

**CHALLENGING THE FAMILY WAGE IDEAL:
UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES TO CHILD
EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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ABSTRACT

In 2003, the Liberal government of British Columbia passed Bill 37 which amended employment standards affecting children, part of an overall process of neoliberal economic restructuring. These changes must be understood within the broader historical context of the restructuring of the market economy. This thesis argues that the economic activity of children is one aspect of working class strategies to maintain family economic stability in the face of capitalist restructuring and, in particular, current efforts to entrench the market principle in society.

In order to demonstrate the argument, this thesis employs an historical comparative analysis and draws on the theoretical work of Gramsci, Polanyi and Marx to outline the role of economic and ideological change in shaping working class family strategies to maintain economic stability.

DEDICATION

This thesis deserves two dedications.

To my parents, Carolyn Kirk-Albert and Roger Albert.

and

To David Huxtable.

Thank you.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter One: An Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
An Introduction to the Historical Context	1
Employment Standards for Children in British Columbia	3
The International Context	5
The Argument and Theoretical Considerations	5
Methodology and Framework of Analysis.....	9
Chapter Two: The Historical Changes to Children's Role as Economic Actors: Pre-Industrial and Industrializing Society.....	13
Pre-Industrial Capitalism and Children's Economic Activity.....	13
Industrialization and Changes to Children's Economic Activity	16
Industrialization and the Transformation of Society	17
The Commodification of Labour and the Development of Market Society	18
The Capitalist Labour Market and Working Class Poverty	23
Children's Work and Industrialization	26
Chapter Three: The Historical Emergence of the Family Wage Ideal in Britain	31
Liberalism: Individual Freedom in a Market Society	33
Victorian Ideology and the Family Wage Ideal: The Fight Against Working Class Poverty	36
The Social Construction of the Family Wage Ideal	39
The Role of the State in Mitigating the Effects of Industrial Capitalism: Protective Legislation and The Factory Acts	41
Protective Labour Legislation.....	41
The Factory Acts.....	43
Chapter Four: The Family Wage Ideal in Canada.....	47
Pre-Industrial Canada.....	47
Children's Contribution in Pre-Industrial and Industrializing Canada.....	48
Industrialization and the Formation of the Working Class In Canada	50

Capitalist Labour Market and Working Class Poverty	50
Protective Legislation in Canada	52
Canada's Factory Acts – The Ontario Experience	52
Effects of the Family Wage Ideal.....	55
The Post War Success of the Family Wage Ideal	63
The Post War Compromise: Fordism and the Welfare State	65
The Rise of Neoliberalism	69
Chapter Five: Neoliberal Restructuring in BC and the Changes to Children's Employment Standards	74
The Context: Neoliberal Restructuring in BC.....	74
The Change to Child Employment Standards in British Columbia.....	80
The Previous Permit System for Child Employment.....	83
The Current Process for Child Employment.....	85
Employment Standards Affecting Children: The International Context.....	89
The Support and the Rationale for the Changes to Employment Standards.....	91
The Consultation Process	92
The Protection of Vulnerable Workers	94
The Contradiction Posed by Children in the Labour Market.....	98
Chapter Six: Examining the Challenges to the Family Wage Ideal	100
Conclusion.....	109
Options for Further Research.....	114
Bibliography.....	116
Government Documents.....	125

CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION

“The bourgeois clap-trap about family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by action of Modern Industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour” (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848).

Introduction

In October 2003 the Liberal government of British Columbia passed Bill 37 which amended the Employment Standards Act. Bill 37 amended many aspects of the Employment Standards Act from hours of work to the creation of a six dollar an hour training wage. One of the most puzzling changes, however, was the lowering of the age of employment eligibility from 15 to 12 years. This brings the age of employment eligibility down to the same level that it was in the late nineteenth century in British Columbia and throughout Canada. This thesis aims to understand, and contextualize, why the BC Liberal government changed employment standards for children.

An Introduction to the Historical Context

Children have always worked, but how and why children work has changed throughout history. In pre-industrial societies children worked within the context of their family households or small communities where their work was an integral part of daily survival. When industrialization and the emergence of a

capitalist labour market occurred in Western Europe and North America, children's work qualitatively changed. Instead of working within the context of their family household, helping with the firewood or working in the field, children were increasingly sent to work *for wages* outside of the context of their family households. In short, their labour was sold in a labour market.

But beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and later in Canada, the presence of children in the labour market declined. Many historians who study this phenomenon suggest that a variety of factors influenced the decreased presence of children in the labour market. Some historians place more emphasis on the advancement of technology, the decreasing necessity of child labour in industry and the overall rise in real wages, and argue that protective legislation merely reflected a process already underway (Cunningham, 2001, 1998; Harevan, 2000; Nardinelli, 1980; Sutherland, 2000; Zelizer, 1985). Other historians argue that, while technological change and the overall rise in incomes contributed to the gradual decline of children in the labour market, protective labour legislation and compulsory schooling legislation were critical factors in the removal of children from the labour market (Boyden, 1997). Although there is considerable debate, there is agreement among historians that children's presence in the labour market dramatically declined in Britain and Canada during the early part of the twentieth century.

Many people living in North America and Western Europe today believe that child labour is a thing of the past or that it exists only in developing countries (James et al. 1998; McKechnie and Hobbs, 1999). It is assumed that if children

work they “help out” in the family business, baby-sit for the neighbours or deliver the morning paper.

Furthermore, the topic of children’s employment is generally imbued with moral arguments that express concern over the exploitative nature of children’s work or its potential educational value (Heesterman, 2005). James and James (2004:78) note that “...child labour is seen as a denial of childhood, robbing a child of the carefree existence which, in the West, tends to be regarded as his/her birthright.” The regulation of children’s employment is historically based on the notion that children require protection and encounter harm if they venture into the adult world of work (James and James, 2004:78), but the changes made to employment standards for children by Liberal government of British Columbia in October 2003 contradict this conception of children’s vulnerability.

Employment Standards for Children in British Columbia

In October 2003, the BC Liberal government amended the Employment Standards Act. The Employment Standards Act sets out the minimum standards for the majority of workplaces¹ across British Columbia. It covers minimum wage, minimum age, minimum daily pay, overtime, among other employment standards.² The amendment, Bill 37, reduced the age of employment eligibility

¹ Agricultural workers are one exception. Agricultural workers are covered by most sections of the Employment Standards Act but are exempt from receiving statutory holiday pay and overtime pay (Government of British Columbia, 2003). For more information see the Employment Standards Act Factsheet: Farm Worker (2003), accessed online at www.labour.gov.bc.ca.

² For more information see the web site for BC’s Employment Standards Branch at www.labour.gov.bc.ca (2005).

from 15 to 12 years and dismantled the regulatory process that was in place to regulate and oversee the employment of children repealing previous legislation that placed strict guidelines on employers of children. These legislated changes reversed many employment standards provisions in place since WWII.

In 1944, the British Columbia legislature passed the Control of the Employment of Children Act. The Act "...forbade employment of children under 15 in specified industries, except with a permit from the Minister of Labour" (Lorentsen and Woolner, 1950:1455). The Act also required employers to receive permission in writing from the Minister before a child was employed and had to display the written permission in a conspicuous space while the child was employed (Government of British Columbia, 1944). In 1980, regulation of the employment of children was subsumed within the Employment Standards Act, but maintained the regulatory guidelines set out in 1944 under the Control of the Employment of Children Act. Bill 37 in 2003 removed the regulatory guidelines and lowered the age of employment from 15 to 12 so that currently, British Columbia has the lowest child employment standards in North America (Human Resources Development Canada, 2004; Luke and Moore 2004).

Many provincial governments, representing different political persuasions from the right-wing Social Credit Party to the left-wing New Democratic Party, have come to power in British Columbia since the enactment of the Control of the Employment of Children Act in 1944. With the enactment of Bill 37, the BC Liberal government is the first government since 1944 to change employment standards affecting children.

The International Context

It is also important to note that children's employment is a global phenomenon not only in terms of the presence of working children in developing countries but also in terms of the presence of working children in the 'developed' or industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America. According to ILO (2002:15)³ estimates, approximately 211 million children globally were economically active in 2000. While there is a high concentration of working children in what are considered transitioning or developing countries, for example, the ILO (2002) estimates that 127.3 million children are economically active in the Asian-Pacific region, working children are also prevalent in North America and Western Europe. The ILO (2002) estimates that 2.5 million children in developed countries are economically active.

The Argument and Theoretical Considerations

The change to employment standards legislation, specifically targeted at children's employment, is puzzling considering international efforts to combat child labour⁴ and the history of national and regional political efforts to regulate children's employment in Western Europe and North America. The current situation in regards to employment standards for children in British Columbia raises a number of important questions.

³ See ILO (2002) for methodological information.

⁴ This is addressed in-depth in Chapter 5. See the International Labour Organization for up to date information on their various campaigns to fight child labour at www.ilo.org or see The Global March Against Child Labour www.globalmarch.org (2005).

Whereas it is generally understood that legislative steps were taken in Western Europe and North America to regulate the employment of children and exclude them from the labour market, why has the Liberal government in British Columbia repealed previous efforts to regulate the employment of children? What are the historical and contemporary conditions that allowed for this to happen?

With an eye to illuminating the current anomalous situation in British Columbia, this thesis aims to highlight the historical conditions in Britain and Canada that contributed to the qualitative change in children's economic activity.

The overall argument presented in this thesis is that the changes to employment standards affecting children in British Columbia must be understood within the broader context of the restructuring of the market economy. The interconnected relationship between ideology and economic change works to shape how working class families maintain economic stability in capitalist society which in turn, shapes the economic activity of children. Furthermore, the family wage ideal, the expectation that a male breadwinner's income is sufficient to support his family, which emerged in the nineteenth century (Friedmann, 1999; Humphries, 1982), worked to construct a particular type of labour market which in turn worked to limit working class family strategies to maintain financial stability. Among these strategies is the sending of as many family members as possible into the labour market to expand the family's income base.

In terms of the change to employment standards affecting children in British Columbia, this thesis argues that the inclusion of children in BC's labour market contradicts the family wage ideal. The BC Liberals' neoliberal legislative

changes demonstrates, on the one hand, its commitment to the principles of neoliberalism and traditional Victorian notions of family responsibility. On the other hand, the actions of the Liberal government in BC contradict the family wage ideal by broadening the scope of who can contribute to the economic stability of a family.

A comparative historical analysis of the prevailing historical conditions that shaped the family wage ideal illustrates the necessity of multi-earner strategies for working class families, particularly working poor and low income families, to maintain economic stability in a capitalist society.

Economic restructuring does not occur spontaneously, nor does it occur 'unaided,' a number of factors work together to facilitate such a process. This thesis emphasizes the roles that ideology and government action have in economic restructuring throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Britain and in Canada, how this shapes labour markets and in turn, how this relates to the challenges to the family wage ideal and the changing economic roles of children.

Ideology is a particularly important factor to consider in the analysis of economic change. As Gramsci (1971:377) states

"...material forces are the content and ideologies the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely didactic value since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without the form and ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces".

Inspired by Gramsci, this thesis is founded on the notion that ideological projects

such as liberalism and neoliberalism are forms of political action that justify capitalist relations (Gill, 2000:51). Moreover, an inquiry into the role of ideology in class relations also addresses the existence of competing class interests inherent in the justification of capitalist relations. As Marx and Engels note

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force in society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force ... [and the] ruling ideas must be made 'universal', that is they have to appear as if the ruling ideas are in the interest of everyone ... (1846:47-48).

This is an important consideration for a comparative historical analysis of the emergence of the family wage ideal because it acknowledges the potential for contradictions and conflicting interests.

The role of the state is also an important factor in economic restructuring. As Polanyi (1944) demonstrates, state-made policies motivated by liberal ideas concerning the importance of the market work to institutionalize the market principle in society. The state plays a central role in implementing policies that promote market centrality (Block, 2000; Jessop, 2002). The implementation of the market principle in society shaped the regulation of children's employment in the nineteenth century and current state policies are also shaping the regulation of children's employment.

There is scant attention paid in scholarship to contemporary issues relating to economic restructuring and the changing economic roles of children in North America. There is, however, an increasingly voluminous collection of literature devoted to the changing economic roles of children in Britain, including the

persistence of the employment of children (Heesterman, 2005; Hobbs, et al, 1992; McKechnie and Hobbs, 1999; Mizen et al, 1999). Specifically, there is little emphasis placed on the contemporary role of children as economic actors in contemporary Canada specifically. This thesis contributes to filling that void in the literature.

