hamilton who testified before the Labour Commission in 1887. It was said of Tuckett that his business “is one of the most extensive in the Dominion, and Mr. Tuckett has earned the reputation of being an ideal employer of labour. He encourages thrift, industry and steadiness among his employees by dealing out substantial rewards at stated periods. The profits of his business are in part shared by the wage earners of his great factory. Old hands, after a given time, receive handsome checks to enable them to build homes. Every year there is a meeting between employer and employee that is marked by gifts which make glad the heart of the wage-earner.” Morgan claims of Tuckett’ “when a Canadian wishes to point out the best representative of the manufacturers as regards their attitude to employees Mr. Tuckett takes first place in the roll-call.” Tuckett would become the mayor of Hamilton in 1896, president of the St. Georges society in 1898, and, eventually, director of the Hamilton Steamboat Company.


**Thompson, Philips (Toronto)** was born in England but moved to Canada with his family when he was 14. Thompson held editorial positions for the Boston Traveller,
Toronto Mail and Empire, Globe, and Grip; and was the Toronto correspondent for the Ottawa Labour Gazette. He was the secretary and organizer in Ontario of the Socialist League and President of the Nationalist Association of Canada. Thompson unsuccessfully contested a Toronto election as a reform candidate. Thompson wrote extensively on the ‘Irish Question,’ social reform and socialism. He was a Theosophist in religion. Thompson was said to be a class-conscious socialist; such as necessarily opposed to Imperialism and class rule; believes government should be simply the business agent of the people. The Hamilton Spectator claimed he was “[a]n amiable and able journalist, who is honest in putting forth views which he thinks will benefit mankind.”


**Wainwright, William (Montreal)** was born and educated in England. He entered the service of the railroad at an early age. Starting as a clerk he became the general manager of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway before immigrating to Canada. He worked for the Grand Trunk Railway upon arriving in Canada. He eventually became the assistant manager of that line as well as the general manager of the North Shore Railway.


**Wilson, James C. (Montreal)** was born in Ireland but was an infant when his family immigrated to Canada. He was educated in Montreal and briefly became a teacher before becoming a clerk at a bookstore in Ontario and then for New York publisher T.W. Strong. Upon his return to Montreal, Wilson worked as a bookkeeper for a paper manufacturer before building his own paper plant in Lachute. His Lachute plant grew significantly and quickly became one of the largest operations in the Dominion. Wilson
was a member of the Montreal Board of Trade. He was a Mason, an active Presbyterian and a supporter of charitable causes. He was a governor of the Montreal General Hospital and served on the Montreal city council in the early 1880s. He was a representative in the House of Commons from 1887-1891.


**Wright, Alexander W. (Toronto)** was engaged in the woolen and carpet manufacturing industries in Preston and St. Jacob’s when he connected himself with press editing the Guelph Herald, the Orangeville Sun, the Stratford Herald, the Toronto National and the Labour Reformer. Wright was the secretary of the Manufacturers’ Association of Ontario as well as the Niagara Steel Works. He was also a public figure running for federal office in 1880 as an independent candidate. An ardent unionist, he lectured on economic questions before the Knights of Labor (he was an office bearer with this organization) and upon socialism and similar topics, before other bodies. As a final testimony to his knowledge on the subject Labour, he was appointed head of the "Sweating Commission" in 1895.


Appendix Four – Evidence of Murdock McLeod

I present the evidence of Murdock McLeod in this appendix as it represents an example of a witness who was unwilling to expand on any of the issues raised in his testimony. McLeod had twenty years experience working in the mining industry but much of his testimony consists of one word cursory responses. Even when prompted on whether he had “... anything additional to offer the Commission” McLeod was silent. Commissioner Gibson comments on McLeod’s age (in comparison with the ‘younger’ miners in the audience) suggesting his views are of interest to the Commission. The questions concerning temperance, for example, could not prompt McLeod to discuss anything with any depth in his testimony.


MURDOCK McLEOD, miner, sworn and examined.

By Mr. KELLY:—

Q. How long have you been employed in these mines? A. From the first start?
Q. Yes? A. About twenty years.
Q. How old were you when you first started? A. About nine years.
Q. What pay did you receive when you first commenced? A. I think, as near as I can remember, 45 cents a day. That was for trapping.
Q. Could you read and write at that time? A. Yes.
Q. You then improved and went along, and how long was it before you got a dollar a day? A. I should suppose about four or five years.
Q. Would it be five years? A. Yes.
Q. Then you would be 14 or 15? A. Yes.
Q. What next did you do? A. After I was trapping and worked myself up I drove and I was paid so much a box and I could make $1 a day.
Q. You are now a miner? A. Yes.
Q. You heard the evidence given by Mr. Paul? A. Yes.
Q. Do you corroborate the statements made by him in every particular? A. Yes.
Q. Have you anything additional to offer the Commission? A. No; I do not think I have any suggestion to make.