Methodology and Framework of Analysis

This thesis employs a comparative historical analysis and uses primarily secondary data to trace the changes in the family wage ideal by focusing on the development of the capitalist labour market and the role of ideological projects in economic restructuring. Fundamentally, it uses the changing economic roles of children to shed light on reasons for the rise and continuing challenges to the family wage ideal. The only way to understand the rise and continuing challenges to the family wage ideal is to examine this social phenomenon within the historical contexts in which it emerged and developed. A structural analysis would only examine part of the picture.

The thesis examines the historical changes to children's economic activity and the rise of the family wage ideal within two historical contexts; Britain during the nineteenth century and Canada from the nineteenth century to the present. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is because the changes to employment standards for children occurred in British Columbia within the broader Canadian historical context which is shaped by the fact that Canada was a colony of Britain. As a colony of Britain, the process of industrialization in

Canada mirrored, to some extent, what occurred in Britain. This was due to Britain's hegemonic power during the nineteenth century (Arrighi, 1994). As Naylor (1975) notes, Canadian industrialization occurred within the context of British mercantilism which clearly shaped the types of industries and social institutions that developed in Canada. In addition, Guest (1985:16) remarks that European colonies generally reflected the ideological persuasions of their colonial masters. In terms of Canada, many colonists, particularly from Britain, shared the liberal and Victorian values of free enterprise, individualism and individual responsibility with their British counterparts.

The second reason is that a comparative historical method of analysis provides the means by which to chart how economic restructuring and ideology affect the changing role of children as economic actors and the rise of the family wage ideal throughout history at the same time acknowledging the unity and diversity of these changes within the capitalist world historical context. McMichael (1990:395) explains that

...where general ... processes of the modern world are organized by time and place, comparison of time and place reveals continuities and at the same time attaches world historical meaning to those occurrences

The overarching goal of this thesis is to explore why the provincial government of British Columbia has included children in the labour market. In order to accomplish its objectives, this thesis is organized as follows.

Chapter Two is a general, theoretical discussion of the transformation of society from pre-industrial to industrial society. It traces the impact of the

transition from pre-industrial society to an industrial capitalist society had on families, but particularly on children. It employs an analytical framework that combines both Marxist and Polanyian accounts of industrialization to draw out the interconnectedness of various social forces that were involved in the establishment of capitalism as the dominant mode of production in Britain and in Canada.

Chapter Three continues the discussion of the economic restructuring that occurred during industrialization but with an emphasis on the role that ideology played in facilitating and justifying economic change, specifically in Britain. This chapter traces how liberal and Victorian ideology, and consequently the family wage ideal, contributed to the social construction of women and children as dependents. The family wage ideal contributed to their legal restriction from the labour market through the enactment of protective labour legislation and the eventual triumph of the Victorian, bourgeois family form of male breadwinner/female homemaker.

Chapter Four traces historical process of industrialization in Canada and the effects this process had on working class families and children, specifically families that represented the lower echelons of the working class. It describes the rise of the family wage ideal in Canada and the enactment of protective legislation which had a similar effect on working class families in Canada as it did in Britain. It then traces the process whereby the family wage ideal became consolidated within the context of Fordist accumulation, the Welfare State, and the gendered division of labour that is characteristic of the bourgeois family form.

It highlights the fact that the family wage ideal was not a reality for a portion of working class families mainly because they increasingly had to rely on two income earners to maintain economic stability. The elusive reality of a family wage becomes even more apparent with the ascendance of neoliberal ideology and the economic restructuring that has accompanied it.

Chapter Five turns to contemporary British Columbia and the neoliberal economic restructuring currently underway facilitated by the BC Liberal government. This chapter discusses the inclusion of children in the labour market by contrasting pre- BC Liberal government regulation of children's employment to the re-regulation of children's employment under the current BC Liberal government. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the contradictions in the Liberal government's actions.

Chapter Six pursues the discussion of the inclusion of children in the BC labour market by emphasizing ideological factors that have contributed to the de-regulation of working children. It ends with some concluding remarks and thoughts for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL CHANGES TO CHILDREN'S ROLE AS ECONOMIC ACTORS: PRE-INDUSTRIAL AND INDUSTRIALIZING SOCIETY

Pre-Industrial Capitalism and Children's Economic Activity

It is generally acknowledged that prior to capitalism becoming the dominant mode of production, the social and economic aspects of life in a community constituted a kind of unity (O'Connor, 1984:24). According to O'Connor (1984:24), the sharp distinction between economic and social life characteristic of capitalist society remained undeveloped in Europe until the eighteenth century.

Before the separation between economic and social activity was fully developed in Western European societies, human economic activity was embedded in social relationships (Polanyi, 1944:48). In comparison to industrial capitalist societies where social relations are subordinated to the market, in pre-industrial societies, the market was subordinated to community; it was not considered a separate entity. The subordination of human activity to the market, which appears with the rise of industrial capitalism, is not found in most of human history (Polanyi, 1944).

Polanyi (1944) identifies two principles, reciprocity and redistribution, which guided pre-industrial economic activity. The principles of reciprocity and redistribution ensured order in production and distribution (Polanyi, 1944:49), with the specific manifestations dependent upon the social organization of the

particular community. These principles ensured that members of the community were fed and housed, that food and other goods were distributed according to social custom, and that internal and external political networks and associations were maintained (Polanyi, 1944:49). In addition, Polanyi (1944:55) identifies a third principle, "house-holding" which consists of "production for one's own." House-holding refers to "...producing and storing for the satisfaction of the wants of the members of the group" (Polanyi, 1944:56). The group in this context could be a family unit, settlement or manor. The principle of house-holding differentiates economies embedded in communal life and in individualized family living, such as agrarian households (Polanyi, 1944:56), from those where social life is subsumed within market relations.

Pre-industrial households were "complete households," where individual family members contributed to the survival needs of the whole family (Harevan, 2000; Humphries, 1982; Tilly and Scott, 2001; Wilson, 1996). This type of household typified pre-industrial life in Western Europe and North America. Families were dependent on each other for their survival; production and family life were interconnected in the sense that production and consumption took place within the confines of the family, or household, and were not directly reliant on markets for goods, services and means of subsistence (Tilly and Scott, 2001).

The division of labour in pre-capitalist families was determined by age and gender. Age and gender designation did not determine the importance of each family member's task as the contribution of each family member was crucial to the survival of the family as an economic unit (Cohen, 1988:68; Connelly and

MacDonald, 1986:55). Children were not excused from contributing to family survival; as family labourers, children were afforded no special treatment (Tilly and Scott, 2001:104).

The notion that children were expected to participate in production for the family's subsistence was generally a universal expectation. In his examination of the rise of the British working class, E.P. Thompson (1962:367) noted that the child was an intrinsic part of agricultural and early industrial economy in Britain. In terms of Canada, Neil Sutherland (1976:10) explains that,

“Making a virtue out of necessity, English Canadians viewed work as a central characteristic of a good upbringing and proper education. Through hard work over long hours children not only discovered the positive and life long benefits contained within work itself but were also kept from the temptations which immediately crowded in on the indolent and the idle.”

This sentiment regarding children's work highlights the importance of their participation in household economic activity. Tilly and Scott (2001:104) also observe that “...children were a family resource only if their labour could be used...”

Economic interdependence made family commitment and obligation strong and afforded families some level of security but the everyday reality of possible death of a family member still made survival a precarious enterprise (Wilson, 1996:17).

The development of industrial capitalism in Britain, and later in Canada⁵, dramatically changed the pre-industrial way of life and with it the organization of production and consumption. Throughout the period of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain and into the twentieth century in Canada, production was gradually removed from the household and the family's survival increasingly became dependent on the market. The increasing dependence on the market changed the type of contributions children made to their family's survival as they began to engage directly with the labour market.

Industrialization and Changes to Children's Economic Activity

It is commonly known that the process of industrialization and the push for the development of a market society dramatically reorganized social life. Not only did changes in production occur but an increase of dependency on the market for survival needs occurred as well. The "complete households" associated with pre-industrial society with were gradually eroded and replaced by family households increasingly reliant on wages earned outside of the household for their survival to purchase goods and services on a market. Industrialization signified the growing domination of capitalism as the mode of production and the growing need of families to earn wages to survive.

⁵ Cohen (1988) notes that the process of industrialization manifested differently in Britain and Canada.

Industrialization and the Transformation of Society⁶

The process of industrialization and the ascendance of capitalism as the dominant mode of production did not occur as a simultaneous and homogenous event for Western European societies. But the dramatic social changes associated with industrialization did share some common features across Western Europe and eventually in North America. The most important features of industrialization, for this thesis, are the changes that occurred in production, the creation of a capitalist labour market and the subordination of society to economic activity.

Capitalist production relies on the availability of “free” and “willing” labour bought and sold in a competitive labour market (Marx, 1977; Polanyi, 1944). The enclosure movement and, subsequently the Industrial Revolution, contributed to the creation of a capitalist labour market and the emergence of the working class in Britain (Marx, 1977; Thompson, 1980). As Davin (1982:635) explains, the enclosure of the common lands reduced opportunities for peasants to graze their livestock or forage for food and forced them into a greater reliance on wages for survival.

This process was, in part, facilitated through legislative changes such as the New Poor Law in 1834. The New Poor Law reorganized previous feudal

⁶ This discussion of industrialization and the Industrial Revolution is a generalized summary with a focus on changes to production and the emergence of a labour market. The author recognizes that the process of industrialization generally, and the Industrial Revolution specifically, were much more complicated and diverse than what is represented here. For further inquiry see Secombe (1993) and Thompson (1963) and for Canada see Bradbury (1993), Cohen (1988), Naylor (1975) and Pentland (1981).

mechanisms of poor relief by abolishing the concept of “the right to live” and replacing it with a system which made wage work a requirement for poor relief (Polanyi, 1944)⁷. As industrialization and the economy diversified, families became more dependent on wage labour (Wilson, 1996:18). The “...rise of the wage system as the dominant mode of survival meant that a ‘living’ was bought and the social function of work was mediated by an exchange process – selling labour, buying goods” (Ewen, 1982:116).

The Commodification of Labour and the Development of Market Society

A Marxist analysis of the process of industrialization focuses on the changing relations of production. For Seccombe (1993:23), the process of industrialization signified the dominance of capitalism as the mode of production. One of the most important changes that occurred was the removal of the workplace from the household (Cohen, 1988; Seccombe, 1993). In comparison to other modes of production, capitalist production removed commodity production from the domestic sphere to centralized locations of mass production: the factory.

According to Marx (1867), the transformation of the relations of production is part of the historical process of capital accumulation and centralization which eventually requires the separation of labour power from the labourer so that labour appears as a commodity for sale on the market. The commodification of

⁷ This is elaborated in the following section.

labour is a unique feature of capitalism as “[c]apitalism is distinguished from all prior modes of production in history by the fact that labour power assumes for the labourers themselves the generalized form of a commodity” (Secombe, 1993:5). Another unique feature of capitalism for Marxists is that capitalists “consume” labour power, as a commodity, within a context of competition with each other where the maximization of workers’ output is needed for the lowest cost (Secombe, 1993:6). As capitalism is an economic system that relies on competition, commodities, including labour, must be sold on a competitive market. Marx (1867:415) explains that in the labour market,

...the worker is conceived as an owner of the commodity ‘labour power.’ He stood face to face with the other owners of commodities, one owner against one owner. The contract by which he sold his labour power to the capitalist proved in black and white, so to speak, that he was free to dispose of himself.

A Polanyian analysis of industrialization focuses on the development of markets and the disembedding of economic activity from social life. Polanyi argued that the rise of capitalism involved the disembedding of economic activity, a process which led to the development of a market economy (Polanyi, 1944; Jessop 2001:215). According to Polanyi (1944:71), a market economy is “...an economic system controlled, regulated, and directed by market prices; order in the production of goods is entrusted to this self-regulating mechanism.”

Polanyi (1944) further argued that the development of a market economy required the dramatic restructuring of society and implied a “stark utopia.” The restructuring of society was a requirement for a market system to work effectively

because it requires the separation of society into the economic (private) sphere and the political (public) sphere and the rendering of social relations into an accessory of economic activity (Polanyi, 1944). Polanyi described this process as “disembedding the market.”

For Polanyi (1944), the precondition for a market economy was the commodification of land, labour and money (Polanyi, 1944; Gill, 2000:52). As land, labour and money are essential for industry “...they must be organized in markets; in fact, these markets form an absolute vital part of the economic system” (Polanyi, 1944:75). Polanyi described land, labour and money as “fictitious commodities” because they are not commodities in the empirical sense; these “commodities” are not produced for sale in a market as compared to actual commodities such as food, hardware, tools and textiles that are produced to sell in markets. The conceptual process of commodifying land, labour and money meant the subordination of human subsistence to the laws of the market (Polanyi, 1944). In order to transform labour into a “fictitious commodity,” it had to be “freed” from the bounds of previous social arrangements through various legislative changes, such as the New Poor Laws in Britain (Polanyi, 1944; Gill, 2000:52).

According to Polanyi, certain legislative reforms, particularly the New Poor Laws in Britain, directly contributed to the development of the industrial labour market. He states that the previous system of poor relief in pre-industrial Britain was created to protect the rural population from economic downturns in the rural areas through “aid-in-wages” within the context of the parish system in Britain

(Polanyi, 1944:106). The New Poor Laws however, "...provided that in the future no outdoor relief should be given ... aid in wages, of course, was discontinued" (Polanyi, 1944:106). This forced many people from the confines of their parishes into urban centres where the possibility of employment was higher. In essence, the 1834 Poor Law reform established the competitive labour market by essentially creating a class of "willing" people to work for whatever wages they could (Block, 1986; Humphries, 2003; Polanyi, 1944).

The Poor Law Act of 1834 also worked to instil, within the national consciousness, the liberal notion that the state is not responsible for ensuring a minimum standard of living for its people (Kent, 1999:167). Poverty, it was argued, was the fault of the individual and any government attempts to alleviate poverty would only encourage people to remain poor (Kent, 1999:167). Thus, people were constructed as "willing" workers and were made responsible to deal with poverty on their own. Political economists, during the New Poor Law debates, argued that the poor needed to free "...themselves from the corruptions of the old Poor Laws and by becoming, under the discipline of the New Poor Law, sober, industrious and provident" (Roberts, 2002:80).

Both Marx and Polanyi recognized the grave social implications of the commodification of labour and the effects this has had on social life. For Marx, the commodification of labour hides the social relations inherent in the exchange of commodities and money in the market (Secombe, 1993:7; Marx, 1977). For Polanyi (1944), the subordination of human activity to a free market system was antithetical to human existence. In addition, both Marxist and Polanyian

analyses of the rise of capitalism and the market system address the requirement of a capitalist labour market for the system to work and the effects this had on social life. Once the capitalist labour market was firmly developed, workers could only gain access to work through the labour market (Fine, 2003:87).

Another important aspect of the development of a capitalist labour market is that it individualizes economic activity. Instead of the whole family or small community working together for the subsistence needs of the community, in the capitalist labour market *individuals* sold their labour in a market. This worked to isolate and individualize people's struggle for survival (Ewen, 1982:117).

Employers, in this context, did not have to address the needs of the workers family. Seccombe (1993:9) explains that in the capitalist context, individuals have no immediate obligation to provide for family members, rather it is an act of social obligation and not related to the wage form. This is because "...individuals are hired and fired and family circumstances are not part of the equation. The social obligation to care for family is supported by ideology and social pressures" (Seccombe, 1993:9).⁸ In the context of industrialization in Britain and Canada, family members entered the labour market as *individuals*, and in many cases, as many family members who were able did in fact enter the labour force via the labour market.

⁸ The ideological dimension of the transition to industrial capitalism is discussed in the following chapter.

The Capitalist Labour Market and Working Class Poverty

The labour market at the time of early industrialization in particular, but also throughout industrialization, was characterized by instability, below subsistence level wages, long working days and high competition (Rose, 1992). The extremely competitive labour market at the time made it possible for capitalists to hire the cheapest labour available which led to conditions of overcrowding and over-work and the displacement and replacement of adult male workers with women and children (Cohen, 1988; Davin, 1982; Friedmann, 1999:148; Zelizer 1985).

The exceedingly competitive labour market at the time did not, however, translate into full employment for the working class. Thompson (1963:269) notes that the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain was, in fact, a period of chronic underemployment. Thompson (1963:275) explains that "...while wages were moving slowly but favourably in relation to the cost of living, the proportion of workers chronically underemployed was moving unfavourably in relation to those in full work."

In addition, the process of industrialization was also characterized by the extreme poverty of the working class; squalid and unsanitary accommodations and, filthy and dangerous working conditions (Davin, 1982; Palmer, 1992, Thompson, 1963). Hobsbawm (quoted in Rose, 1992:77) estimated that throughout the nineteenth century skilled and securely employed manual labourers "... made up no more that 10 to 20 per cent of all workers." Hobsbawm's estimation suggests that "... at least 80 per cent of working class

men either were not sole family providers, or if they were, they and their families lived under continuing stress" (Rose, 1992:77). Thompson (1963:351) outlines the contradiction between the economic progress of industrialization and the experiences of workers in that

...the average working man remained very close to subsistence level at a time when he was surrounded by the evidence of the increase of national wealth ... His own share in the benefits of economic progress consisted of more potatoes, a few articles of cotton clothing for his family, soap and candles, and some tea and sugar ...

Furthermore, Segal (1990:297) argues that employers used the threat to male workers posed by the presence of women and children in the labour market, to control men and women in "...the capitalist quest for cheap labour." Rose (1992:103) notes that because women were identified as cheap, docile labour, employers used them, not only to increase their profit margins but as a means of controlling male labour.

Employers also used the "threat" of immigrant workers and particular ethnic groups to maintain low wage levels. In Britain, Irish immigrants were considered a source of cheap and exploitable labour (Thompson, 1963), particularly after the potato famine in the 1840s (Chinn, 1995:64). Similarly, Bradbury (1993:31) describes how manufacturers in industrializing Canada moved to Montreal because they considered French Canadians a source of cheap labour. In addition, MacIntosh (2000) indicates that the existence of child labour in certain industries, such as mining, was predicated on the availability of other sources of cheap labour. For example, the existence of child labour in the

coalmines on Vancouver Island was very low because employers had ready access to Asian labourers (MacIntosh 2000:11).

Until the capitalist labour market was firmly established whereby workers entered as individuals, many families entered the labour market as productive units. The introduction of the factory system, for instance, forced families, who previously worked as collective economic units, to change their economic strategies (Harevan, 2000:83). Families "...entered...factory work as units or sent individual members to work" (Harevan, 2000:83). This is evidenced by Keil and Usui (1988) and their research into family economic strategies in the anthracite region in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. in the later half of the nineteenth century. They note that

Some working class households were able to maintain their collective economic function by transforming their customary domestic economies into family wage economies⁹, in which more than one worker participated in the wage labour market and pooled their incomes (1988:185).

Horrell and Humphries (1995) make a similar observation in regards to early factory production and the domestic industry in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They note that "...children often worked alongside other family members and even for adult kin in subcontractor systems of employment" (Horrell and Humphries, 1995:487). Eventually, these "protective" strategies eroded and children were left alone in the labour market and the workplace (Horrell and Humphries, 1995:487).

⁹ This is different than the family wage economy discussed in the next chapter.

Children's Work and Industrialization

The types of work available to children was diverse but varied according to geographic location and the employment of other family members. Harevan (2000:90) argues that the employment of children depended on their family's income, the child's gender and age, the employment of other siblings, the presence of father in household and the family's ethnic background.

Although Horrell and Humphries (1995) note that children eventually entered the labour market alone, Harevan (2000) points out that families were important in terms of recruitment of workers, including children, for work sites. MacIntosh (2000) made a similar observation of the coal mining industry in Canada. He states that "[b]oys were brought into the mines by their fathers, experienced miners who were recruited in the United Kingdom to develop the Canadian industry" (2000:7). In addition MacIntosh (2000: 121) observed that the percentage of households headed by miners that employed at least one eligible son was nearly three-quarters in the 1890s¹⁰.

The income and type of occupation of the male head of the household was also a factor in whether children were sent out to work. In a detailed quantitative study of children's employment patterns in factories throughout the Industrial Revolution in Britain¹¹, Horrell and Humphries (1995) note that the difference in rates of children's employment and contributions were correlated to

¹⁰ According to MacIntosh, this number decreased by the turn of the century. He argues this decrease may reflect miners' efforts to steer their sons away from the mines (2000: 121). This data represent families in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia (MacIntosh 2000:115).

¹¹ The data Horrel and Humphries (1995:488) use spans the period of the 1780s to the 1870s.

their father's occupation. For instance, children whose fathers worked in factories had a higher rate of income contribution than children whose fathers worked in other sectors such as agriculture.¹²

Children were considered important contributors to their family's income (Bradbury, 1993; Harevan, 2000; Horrell and Humphries, 1995; Seccombe, 1993; Sutherland, 2000). In many cases, the income of children was more important than that of their mothers'. For many families, children were sent first into the labour market and mothers were sent to work as a last resort (Harevan, 2000:89). Bradbury (1993) observed a similar trend in industrializing Montreal. In her study, Bradbury (1993:110) noted that the contributions of children were crucial in supplementing the earnings of their fathers as the employment of fathers was generally seasonal and sporadic. Mothers/wives would only enter the labour market in response to various crises "...when their husbands were ill, unemployed, or chronically drunk" (Bradbury, 1993:110).

The types of employment available to children were varied. Cunningham (2001) notes that the textile industry in Britain was a major employer of children. Children were used as scavengers to pick up waste material that fell under the looms and as 'piecers'¹³ (Cunningham, 2001:44). Children often worked in mines as 'hurriers' (Thompson, 1963:269), in sawmills and match factories (MacIntosh, 2000:4). In industrializing urban centers of nineteenth-century Canada, for

¹² See Horrell and Humphries (1995) for a more detailed discussion.

¹³ 'Piecing' was the task of joining threads during the weaving process (Cunningham, 1996:51)

example, children were employed in an array of industries from textiles to cigar making, boot-making and printing (Bradbury, 1993; MacIntosh, 2000).

Children were also 'employed' by their parents in situations of 'homework' or 'putting out' (Bradbury, 1993; Bullen, 1986; Cunningham, 2001). 'Homework' or 'putting out' refers to work done in the home. For the employers, 'putting out' work such as cutting or sewing, decreased overhead costs such as rent, the need for machinery and the cost of supervising labour (Bradbury, 1993:137). Bradbury (1993) and Bullen (1986) both remark that this type of industrial work was an important feature of the textile and shoe making industries.

The type of work available to children was also predicated on their gender. 'Homework' took advantage of the "...traditional role of women and girls as sewers for their own families" (Bullen, 1986:171). In addition, girls were more likely to work at 'homework' under the watchful gaze of their mothers (Bradbury, 1993:137). If girls worked at home they could also contribute to the domestic needs of the family such as child care for younger siblings, fetching water or running errands (Bradbury, 1993:137). This type of work was principally known for its long hours and strenuous working conditions. As many employers paid by the piece, this encouraged families to work longer hours and at a faster pace (Bullen, 1986:172).

Boys had access to more diverse occupations in mining, the forestry industry and a variety of street-level occupations. Bullen (1986) argues that the informal, street level jobs were also an important source of employment for children, particularly boys. Newsboys were perhaps the most (in)famous of

children street-level workers; Bullen (1986:176) describes them as “serious businessmen”. Selling newspapers was perhaps one of the most visible types of employment for children, as they often stationed themselves outside of train stations and the entrances of hotels (Bullen, 1986:176). The sales technique of a newsboy often relied on their ability to ‘trick’ their customer:

The most common trick of a newsboy was to approach a customer with a single paper claiming that it was the last one he had to sell before heading home. If the unwary citizen fell for the con, the newsboy returned to the hidden pile of papers and repeated the trick (Bullen, 1986:137).

The various types of employment available to children described above hardly represents the totality of what was available. Children also worked in bakeries, in various labour positions; wherever unskilled work was present. MacIntosh (2000:4) remarks that “...wherever new divisions of labour and machinery produced jobs that made little call for skill or strength, children were employed.”

MacIntosh’s remark addresses the issue that advances in technology, a complex division of labour and the presence of a competitive market, particularly a highly competitive labour market, encourage the existence of children in the labour market. Another significant factor that determines the existence of child labour in a labour market is poverty. Poverty, to a large extent, leaves little choice for families to maintain a decent level of subsistence. If the conditions exist, families are often forced to employ multi-earner strategies to ensure their

livelihood and maintain some sort of standard of living. As Bradbury states, in relation to industrializing Montreal,

Virtually all families in the largest fraction of the working class, the unskilled, and the most in the trades undergoing rapid transformation, had to find ways of complementing the wages of the family head even to achieve the minimum standard of living ... (1993:99).