By Mr. FAIRC:—

Q. Are you a married man? A. Yes.
Q. Can you give the Commission any idea as to the cost of groceries, meat, &c.?
A. No.
Q. You do not keep track of such things? A. No.
Q. Many of them? A. Yes; some.
Q. Looking around the audience I see they are young men; do you not think that the old miners take sufficient interest in the labors of the Commission or in their own interests to come and give us their views? A. I cannot say.
Q. Are the majority of them young men or old? A. They are young men.
By Mr. HAGGERTY:
Q. What would the youngest of the boys be employed at? A. Trapping I suppose; they do different kinds of work.
By Mr. FAYED:
Q. Is driving hard work? A. No.
Q. Not too hard for boys? A. No.
By Mr. Kerwin:
Q. Do the old men whom you say retire have sufficient saved on which to live for the remainder of their lives? A. I do not know about that.
Q. Is it because they are too old to work or have they families to help them? A. I do not know whether that or too old to work; I could not say.

ANDREW Scott, miner, sworn and examined.
By Mr. Kelly:
Q. You heard the statement made by the gentlemen who preceded you? A. Yes.
Q. Do you agree with that testimony in every particular? A. Yes.
Q. Have you anything different to offer to the Commission or anything that would be of information to it, or can you suggest any change in the mode of working which would be beneficial to the men working in the mines? A. I think the last gentleman gave it here pretty fully. The biggest grievance we have today is about this walking down to our work and walking up from it. I believe we should have a ride up and down.
By Mr. Freed:
Q. Are you able to form an opinion as to the number of days you have worked during the past year? A. No.
Q. Are you able to give us an opinion as to the actual amount of your earnings during the last year? A. No, I don't think I could do so. I suppose it ran over $300 or about $400.
Q. How much can you earn when you work a full day? A. You would average from $1.75 to $2.00 a day.
By Mr. Kelly:
Q. Do you own a property of your own? A. No.
Q. Are you married? A. I am.
Q. Do you hire a tenement? A. Yes.
Q. Who from? A. The company.
Q. What do you pay a month for it? A. $2.00.
Q. How many rooms are there in your place? A. Three.
By Mr. Freed:
Q. Is that three rooms besides a kitchen? A. Besides a porch, including the kitchen.
By Mr. Kelly:
Q. Do you pay taxes? A. Yes; poor, county and school taxes.
By Mr. HAGGERTY:
Q. Do you consider $2 a month a high rent? A. It is not very high, but still I believe some improvements could be made on the houses.
Q. Do you own a house? A. No.
Q. You hire one? A. Yes.
Q. From the company? A. Yes.
Q. How many rooms are there? A. Two rooms upstairs and a kitchen.
Q. That would be four rooms? A. Yes; three rooms and a kitchen and a kind of porch attached.
Q. Do you think that the rent you are paying is too much? A. No; I do not think the rent is too much?
Q. You find no objection to that? A. No.
Q. Do you subscribe towards the doctor? A. Yes.
Q. Have you any objection to that? A. No.
Q. You think the fee is not too high? A. No.
Q. Do you belong to a labor organization? A. No.
Q. You do not belong to any society? A. To the Miners' Union I do.
Q. Do the company object to or find fault with any man who belongs to a Miners' Union, or have they done so within your knowledge? A. Well, I do not think they have.
Q. Have you known the company to blacklist any man foremost in getting up organizations or any society? A. No; I do not know of it.

By Mr. Haggerty:

Q. Is this a Scott Act town? A. They try to be one.
Q. Do the managers of the mine take a lively interest in the temperance welfare of the miners? A. Well, I think they do.
Q. They endeavor by all means in their power to get the men to join temperance organizations? A. Yes; so far as I know.

By Mr. Gibson:

Q. Do the managers join the temperance society themselves in the first place? A. Yes; I think some of them do belong to it, although I do not myself.
Q. Is your health generally good? A. Yes; pretty good.
Q. How is the air in the mine? A. It is pretty good around the workings.
Q. Is there anything in the mine which would tend to shorten life or impair health? A. There are some parts of it a little damp.
Q. Are there any of the miners old men? A. Yes.
Q. About what age would the oldest be? A. About 74 would be the oldest I know of.

By Mr. Haggerty:

Q. He would not be a coal cutter? A. No.
Q. A laborer? A. Yes.

By Mr. Kelly:

Q. What is the age of the oldest coal cutter that you know? A. I think about 65.
Q. How long would he be coal cutting? A. I could not say; a good many years, anyway.

By Mr. Frew:

Q. You spoke of working when nine years old; do you know any boy as young as that working in the mine now? A. I could not say there is.
Q. What would be the age of the youngest boy working in the mine? A. I do not know there is any under 12—I could not say for sure.

By Mr. Gibson:

Q. Do you know if any of the miners when they got up to say 60 or 65 years of age retire from working in the mine? A. Yes.
A—19**
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