The visibility of working children and the overall living and working conditions of the working class became a growing concern particularly for the labour movement and middle class reformers. Beginning in the early nineteenth century in Britain and in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Canada, campaigns emerged to lobby for the enactment of protective labour legislation aimed at limiting the presence of children in the labour market and increasing the standard of living for the working class. Victorian and liberal ideology both played a role in the ensuing debates and discussions that occurred around the enactment of protective legislation. Victorian ideology offered a moral framework for capitalist society and worked to legitimize market interference through the enactment of protective legislation. Liberal ideology offered guiding political and economic principles for efforts to establish and maintain a free market society. Both ideological projects worked to shape the family wage ideal and contributed to the construction of modern childhood.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF THE FAMILY WAGE IDEAL IN BRITAIN

The ascendance of capitalism as the dominant mode of production and the process of industrialization during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put pressure on the ability of working class families to maintain an adequate level of subsistence. The emergence of a competitive labour market, forced working class families to send as many family members into the labour market as possible. During the mid-nineteenth century middle class reformers became "...alarmed by the squalor of working class life" (Seccombe, 1993:54). Not only were the middle classes concerned with the growing poverty of the working class, they were also concerned with the potential effects it may have on social order (Seccombe, 1993).

The labour movement was also concerned with the state of the working class but for different reasons than the middle class. Whereas middle class reformers were concerned with social order and, with the humanitarian issues that arose with working children, the labour movement was concerned with the overall welfare of workers, including working conditions and hours of work (Reid, 2004:55). The labour movement's campaigning efforts to restrict the hours of working children in Britain began during the early nineteenth century, before middle class reformers took up their campaigns. Union lobbying, initially in the

form of Short Time Committees,¹⁴ launched campaigns to limit the hours of work for children in the cotton mills. Reid (2004:55) argues that although unionists were motivated by the overall desire to reduce hours of work for adults, they also had humanitarian concern for the welfare of working children.

The efforts to solve the growing devastation of the working class were highly influenced by the prevailing ideological projects of the time, liberal and Victorian ideology (Rose, 1996). Liberalism stresses the importance of individual freedom in a market society, the primacy of the market and argues for little, if any, state interference in the economy (Gill, 2000; Heywood, 1992). Victorian ideology saw the bourgeois family model as the solution to the ills of the working class (Secombe, 1993) and thus legitimized the subordination of women and children by constructing them as dependents which further justified their removal from the labour market (Rose, 1996). It was argued during the various political debates concerned with factory legislation that the removal of women and children from the labour market and an increase in male wages would alleviate working class poverty (Humphries, 1982; Secombe, 1993).

Liberal and Victorian ideology were contradictory ideological projects in that Victorian ideas about the position of women and children in society challenged liberal ideas concerning the freedom of individuals and individual responsibility. But they were also complementary ideological projects that worked to shape the eventual regulation and legal removal of women and children's

¹⁴ Short Time Committees were offshoots of trade union organization. The first Short Time Committee was created by cotton mill workers in Manchester in 1814 (Reid, 2004:55).

labour from the labour market by constructing women and children as 'un-free' (Rose, 1996). Determining that women and children were 'un-free' justified state interference in the labour market, otherwise, any interference in the form of social or protective legislation was fiercely opposed by political economists and their supporters (Roberts, 2002). Joseph Hume, a staunch supporter of liberal political economy stated, during the debates concerned with implementing protective legislation for child workers, that "...the case of the children was the exception to the rule" (quoted in Roberts, 2002:275).

Liberalism: Individual Freedom in a Market Society

Heywood (1992:16) argues that liberalism triumphed in the nineteenth century as industrial capitalism became firmly established as the dominant mode of production. Gill (2000:51) argues that liberalism, particularly economic liberalism, is a form of political action that justifies capitalist relations. Liberal thought was influenced by the theories of human nature and political economy developed by thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Smith and Mill who viewed human nature as inherently self-interested and that society must be organized to allow for the maximization of freedom in the pursuit of self-interest (Gill, 2000; Heywood, 1992). The notion of individual freedom is one of the central tenets of liberal thought.

Heywood (1992:32) describes the liberal conception of freedom as "negative freedom" meaning that an individual "...is free in so far as he or she is left alone, not interfered with or coerced by others. Freedom is ... the absence of

external constraints on the individual.” This conceptualization of individual freedom leads to a particular vision of the relationship between the state and the individual. In classical liberal thought the state is seen as a powerful and oppressive entity that has the capacity to impinge on an individual’s freedom and thus must be contained, or minimized to ensure the maximum freedom of individuals (Heywood, 1992:32). Heywood (1992:32) explains that

[c]lassical liberalism is ... characterized by a belief in a minimal state, which would act as a ‘night-watchman,’ whose role is limited to the protection of individuals from each other. All other responsibilities should then be placed in the hands of sovereign individuals

Heywood (1992:32) argues that liberalism’s success in the nineteenth century was because industrial capitalism was seen to have produced the social conditions that would allow for the pursuit of self interest and for individuals to take responsibility for their own lives. The liberal conceptualization of individual freedom has further implications in terms of how economic activity in a given society is organized.

Economic liberals argue that the free market is the central organizing mechanism in society and that the state must not interfere in economic activity. Gill (2000:51) describes economic liberalism as a “...doctrine of the primacy of market forces rather than of the state.” The market is seen as a natural, self-regulating force which promotes “...economic prosperity and well-being” and ensures that the interests of consumers, workers and employers are compatible and beneficial to all (Heywood, 1992:37). Gill (2000:51) notes that economic

liberals view the most competitive markets as the most efficient and "...most likely to contribute to the general welfare." In short, economic liberalism views the market as a source of human freedom and welfare.

The economic liberals associated with the promotion of laissez faire capitalism in the nineteenth century in Britain were guided by the belief that "...the unrestricted pursuit of profit would ultimately lead to general benefit" (Heywood 1992:3). They argued that the state should have no role in economic activity and were opposed to any regulation of working conditions as they saw this as an infringement on the freedom of individuals (Roberts, 2002; Heywood, 1992:38). Some of the most strident supporters of political economy, particularly the Utilitarian Members of Parliament, "...never urged legislative protection for the thousands of children exploited in England's myriad workshops" (Roberts, 2002:82)¹⁵ as any interference in the form of protective legislation was seen as a contradiction to the principles of laissez-faire capitalism (Roberts, 2002:100).

Economic liberals in nineteenth century Britain pushed for the creation of a market society where the barriers to the free play of market forces were removed and individuals were responsible for their own survival. This view had certain implications for the enactment of protective labour legislation aimed at the regulation of women and children's labour. In order to address the issue of working women and children, protective legislation was required to limit and regulate their hours of work, but that meant interfering with the labour market.

¹⁵ This observation is based on extensive Hansard research conducted by Roberts (2004).

Victorian morality presented a means to justify market interference by constructing women and children as dependents, requiring protection from the harsh realities of the market. Market interference on behalf of preserving the morality of women and children was framed as an exception to the rule (Roberts, 2002).

Victorian Ideology and the Family Wage Ideal: The Fight Against Working Class Poverty

The triumph of bourgeois culture in the nineteenth brought about a new moral framework in which to organize and understand social life (Segal, 1990:104). The new moral framework was provided by Victorian ideology. It was highly influenced by paternalist ideas about the role and responsibilities of male heads of households as the provider and the protector (Secombe, 1993) and "...emphasized the fragility of women and integrity of the family" (Humphries, 1982:473).

In her historical study of gender and power relations in Britain, Kent traces the emergence of Victorian ideology and its connection with emerging theories of political economy in the eighteenth century. Political economists like Adam Smith and David Hume "...recognized that commercial life and virtue in its neoclassical form could not be made compatible with one another..." as they represented conflicting social values (Kent, 1999:65). Political economic theory that argued for the pursuit of self-interest left society without a moral structure to uphold society (Kent, 1999:65). Thus, the neoclassical notion of virtue needed to be located in a realm outside of public life. Virtue, it was argued, "...would be

found elsewhere, in the private world of the home and family, embodied in the figure of wife and mother” (Kent, 1999:65). Men, who engaged in the public world of commercial activity, could learn humanitarianism and generosity from their intimate relationships with their wives and children, and thus bring these attributes into the public world (Kent, 1999:67-68). Kent further argues that the “[p]rivate morality imbibed in the home promised an effective safeguard against the corruption of public life” (1999:68). This ideological argument led to powerful constraints on women’s, and children’s, activities and behaviour and worked “...to contain their activities in later decades” (Kent, 1999:69).

Victorian ideology supported the notion that the bourgeois family form was the proper and natural family form. The home was viewed as “...a haven of domestic and moral strength” (Segal, 1990:105) where women were the guardians of virtue and morality; thus any activity for women outside the home was fiercely opposed (Fishman, 1987:35). It was argued that women were naturally inclined to domesticity, keeping house and child rearing and men were naturally inclined to provide for all the needs of his dependents. This notion contributed to the “...widening gulf between the private ‘feminine’ sphere of the household and the public ‘masculine’ sphere of the market” (Segal, 1990:105).

Within the context of the bourgeois family form, children were considered individuals (Margolis, 2001:139) but were still thought of as emotionally and psychologically dependent (MacIntosh, 2000:15). Previous Calvinist beliefs that infants were inherently evil “...gave way to the Lockean doctrine of the *tabula*

rasa, which stressed the lack of innate evil (or good), and the importance of experience in moulding the child” (Margolis, 2001:139).

Childhood began to be viewed as a distinct period of the life cycle, a “precious phase of life” that was imbued with romantic notions of innocence and vulnerability (Hendrick, 1997; MacIntosh, 2000; Margolis, 2001; Seccombe, 1993). In addition, “[t]he recognition of childhood as a distinct stage of life led to the treatment of children as objects of nurture rather than as contributing members to the family economy” (Harevan, 2000:113). Children were viewed as having unique needs and required “special nurturing” which put increasing pressure on middle class parents, particularly mothers, to ensure that children grew up to become moral and productive adults (Margolis, 2001:139-42; Seccombe, 1993). This view of childhood stressed the importance of external influences in children’s development. MacIntosh (2000:15) explains that “...[d]efined as fundamentally immature, [children] were defined as corruptible. Thus children required protection from the harsh and coarse world of adults (MacIntosh, 2000:15).

The ‘new’ ideas about motherhood and childhood that emerged from Victorian ideology and influenced by theories of political economy and the nature of society, in part, inspired the various campaigns to remove women and children from the factory floor.

The Social Construction of the Family Wage Ideal

Middle class reformers attempted to promote the ideals of bourgeois life for the working class arguing that the middle class family was the solution to the ills of the working class. Middle class fears concerning the deterioration of the working class and its potential for civil unrest promoted efforts to establish proper familial relations in the working class (Seccombe, 1993). It was argued by reformers that the answer to the problems of the working class was the adoption of the middle class family form because it was seen as the foundation of a stable, industrial society (Segal, 1990:105). The solution was to "...reinstate a clear sense of male househeadship by encouraging the formation of a male-breadwinner family wage norm" (Seccombe, 1993:57).

The invention of a male wage-dependent family was used to combat a variety of problems that arose with early capitalism (Friedmann, 1999). It was used by bourgeois reformers to campaign for legislation that restricted the employment of women and children and in turn was used by male trade unionists to fight for higher wages. The family wage ideal, the notion that men should be paid higher wages because of their responsibility to provide for their families, was promoted as a necessity for the maintenance of the working class and for the prevention of the dilution of men's wages by the super-exploitation of women and children (Humphries, 1982; Segal, 1990:298; Seccombe, 1993:113). The family wage ideal was critical to the birth of the labour movement in Britain (Segal, 1990:297) and Canada (Palmer, 1992).

The labour movement at the time in Britain and then later in Canada, closer to the turn of the twentieth century, used the breadwinner/homemaker model as one of the tools to fight for better wages for their constituents (Palmer, 1992). The argument was that women and thus children were better off in the home away from the physical dangers and moral evils of industrial work. It was argued that by excluding women and children from the labour force, men had to be paid more so they were able to provide for their dependents (Palmer, 1992). The construction of working class manhood became dependent on the ability to provide for his family (Palmer, 1992:77; Frader and Rose, 1996; Segal, 1990:109-10). Humphries explains that

[t]he withdrawal of certain members of the working class from the labour market, in conjunction for the campaign for a 'family wage' supported by bourgeois ideology which emphasized the fragility of women and integrity of the family, could, by raising the real wages of the remaining workers, improve the working class standard of living (1982:473)

The social construction of the male wage-dependent family and the family wage ideal was reflected in campaigns for protective labour legislation for women and children. The family wage ideal, influenced by Victorian ideology, was a factor and a means of legitimating the involvement of the state in mitigating the detrimental effects of early industrial capitalism, principally the high rate of working class poverty. Furthermore, the family wage ideal provided the necessary justification, the exception to the rule, for state interference in the labour market otherwise ardently opposed by supporters of liberal political economy (Roberts, 2002).

The Role of the State in Mitigating the Effects of Industrial Capitalism: Protective Legislation and The Factory Acts

Polanyi's analysis of the development of market-society helps us understand the role of the state in mitigating the effects of industrial capitalism on humanity and for securing the social and economic conditions necessary for industrial capitalist growth. A central aspect of Polanyi's analysis was what he termed the "double movement" (Polanyi, 1944). In essence, the double movement describes the process whereby society reacts to the conditions brought on by market liberalization, the self-regulating market and the centering of markets in society through a counter protective movement in the form of state intervention through legislation or social movements such as the labour movement or social reformist movements. The "double movement" not only alleviates the effects of liberal markets for principally workers, but it also secures social and economic conditions that support capitalist market economies (Block, 1986:178). Protective labour legislation serves as an example of such state intervention.

Protective Labour Legislation

There were a number of protective legislative reforms during the nineteenth century in Britain. In short, protective legislation was seen as a means by middle-class reformers and labour organizations to protect the working class, more specifically women and children, from the harsh realities of an unregulated labour market. One of the first attempts at protective labour legislation was the Factory Act of 1802 (Cunningham, 2001; Rose, 1996). The Factory Acts

implemented during the mid nineteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century illustrate the role of the state in mitigating the effects of the self-regulating market on the working class and the state's role in mediating the interests of capital and labour. Marx discussed this role in his analysis of state intervention in the economy, particularly the protective legislation of the Factory Acts, where he identified how the state supported the working class fight for the regulation of the working day and how this also protected the bourgeois from its drive for profit and the detrimental effects that had on the very source of their wealth, the working class (Panitch, 1976:4).

The various campaigns for protective labour legislation illustrates the conflicting ideological projects of Victorian and liberal ideology, the tension between the "family values" of Victorian ideology and the "market values" of liberalism (Rose, 1996). Any attempt to "interfere" with the free-market in the form of protective labour legislation, was seen as political interference and was hotly contested (Roberts, 2002; Rose, 1996). In order to rationalize liberal and Victorian ideology and deal with the contradiction of state involvement through protective legislation women and children were constructed as dependents by determining that they were "...unable to govern themselves" (Rose, 1996:194).

In addition, a focus on the Factory Acts demonstrates how protective legislation targeted the regulation of women and children's labour, which contributed to the development of an androcentric labour market and supported the prevailing Victorian ideals of the dependent nature of women and children.

According to Rose (1996:194), women and children were identified as the only appropriate subjects for protective legislation.

The Factory Acts

In 1833, a Factory Act was passed that prohibited the employment of children under the age of nine in all textile mills powered by steam or water, limited the number of hours that children between the ages of nine and twelve were allowed to work and contained a compulsory school attendance component (Nardinelli, 1980). The Act that finally became legislation did not represent requests from reformists who wanted the Act to be wide-ranging with strict penalties for offenders (Cunningham, 2001). In fact, the Act only covered the textile industry and not other comparably exploitive industries such as mining or brickworks.

It is assumed that pressure from reformist groups forced the government to enact the legislation. These groups, consisting of trade unionists and middle and upper class reformers, used extensive public campaigns to rally support. They held fast to the Victorian image of childhood as a time of vulnerability and leisure; children were to be protected from the evils of working life, as it was both physically and morally damaging. The legislation was reluctantly passed by the British government but only after it received a moderate amount of cooperation from capitalists who determined were still able to make a profit using less child labour (Cunningham, 2001).

Other Acts followed; the Factory Act of 1844 established the half-time

system whereby children in textile mills worked for half a day and attended school for the other half but it also lowered the legal age for employment to eight (Nardinelli, 1980) repealing the age precedent that was set previously. This Act remained until the Factory Act of 1874, which again changed the age limits from 8-12 to 10-13 but kept the half-time component (Nardinelli, 1980; Cunningham, 2001). During the period between 1871 and 1881, the Factory Acts were extended to include non-textile factories and in 1876, the Workshop Act was passed to include non-factory industries (Nardinelli, 1980).

The half-time system was officially abolished in 1918 and full time school replaced full time work. This appeared as a victory for the reformers but children still continued to work in the informal economy (Cunningham, 2001) although apparently to a lesser extent than in the early nineteenth century. Marx made an important observation in terms of the reasons why the Factory Acts were eventually universalized, "...as a general law for all social production" (Marx, 1867:621). His observation was that this happened in part because of the "...cry of capitalists for equality in the conditions of competition [in other words] for equality of restraint on the exploitation of labour" (Marx, 1867:621). In this instance, it appeared that the state was able to mediate the discordant relationship between capital and labour.

The fight for protective legislation illustrates the ideological and political contradictions in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Rose, 1996). The conflict was between the push for a market centred economy (market values) and the fight for the protection of vulnerable workers (family values). It

was debated that protective legislation for children would justify the state interfering in economic relations (Rose, 1996:197, Roberts, 2002). This is illustrated by a statement made by Sir Robert Peel in 1815 when he presented a proposal to limit the working hours of children (Lawes, 2000:92). Sir Robert Peel stated that “[c]hildren who had no free will of their own could hardly be called ‘free labourers.’ ... They were either under the control of a master or a parent (quoted in Lawes, 2000:92). Thus by legally determining that children and women as “un-free”, the state could intervene on their behalf.

Protective legislation was also about the restriction and regulation of women’s and children’s labour. The dominance of liberalism as the prevailing political and economic ideology of the time of the Factory Acts directly influenced the creation of protective legislation. As previously discussed, one of the central tenets of liberalism is individual freedom (Heywood, 1993). It was assumed that “...the capitalist and the worker confronted each other as free persons, as independent owners of commodities, the one possessing money and the means of production, the other labour power” (Marx, 1977:519). The regulation of women’s and children’s labour asserted their status as dependent “un-free” individuals. According to Rose, in order to get legislation passed reformers “...had to convince legislators that women and children, unlike men, were not free labour; they did not have free agency” (1996:197).

By the time protective labour legislation was enacted, other factors were contributing to the withdrawal of women and children from the labour market. Some historians note that changes in manufacturing and industrial technology

minimized the need for children's labour (Nardinelli, 1980; Zelizer, 1985). Others point to the enactment of compulsory education legislation and a growing need for a skilled and educated work force (Boyden, 1997; Harevan, 2000; Zelizer, 1985). Zelizer (1985:62) explains that "[t]he success of industrial capitalism is assigned primary responsibility for putting children out of work."

How the regulation of women and children's labour played out in Canada and the effects this had on working class families is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FAMILY WAGE IDEAL IN CANADA

Pre-Industrial Canada

At the turn of the nineteenth century Canada was a sparsely populated colony with the majority of the population living in rural communities or on independent farms (Wilson, 1996:17). Canada was a colony politically and economically; it was a "...staple extracting hinterland oriented towards serving metropolitan markets from which it received finished goods" (Naylor, 1975:3-4). Until Confederation in 1867, approximately 85 per cent of Canada's population lived in a rural setting, on family farms or small villages (Connelly and MacDonald, 1986:55). During this period, most economic activity was organized around subsistence production (Cohen, 1988:4). As Canada was a British colony, export-oriented production existed in tandem with subsistence production, meaning that in order to survive in pre-industrial Canada, families needed to provide for most of their own subsistence needs¹⁶.

¹⁶ Cohen (1988) points out that it is a myth of Canadian folklore that farms or other units were completely self-reliant. There were many goods that farms were unable to produce or that were even produced within the colony, so there was some reliance on foreign markets. Although this was the case for the majority of settlers, it "...does not negate the essentially subsistence character of the economy" (Cohen 1988:40).

Children's Contribution in Pre-Industrial and Industrializing Canada

Children were important contributors to their family's survival. According to Cohen (1988:72), children "...were an important source of labour on most farms..." and thus a greater number of children meant a greater chance for success as hired labour was expensive and early farming methods labour intensive (Cohen, 1988:72). This is further evidenced by the observations of the Reverend Hugh Huleatt in the late 1880s, who compared two immigrant farm families in the area of Moosomin, Assiniboia¹⁷ (Sutherland, 2000:9).

Reverend Huleatt noted that the first farmer, with the most successful farm in the area, had cattle, pigs, fowl and over sixty acres of crops, and had two teenage boys (Sutherland, 2000:9). The oldest boy was sent out to work on a neighbouring farm for 'good wages' and the younger one was retained for work on the family farm. The second farmer was initially considered the most likely to succeed because he was a "...total abstainer,' a 'first-class carpenter, with a tidy, good wife,' had excellent land and good oxen, 'yet he had only twelve acres under crop instead of sixty.'" (Sutherland, 2000:9). The difference between the two farmers, according to Reverend Huleatt, was that the second farmer was childless and "his progress had been barred by 'the want of children to help on the farm'" (Sutherland, 2000:9).

¹⁷ This area was part of the Hudson's Bay administrative district east of the Rocky Mountains and west of its headquarters near the Red River colony near contemporary Winnipeg (Finkel et al. 1993:9).

Children began their work at an early age and often worked alongside their parents or older siblings (Seccombe, 1993). Children's tasks followed the same gendered patterns as their parents; girls learned domestic skills from their mothers and helped raise younger siblings and boys learned farm work or other related tasks from their fathers (Wilson, 1996:17). Male and female children were also treated differently in terms of their "...ultimate relationship to property" but "...until the father died or gave his property away he exerted considerable control over his children's [both male and female] labour" (Cohen, 1988:45). As children became older they worked on their own on the farm or occasionally outside of the family unit, in apprenticeship positions or as extra farm labour for a neighbour for boys and work as domestic servants for single unmarried daughters (Wilson, 1996:88; Sutherland, 2000).

The important contribution of children's labour is further demonstrated by immigration patterns during the 1870s and 1880s in Canada. During this period, Britain sent thousands of 'pauper' children to Canada to be placed mostly on farms (Parr, 1994). Although general goodwill, Christian charity and humanitarianism were present, these children were seen as the answer to the shortage of domestic servants and farm labourers (Sutherland, 2000:9). In the pre-industrial rural society of Canada, "Canadians needed children for the work they could do" (Sutherland, 2000:9). In a report published in 1886 entitled *What*

*Women Say of the Canadian North West*¹⁸, it was reported that women settlers observed a high demand for "...hard working, honest girls' as farm help or as general servants" (What Women Say, 1886:32).

Industrialization and the Formation of the Working Class In Canada

Canada, as a colony of Britain, experienced industrialization much later than its colonial master. Canada did not go through the difficult transition from mercantile-agrarian production to industrial production until after Confederation (Naylor, 1975:4), although there were similarities in terms of growing reliance on markets for survival and migration to urban centers. In addition, Canada's industrialization began within the context of British mercantilism, which influenced the types of industries and economic systems that developed. When industrialization did happen in Canada, it progressed rapidly although differently by region (Connelly and MacDonald, 1986:55).

Capitalist Labour Market and Working Class Poverty

It became necessary for working class families in Canada to send as many members as possible into the labour market in order to ensure the family's survival. Copp (1974:29) explains that in industrializing Montreal, steady, well paid work was not the norm; the "...average worker could not provide his family

¹⁸ In September 1885, questionnaires were sent out to women living in the Canadian North West. The intention was to develop "...a better understanding of the affairs of the North West." The original authorship is unclear although, inquiries were directed to Alexander Begg, Canadian Pacific Railroad Offices, London, E.C.

with more than bare subsistence.” The financial insecurity of working class families, particularly unskilled workers families, put pressure on other family members, including children, to enter the labour market as soon as possible (Bradbury, 2000; Copp, 1974:29). Bradbury (2000:219) describes how

The degradation of work conditions and lower wages that typified trades like shoemaking appear to have been counteracted by sending growing numbers of family members to seek steady work. In 1861, such families had only 1.08 workers ... [by] 1881 they averaged 1.62 workers ... The average number of children reporting a job amongst those families with children of working age, nearly tripled over the two decades from .55 to 1.51.

The inadequacy of male wages in conjunction with industry's demand for cheap labour also drew women and children into the labour market (Bradbury, 1993; Ewen, 1982). It is estimated that as many as 1 in 5 married women worked in industrializing Montreal and although their wages were lower than men's, their income "...made the difference between bare subsistence and a modest prosperity for [the] family" (Copp, 1974:29). There is little doubt that employers turned to women and children for a source of cheap labour and that the overall effect was the decrease in the general value of labour (Bradbury, 1993:116; Segal, 1990:298; Zelizer, 1985). Trofimenkoff (2000:147) argues that employers knew that working class families required their children to work to support the family and used this to their advantage; employers justified paying them less because they lived at home. Young women, in addition, were paid less because they were expected to marry, and thus were defined as temporary workers and not worthy of higher wages (Trofimenkoff, 2000:150).

Protective Legislation in Canada

The regulation of women's and children's labour in Canada was also shaped by Victorian ideology, the family wage ideal and liberal political economy as it was in Britain. Middle class reformers used Victorian morality to challenge the place of women and children in the labour market (Hurl, 1988; MacIntosh, 2000) and trade unionists used the family wage ideal to fight for better working conditions of their constituents (Morton, 1990; Palmer, 1992). The Liberals at the time also shared their British counterpart's concern that protective legislation would interfere with the market (Morton, 1990).

Canada's Factory Acts – The Ontario Experience

The prevailing views of childhood and free market capitalism were important factors in the debates surrounding the enactment of protective child labour legislation in Canada as they were in Britain. The union movement was actively involved in the campaign to regulate child labour in Canada, particularly in Ontario and Quebec, as these provinces were the manufacturing centres of the country.

In the 1830s and 1840s, skilled labour voiced its opposition to the use of child labour. This outcry reflected changes in the apprenticeship system; children were no longer taken on as apprentices, but as paid workers in direct competition with adult labour (Hurl, 1988). Once unions became legal under Canadian law in 1872, organized labour strengthened its fight against child labour (Hurl, 1988; Morton, 1990; Palmer, 1992).

As skilled workers became organized at the national and provincial levels, various unions and union organizations attempted to address the issue of child labour, particularly in industry. The formation of the Canadian Labour Union (CLU) in 1873 was the first attempt by the labour movement to organize at the national level. Although it only lasted three years, the CLU censured the employment of children under 10 years (Hurl, 1988; MacIntosh, 2000; Morton, 1990). In the early 1880s, the Knights of Labour passed motions at their annual general meetings to abolish child labour in factories for children under 14 (Hurl, 1988). The Trades and Labour Congress (TLC), formed in 1883, to continue the goal of organizing at the national level, passed a motion to abolish the use child labour in factories under the age of 14 (Hurl, 1988). Later, in 1898, the TLC released their 'Platform of Principles which included "... the abolition of all child labour by children under 14 years of age, and of female labour in all branches of industrial life, such as mines, factories and workshops ..." (Morton, 1990:61). The unions also lobbied government at the federal and provincial level.

In 1879, a Conservative MP, Dr. Darby Bergin, submitted a private member's bill to "Regulate the Labour of Children and Young Persons in the Mills and Factories" (Hurl, 1988; Morton, 1990). The draft bill did not find support in the House of Commons and was rejected. The Liberal party was particularly opposed to the bill and responded by stating that "...Bergin's attempt at factory legislation was state meddling" (Morton, 1990:41). Bergin resubmitted the draft bill a number of times between 1880 and 1886, and it was either rejected or withdrawn each time. Not surprising, the strongest opposition to the Bill came

from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) (Hurl, 1988; Tucker, 1988) but eventually, the CMA resigned itself to the implementation of Factory Acts as "...factory legislation was a regular feature of industrialized economies ..."

(Tucker, 1988:48).

The lobbying efforts at the provincial level, however, were more fruitful. In 1884, the Ontario provincial government passed the Factories Act. The Factories Act set the minimum age for employment for boys at 12 and girls at 14. It also limited the hours of employment to ten hours a day, 60 hours a week (Hurl, 1988). Although it was passed in 1884, it was not proclaimed until 1886 (Tucker, 1988:49) and in 1889, the Ontario provincial government amended the Act to include small-scale factories (Hurl, 1988). By 1895 Ontario raised the minimum age for boys to 14 in all factories except canneries, and was soon followed by Quebec which raised the minimum age to 14 in 1907 (Lorentsen and Woolner, 1950:1415).

Other protective labour laws were enacted as industry developed over time in other parts of the country. For instance, British Columbia passed a law in 1877 restricting the use of child labour in mines. In fact the mine was actually the "...object of the first legislated efforts to restrict child labour in Canada (McIntosh, 2000:9) although British Columbia did not enact any laws regulating factory work for children until 1908 (Lorentsen and Woolner, 1950:1419). Other provinces that enacted factory laws were Manitoba in 1900, Nova Scotia in 1901, New Brunswick in 1905 and Saskatchewan in 1909 (Lorentsen and Woolner, 1950:1419). All of these factory laws established minimum age standards for the

employment of children and restricted the working hours of women and young people in addition to establishing the recognition that "...no person might be employed so that his or her health was likely to be permanently injured" (Lorentsen and Woolner, 1950:1419).

The presence of middle and upper class social reformers associated with the child labour legislation campaigns in Britain was minimal in Ontario. Only one group, the Society for the Protection of Women and Children, submitted a petition amongst dozens of others sent to the federal government (Hurl, 1988). Many women's groups were reluctant to enter the debate as many of them were the wives and daughters of those who directly benefited from child labour (Hurl, 1988).

The middle class reformers in Canada were mostly concerned with issues of morality such as compulsory education and curfews. Also, those interested in child welfare were more concerned with neglectful parents rather than the 'virtues of work' (Hurl, 1988). It appears that within the Ontario context, Victorian morality played a prominent role in shaping the debate surrounding child labour legislation.

Effects of the Family Wage Ideal

Although this thesis focuses primarily on children's employment, the transformation of the labour market also meant that women were discouraged from selling their labour power. Their exclusion was expressed ideologically in the cult of domesticity (Cott, 2001; Wilson, 1996). The cult of domesticity

legitimized women's place in the home by constructing women's domestic responsibilities as a vocation and by placing greater importance on women's roles as mothers (Cott, 2001; Wilson, 1996).

The removal of women and children from the labour market was reinforced by various pseudo-sciences such as home economics that emerged to maintain the position of the mother as the exclusive care giver for children. In her analysis of the rise of "advice" experts, with a particular focus on childcare literature, Margolis (2001) detects an increase in attention given to women's maternal roles starting from the mid-nineteenth-century onward. Not only were women 'given advice' on the physical aspects of child rearing such as teething, toilet training and childhood diseases but, increasingly more attention was placed on the mother's role of socialization. Margolis observes that

...the mother's physical care of her children was minor compared to her job of socializing them. Women were advised that every thought and gesture, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, carried a message to the child. Women were to be ever on guard lest they impede their offspring's moral development (2001:144).

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the emergence of concern over moral and physical hygiene and the overall welfare of children, in particular, working class and poor children. Bourgeois reformers focused the education of poor and working class mothers on hygiene, health, nutrition and how to be "good" mothers based on bourgeois notions of the sanctity of childhood and motherhood (Comacchio, 1993:60).

Organizations, specifically concerned with the welfare of children

emerged. For example, the Montreal Society for the Protection of Women and Children in 1889, advocated for amendments to criminal law "...so that the poor and friendless will be as well protected as the rich and powerful (MacIntosh, 2000:15). The National Council of Women also started many programs aimed at improving the health, education and welfare of (working class) children and the Ontario Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children helped to organize 29 Children's Aid societies between July 1893 and December 1895 (Sutherland, 2000:15).

This period also saw the emergence of new forms of consumerism targeted at women. Coffin (1996:112) describes how "...changing consumer markets, new products, habits and desires and a new language of goods worked as a powerful solvent on traditional structures of gender." Home economics and goods and services targeted at women worked to reinforce the place of women in the domestic sphere. If women, for whatever reason had to work outside the home, they were severely limited in available employment opportunities. Cohen (1988:20) argues that a striking feature of capitalist industrialization was the impact it had on women's paid labour and that it led to the concentration of women into a single area of employment – domestic service.

The family wage ideal also shaped the distribution of social assistance, unemployment insurance, charity and the wages of women who were in the labour market. Bradbury recounts how women in Montreal, employed in manufacturing, were paid rates that assumed they were secondary earners in their family (Bradbury, 1993:33). In an article about women and the labour

movement in British Columbia, Creese (1992) describes the contradiction created by the family wage ideal and economic reality. Creese (1992:365) notes that the reality of working class poverty forced many poor women into wage labour. In 1901, female workers made up 6 per cent of the labour force, by 1931 their presence in the labour force more than doubled to 14 per cent (Creese, 1992). Effectively, the concern over the moral well being of women workers did not allow them status as workers (Creese, 1992:373). The social construction of women's dependency would later restrict their access to poor relief, unemployment insurance and other means of governmental assistance. For example, women did not have access to financial relief during the Great Depression (Creese, 1992:378).

The institutionalization of the family wage ideal, the growing acceptance of "the cult of domesticity" and economic change motivated by liberal ideology created a particular social and economic environment. It led to the development of a social and economic tension in that societal expectations of the male breadwinner were difficult to fulfil. Although women and children were generally pushed out of the labour market on the premise that the wages earned by a male household head could support his entire family, this was generally not the case for the majority of the working class (Bradbury, 1993:99).

The male wage dependent family did not only relegate women, and children, to the private or domestic sphere, it also worked to hide the gendered dimension of capitalist development in Canada. In addition, the male wage-dependent family worked to hide the structural aspects of poverty. At the turn of

the twentieth century in Canada, children were still needed to supplement the family income, particularly in urban areas, "...working families could not rely on industrial earnings alone to provide all the goods and services demanded by urban life" (Bullen, 1986:169).

Although the income provided by children remained essential for working class family survival, beginning in the 1890s, the rise in the "...purchasing power of workers permitted an increasing proportion of working class families to withhold their children from the labour market" (Sutherland, 1997:113). Children were gradually able to take advantage of formal schooling offered by the state and by the 1920s more children attended regularly and continued their schooling longer than their predecessors (Sutherland, 1997:113-114). Increasingly, the social and economic 'value' of children changed as they became less materially useful in the form of contributing an income, and more 'sentimentally priceless' (Boyden, 1997:192; Seccombe, 1993; Zelizer, 1985). Despite the increasing sentimental value of children, they still contributed to the welfare of their families as the reality of poverty for working class families remained significant.

During the first half of the twentieth century in Canada, the economic contribution of children changed from a direct monetary contribution in the form of wages to a more informal contribution in the form of unpaid labour in the home (Sutherland, 1997). In his study of working class urban children in Vancouver during the first half of the twentieth century, Sutherland (1997) describes a number of tasks assigned to children that directly contributed to the welfare of

their families. These tasks included, 'scrounging' for scraps of wood for fuel, tending gardens and helping with housework (Sutherland, 1997)¹⁹.

During the early half of the twentieth-century, the lower echelons of the working class still struggled to make ends meet despite the institutionalization of the family wage ideal and the male breadwinner/female homemaker family form that was supposed to remedy and alleviate working class poverty (Friedmann, 1999; Sutherland, 1997).

In Montreal, for example, between 1897 and 1929, many families were unable to reach minimum income levels unless there was near full employment in the labour market or at least two income earners (Copp, 1974:31, Strong-Boag, 1988:41). Copp (1974:33) sites a study conducted by the Child Welfare Exhibition Committee in 1912 that researched the average income of families. The Committee developed a family budget based on the daily wage of an unskilled labourer, \$1.75 or \$550.00 per year but noted that the rent allowance covered unsanitary, below street level accommodations and the food allowance was not enough to feed a family of five (Child Welfare Exhibition Committee, cited in Copp, 1974:33). The Committee determined that while "the average family income was most probably well above the \$550.00 per year level..." it was "...below the \$952.00 required to rise above the poverty line" (Copp 1974:34).

The institutionalization of family wage ideal not only challenged the working class family's ability to maintain a decent standard of living, it also

¹⁹ For a more extensive discussion, including a number of examples, see Sutherland (1997).

worked to continue women's subordination in the labour market. Fager and Partias (2005:11-12) note that although many working class men were unable to earn a family wage

...the idealization of the family wage helped perpetuate women's subordination in the paid labour force by ostensibly legitimizing lower wages for women. The idealization of the family wage reinforced women's economic dependence on men.

Women remained overrepresented in low-wage sectors of the economy, particularly in factory work and domestic service, partly due to prevailing notions of women's place in society. Women, in general, were socially constructed as unskilled workers. Bradbury (2000:217) explains that women and girls worked in separate spheres of the economy than men. Most worked as domestic servants, dressmakers and as factory workers and that across all sectors, women's wages were half or less than half of men's (Bradbury, 2000:217).

Historical events, such as WWI and the Great Depression of the 1930s in North America further challenged working class people's ability to maintain an adequate standard of living. It was not until WWII that the economy and social conditions in North America and Western Europe changed into a period of relative economic prosperity (Black, 1998; Fudge and Vosko, 2001; Sutherland, 1997; Teeple, 2000).

The state played a central role in the consolidation of the family wage economy²⁰ not only by securing the conditions for capitalist development through economic policies in support of export industries and labour market regulation but also through the creation and implementation of social policies required to maintain a relatively stable working class needed for capitalist industrial production, particularly after World War II (Brodie, 1996). The institutionalized gendered division of labour that arose with the emergence of the family wage economy shaped how social life was organized (Brodie, 1996; McDowell, 1991). This includes how children were slowly transformed from being economically useful to sentimentally priceless (Secombe, 1993; Zelizer, 1985).

The influence of Victorian ideology on the creation of the male breadwinner/female homemaker model was profound in that the Fordist model of production would not have been as successful without the nuclear family form²¹ that had emerged. Children were essentially 'lost' or subsumed in this family form as they were rendered economically useless through child labour and compulsory education legislation and by the reshaping of the labour market as discussed in the previous chapter (Sutherland, 1997; Zelizer, 1985). Consequently, children were excluded as secondary wage earners for their families, yet the need for secondary wage earners still persisted, which put

²⁰The family wage economy mentioned here refers to an industrial capitalist economy supported a gendered division of labour, where the paid labour of the male breadwinner and the unpaid labour of the female homemaker support capitalist production (Luxton, 1980). This is elaborated in the following section.

²¹ See Secombe (1993) for a more robust discussion of how the working class adapted the bourgeois family form into their own working class variation.

pressure on women to accept the role secondary wage earners (Philips and Philips, 1993:22).

The construction of women and children as dependents within the male breadwinner family model led to the development of an androcentric labour market which meant that survival strategies required more creative endeavours. This combined with growing 'common sense' notions regarding the roles of men, women and children highly influenced by Victorian ideology, worked in tandem to shape what constituted the family at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada. Although the theme is developed more fully below, it is useful to point out here that the state increasingly played a vital role in economic development and eventually in the provision of social assistance in various forms that both shaped and maintained the working class in Canada.

The Post War Success of the Family Wage Ideal

Fordism generally refers to the economic, political and social organization that characterized the post-war era from 1945 to the early 1970s in North America and Western Europe. The notion of Fordism derives from the vision of economic development and organization of assembly line work devised by Henry Ford. Henry Ford believed that "... mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management ... a new kind of rationalized, modernist and populist democratic society" (Harvey, 1990:126). Fordism as a system is generally characterized by strong economic growth, mass production based on scientific

management and mass consumption (Gramsci, 1971); it is also "...based on the 'family' wage of the male breadwinner and the commodification of social life" (McDowell, 1991:402) and characterized by a high demand for labour, relatively high wages and growth in union strength (Teeple, 2000:18).

Fordism created a specific type of class structure. Wage bargaining was confined to certain sectors of the economy but sectors that were associated with high risk production still relied on low wages and weak job security (Harvey, 1990:138-39). Harvey (1990:138) describes how this segmented the labour market whereby "...race, ethnicity and gender determined access to privileged employment and who did not." This situation did not produce the consumption levels needed to sustain the emergent consumer society; the "...joys of mass consumption were unavailable to a large portion of the work force" (Harvey, 1990:138). Harvey (1990:138) claims that the state was needed to bring the benefits of Fordism to all through the development of social policies and programs designed to lessen the gap between the white, male, unionized labour force and 'the rest.' Teeple adds that because of the growth of a unionized work force, class conflict "...implied a chronic threat to the reproduction of the system and so had to be contained by institutional means" (2000:19). The state became the site in which social needs were met to insure a stable and compliant working class through institutionalized collective bargaining, the development of legalized employment standards and the provision of social programs that supported the reproduction of the working class for example, universal health care, old age and disability pensions, universal education and welfare.

The Post War Compromise: Fordism and the Welfare State

As stated above, Fordism, as a regime of accumulation, needed state regulation to secure the economic, political and social conditions necessary for the process of accumulation. The state form that is most associated with Fordism is the welfare state (Harvey, 1990; Teeple 2000). Welfare state policies, in general, were influenced by Keynesian economics.

Keynesian economic policies were geared toward the goal of full employment, state economic intervention and social investment (McMichael, 2000). Employment insurance programs, social assistance programs, universal health care, public schools and old-age pensions are a few elements of Keynesian welfare states. Keynesian economic policies were "... intended to reduce the effects of the business cycle and thereby avoid rates of bankruptcy and unemployment threatening to the system ..." (Teeple, 2000:36).

The welfare state in Canada emerged during the post WWII period and is best described as:

"...a capitalist society in which the state has intervened in the form of social policies, programs, standards and regulations in order to mitigate class conflict and to provide for, answer, or accommodate certain social needs for which the capitalist mode of production in itself has no solution or makes no provision" (Teeple 2000:15)

In Canada, this meant care for the working class in the form of universal, state sponsored healthcare, educational systems and social benefits in the form of programs like unemployment insurance, welfare and social services (Teeple, 2000; Stinson, 2004). In terms of the labour market, the welfare state through the

implementation of Keynesian economic policies, acted to mitigate the pressures of capital, prepare workers for the labour market and ensure an adequate supply of labour through standards for wages, workplace regulations and protective legislation (Teeple, 2000:15). In addition, a number of social security initiatives contributed to an increase in employment security in the labour market, these including the Canada Pension Plan and Guaranteed Income Supplement (1965), Medicare (1966) and the Canada Assistance Plan (1967) (Black, 1998:80).

The post WWII period in Canada is associated with relative economic growth (Fox, 2001:159; Black 1998). The post war period is also associated with relatively high paid, full time employment for men whose families enjoyed the benefits of his family wage. The family wage ideal, institutionalized by the welfare state through the provision of welfare measures and collective bargaining, was supposed to afford a particular working class family unit enough to reproduce itself as well as consume at the appropriate level deemed necessary by the economic demands of Fordist production (Brodie, 1996). But the reality for many working families was that they required more than one income earner to achieve the standard of living dictated by Fordist accumulation (Connelly and MacDonald, 1986:58).

According to Black (1998:79), the composition of the job structure and labour force was transformed after WWII particularly in terms of growth in the service and white-collar sectors compared to the blue-collar and resource sectors. The rise of the welfare state saw an increase in jobs in the service sector which were filled by women as the jobs mirrored women's unpaid work in the

home (Stinson, 2004). Women's labour force participation rates doubled from 1953 to 1977 from 23.5 per cent to 46.6 per cent partially due to the expansion of the welfare state and an increase in employment opportunities in sectors traditionally deemed women's work: education, health care and clerical work (Black, 1998:79).

Women's increased labour force participation was also due to growing economic burdens of families partly due to the inability of men's wages to cover the needs of their families. Between 1951 and 1971, employment in the service sector increased from 44.7 per cent to 57.8 per cent but in the resource sector, employment rates declined from 21.3 per cent to 8.4 per cent (Black, 1998:79). Beginning in the late 1970s, but more so after 1980, the real annual incomes of young adults fell significantly (Picot et al, 1998, Morrisette, 1998). In the 1980s and 1990s, men experienced dramatic and prolonged declines in employment (Statistics Canada, 2006:15). The manufacturing and the construction industries, where the majority of jobs are held by men, were the hardest hit during the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s (Statistics Canada, 2006:15).

Lero (1996:29) notes that in 1967, 58.4 percent of all husband-wife families conformed to the male breadwinner/female homemaker model and that only 32.7 percent of these families had dual income earners. But by 1986 only 12 per cent of Canadian husband-wife families relied on the husband as the sole income earner, where dual income earner families represented 52 percent of husband-wife families (Philips and Philips, 1993:37). Philips and Philips

(1993:37) note that economic insecurity was one of the main factors that contributed to the increase of women in the labour force.

As it was noted earlier, the construction of the male breadwinner model family reinforced women's economic dependence on men (Fager and Partias, 2005:11-12). This translated into lower wages and limited work opportunities for women in the labour market. For example, Philips and Philips (1993:50) note, that in 1911, women's wages were 53 per cent of men's wages and in 1931 women's wages were 60 per cent of the average male wage. By 1990, the average wages of full-time, working women were still lower than men's. The average annual earnings of women constituted 67.6 per cent of the average yearly earnings of men (Philips and Philips, 1993:50). The family wage ideal also contributed to the segregation of women into "women's work" traditionally lower paid domestic and social work (Black, 1998; Silver et al, 2004).

In Canada, in 1971, a senate report generated by the Special Senate Committee on Poverty reported that despite relative economic growth and a low unemployment rate, one fifth of the Canadian population remained poor; furthermore two thirds of those families headed by individuals who had jobs (Black, 1998:81).

In Canada, the relative prosperity of the post war period was challenged in the mid-1970s by global and national economic crises and by the mid-1980s, the economy and the Canadian welfare state began to be restructured (Cohen, 1997; Silver et al, 2004). This process marked the beginning of an economic transition and the restructuring of Canada's economy into a neoliberal economy. The

process, so far, has had profound impacts on families, particularly vulnerable working class families.

The Rise of Neoliberalism

It is generally known that the 1970s marked the beginning of dramatic political and economic change in advanced capitalist societies (Albo, 2002; McKeen and Porter, 2003; Gamble, 2001). The post war boom that brought relative economic and social stability across Western Europe and North America began to crack (Gamble, 2002: 127). The “crack” had to do with a number of factors including the “...deepening internationalization of circuits of money and industrial capital ...” (Albo, 2002:46), and dramatic changes in the technology of production and communications.

It was during the mid to late 1970s that neoliberal policies associated with Thatcherism, Reaganism and the New Right Agenda became formal government policy (Teeple, 2000:81; Albo, 2002). Neoliberal economic theory was originally presented as a solution to the “failure” of Keynesian economics. Keynesian economic policies focused on nationally bounded economies and capital accumulation on a national scale, but as capital accumulation internationalized, neoliberal policies were increasingly seen as the necessary political dimension of this process (Teeple, 2000:81).

In general, neoliberalism promotes market led economic and social restructuring (Jessop, 2002:461). In Great Britain and the United States during the late 1970s and 1980s, neoliberal restructuring was synonymous with the

governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Jessop, 2002; Gamble, 2001). In Canada, neoliberal restructuring began in the 1980s (McKeen and Porter, 2003:109).

An outcome of neoliberalism is a shift in economic and social policy towards greater emphasis on the unfettered market (Bakker, 1996; Jessop, 2002; Teeple, 2000). Neoliberal policies are generally associated with the privatization of the public sector, the restructuring of the tax structure, withdrawal of state intervention in economic activity or deregulation, the downsizing of government, the dismantling of the social provisions of the welfare state and the decrease of trade union power (Teeple, 2000; Jessop, 2002). Neoliberal ideas harkened back to the liberalism of the nineteenth century. Thatcher called for a return to Victorian values;

... for a renewal of nineteenth century economic, political, and even imperial philosophies and her championing of moral, social, and gender norms of an earlier time found great favour among a large segment of the population... (Kent, 1999:335)

Generally, neoliberalism carries the notion that "...the market has positive political and economic implications" (Teeple, 2000:85). The implementation of neoliberal policies tend to increase economic inequality, structural unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation (Teeple, 2000:4).

How neoliberal policies are implemented and practiced depends on the national government, although in Canada, provincial governments are also part of the implementation process. The introduction of neoliberal policies is not uniform spatially or historically; some jurisdictions are 'better' at it than others.

Furthermore, Jessop (2002) argues that there are varying forms of neoliberalism. Albo (2002) makes a similar observation when he discusses how different political groups, for instance left of centre groups, incorporate neoliberal policies.

It is a cold hard fact of contemporary politics that regimes of different political stripes have all endorsed capitalist globalization and implemented policies of deregulation, privatization, and social austerity. We get neoliberalism even when we elect social democratic governments (2002:47)

In Canada, neoliberal restructuring has stimulated a drastic decrease in social welfare provision from the state as free trade initiatives take governmental precedence. Free trade is seen as an important aspect of a market centered society advocated by neoliberal ideology. The purpose of free trade is to "...eliminate practices within countries that constitute barriers to trade" (Cohen, 1997:31-32). Instead of focusing on the production and exchange of goods and service, free trade now involves "...institutions and rules which are designed to facilitate capital mobility as well (Cohen, 1997:31-32). This means that when states, such as Canada, enter free trade agreements, they need to reorganize their internal social and economic policies to facilitate this process. This may appear in the form of regressive tax initiatives that guarantee low corporate taxes and less government spending on social programs and more spending on initiatives to attract capital.

The Canadian government argues that initiatives to attract capital are needed in order to remain competitive in the global economy. According to Cohen, Canadian business groups argued in the mid-1980s that high corporate

taxes and strict equity, labour, and environmental laws put them at a disadvantage compared to their rivals in poorer countries (Cohen, 1997:33).

Pressure from Canadian business interests threatened to leave if Canada did not change its economic and social policies. It was argued that “[a]n attractive business climate would be one with low taxes and few restrictions on firm’s activities which affected labour and the environment” (Cohen, 1997:33). Pressure from business resulted in a number of changes targeted at labour legislation and social programs that were perceived as barriers to competition and economic growth.

In Canada, at the federal level, the beginning of neoliberalism is associated with Brian Mulroney’s government in the mid-1980s; which is known for its role in the development and the signing of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Mexico. Subsequently, neoliberal policies were implemented by the Tory governments of Ontario, under Mike Harris (1995 - 2002), and in Alberta, under Ralph Klein (1992 -) (Albo, 2002:47). The traditional NDP strongholds of Manitoba and Saskatchewan also implemented neoliberal changes beginning in the early 1990s along with Ontario under Bob Rae (1990-1995) (Albo, 2002:47). British Columbia was arguably one of the first provinces in Canada to implement neoliberal policies on a large scale. Bill Bennett’s government in 1981 brought about radical changes to labour legislation and employment standards, followed by Bill Vander Zalm in the mid-1980s and continuing with Glen Clark (1996-1999). Since 2001, the British Columbia Liberals, under the leadership of Gordon Campbell, have implemented, what

Albo (2002:47) refers to as “...draconian cutbacks ...to bring the ‘Alberta advantage’ to the Pacific side of the Rockies.”

The implementation of neoliberal policies in British Columbia, under Gordon Campbell in 2001, were to reorganize BC’s economy in order to make “...a strong and vibrant economy, a supportive social infrastructure and safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment” (Province of British Columbia, 2001). What ensued was a “...program of radical reform and budget cuts to healthcare, education, welfare and legal aid ...” (Caledon Institute for Social Policy, 2002), in addition to income and corporate tax cuts, and attacks on workers’ rights.

The various economic policies implemented by the BC liberal government since 2001 have contributed to the intensification of economic burdens on working class families in British Columbia. It is important to point out, however, that similar changes were underway before the election of the BC Liberal government in 2001. The reality is that whether governments were ‘right’ or ‘left,’ they were (and still are) willing or reluctant slaves to neoliberalism and no government has made it any easier for people to make a decent living. Some families are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. The next two chapters discuss the social and economic changes that have occurred in British Columbia and their impact on working poor and low income families. The legislated lowering of the age of employment of children may allow low-income and working poor families the opportunity to send their children out to work as working class families did during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. But

this stands in direct conflict with the family wage ideal and the social construction of children as economically useless.

CHAPTER FIVE: NEOLIBERAL RESTRUCTURING IN BC AND THE CHANGES TO CHILDREN'S EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

The Context: Neoliberal Restructuring in BC

When the Liberals were elected in 2001, they released a report titled *A New Era for British Columbia: A Vision of Hope and Prosperity for the next decade and beyond*. The "vision" stated in this report included "a thriving private sector economy that creates high-paying job opportunities" and "to have the leading economy in the country, with the highest levels of private sector investment anywhere" (BC Liberals, 2001:3). In this report, the BC Liberals also outlined what they perceived as appropriate measures to create a "...brighter future that is realistic, affordable and measurable" (BC Liberals, 2001). These measures, included, but were not limited to: cutting taxes, including personal taxes and taxes on investment and productivity; privatizing crown corporations and encouraging the contracting out of public sector work; cutting "red tape" and regulatory burdens; drastically changing welfare policies and restructuring Employment Standards so that "...workers and employers [have] greater

flexibility ... to negotiate mutually beneficial relationships that help them compete and prosper” (BC Liberals, 2001:11).

In order to restructure BC’s economy into what it considers a competitive and productive economy, the government systematically targeted social programs, worker’s rights, and labour and employment standards, all clearly neoliberal initiatives. For instance, welfare policies are now geared towards “workfare” type assistance. This means that individuals applying for assistance are required to participate in job training programs or to accept job placements in order to receive welfare benefits (Klein and Long, 2003: 27). Recipients who have collected social assistance for two years and are determined “employable” by their caseworker are no longer eligible to collect welfare benefits. In addition, a first time applicant must show evidence of “economic independence” for two years prior to the application (Klein and Long, 2003). Other changes to welfare policies left many families and individuals with no economic support.

The changes to welfare benefit eligibility directly affect women, particularly single mothers. Before the Liberal government changed the welfare rules, single parents were expected to find work after their youngest child reached the age of seven. Currently, mothers whose youngest child has reached the age of three are denied social assistance and expected to find work (Caledon Institute for Social Policy, 2002; Klein and Long, 2003; Fuller and Stephens, 2004). Childcare subsidy rates have remained relatively the same for low-income families, the rates fall short of the actual cost of childcare and more modest income families have been subjected to childcare subsidy cuts (Long and Klein, 2003). For

example, a single parent, with a four-year-old child, who earns approximately \$20, 000.00 gross annually, at an hourly wage of just over \$11.00 per hour, used to receive a \$4,416.00 annual subsidy, this parent now receives \$742.00 less per year (Klein and Long, 2003).

Before the changes made to BC's welfare rules in 2001, those collecting welfare benefits were able to engage in paid employment and keep a portion of the income, called "earnings exceptions." Couples with children and single parents were able to keep \$200.00 but since the changes to welfare rules, any income earned by someone collecting welfare benefits is deducted "dollar for dollar" (Klein and Long, 2003). Child support payments are now deducted "dollar for dollar" from welfare benefits whereas before the new welfare rules parents could keep up to \$100 of child support payments.

Since 2001, changes to employment standards have also demonstrated the Liberal government's commitment to neoliberal policies. A "training wage" was created, called the "First Entry/Entry Level" minimum wage two dollars below the current minimum wage²², primarily affecting young workers and immigrants. The training wage is in effect for the worker's first 500 hours of paid employment regardless of the number of employers she has worked for (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). Another example of the BC Liberal's "flexible" employment programs is the change to the definition of "Farm Worker." Under

²² The current minimum wage for BC is \$8.00/hour, thus the "First Entry/Entry Level" wage rate is \$6.00/hour, 25 per cent less than the standard minimum wage. For more information on minimum wage in BC see the Employment Standards Branch (2006) website at www.labour.gov.bc.ca/esb/facshts/min-wage.htm

the new definition, farm workers are not eligible for overtime or statutory pay (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). One of the more striking changes to Employment Standards has been the change to employment standards that effect children.

Although, arguably, economic restructuring has increased women's access to employment through the expansion of the service sector in BC, the majority of jobs in this sector are low-wage, part-time and insecure (Fuller and Stephens, 2004). In addition, through privatization and spending cutbacks, approximately 20,000 public sector jobs have been cut and 75 per cent of those who lost their jobs were women (Fuller and Stephens, 2004). The loss of public sector employment has also contributed to an increase in the gender wage gap; men's wages in the public and private sector are almost identical due to pay equity legislation, whereas women in the private receive less because of the types of jobs available to women (Fuller and Stephens, 2004).

In general, the cutbacks to public sector jobs and the creation of new welfare eligibility rules dramatically affect women and in turn affect their children. According to First Call, an advocacy coalition for children and youth in BC, child poverty rates for children living in single-parent, female headed household, was 54 per cent in 2002, while the poverty rate for children living in two parent families was 12 per cent (First Call, 2004). The rate of child poverty in BC is the third highest in Canada as almost 19.6 per cent of children living in BC live in poverty (First Call 2004).

By dismantling the social security net, changing employment standards and cutting corporate taxes, the BC government has created an economic climate where the rights of capital have superseded the rights of workers, families and children. The effects of economic restructuring in BC means that less dependency on the state is replaced by economic hardship which results in an increase in economic dependence on family members (Fuller and Stephens, 2004), including children.

In the *New Era* report, the BC Liberals (2001) stated that “If you are a parent, we want you to know that your children will have the education they need and *the economic activity they deserve* to build a successful future at home in your community” (author’s emphasis). It appears that this translated into increased labour market access to children as young as 12 years old in 2003. The provincial government changed BC’s child employment standards affecting minimum age restrictions and regulatory oversight of employment relationships involving children. The minimum age for employment was lowered from 15 years to 12 years. This brings the working age of children in contemporary British Columbia down to the age level of working children in Ontario in 1884²³.

Changing child employment standards is consistent with the overall economic restructuring process sponsored by the BC Liberals. The BC Liberals demonstrate their commitment to reinstituting market primacy through the enactment of neoliberal policies aimed at re-regulating the labour market. Not

²³ See discussion of Ontario Factory Acts in chapter 4.

only does the change to employment standards affecting children demonstrate the BC Liberal's adherence to the market principle, it also demonstrates the BC Liberal's commitment to the principle of privatization.

The neoliberal principle of privatization, in this instance, does not refer to the privatizing of crown corporations or government services as such, instead it refers to the privatization of poverty alleviation. To explain, the government is shifting the responsibility of poverty alleviation from the state to families by placing the initiative for poverty reduction onto families. Considering the various cutbacks to economic and social support services the provincial government has made it more difficult for working poor and low-income families to maintain economic stability. Children as young as 12 years old now have the ability to work to support their families. In some cases this may become a growing reality for many families struggling to maintain economic stability.

The BC government's economic restructuring policies reflect a commitment to neoliberal ideology and Victorian notions of the family, although with a new twist. The commitment to neoliberal ideology is demonstrated by the government's adherence to the market principle. The government's perpetuation of Victorian notions of the family is demonstrated by the importance the government places on family responsibility in order to maintain economic stability. But it also demonstrates a re-shaping of the Victorian family into a neo-Victorian family in that although importance is placed on individual family responsibility to maintain economic stability, Bill 37 challenges the dependent status of children and works to reshape children as potentially important

individual contributors to their family's income. This is different from the Victorian family form where children are considered non-economically active dependents. Friedmann (1999:152) concurs that placing the reasonability of poverty alleviation onto families harkens back to the ideology and morality of the nineteenth century.

The Change to Child Employment Standards in British Columbia

On December 14, 2003, the Liberal government of British Columbia changed the Employments Standards Act by instituting Bill 37, the Skills Development and Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2003 (BC Government 2003). A more detailed discussion of the enacted changes is left to subsequent sections of this thesis, but in sum, the changes to the Employment Standards Act, reduced the age of eligibility of employment from 15 to 12 years, and removed the permit system that was previously in place to provide oversight and regulation of child employees under 15 and replaced it by making parents ultimately responsible for the oversight of their children's employment. Before Bill 37, employers were required to obtain a permit from the Employment Standards Branch if they wanted to hire a person under 15, now employers only need a signed letter of consent from the child's parent or guardian (Ministry of Skills, Development and Labour, 2003).

The previous permit system was instituted in 1944 and regulated child employment in British Columbia until the enactment of Bill 37 in 2003. This legislative change affects children under 15 years of age, yet data as to who they

are in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background, and how many children worked and/or are working are virtually unavailable²⁴. Statistics Canada only collects labour force activity statistics on those in the population that are 15 years old and older (Statistics Canada, 2003) thus accessible statistical data concerning children under 15 who are working are unavailable. A reasonable guess of who these children may be takes into consideration the number of family run businesses in British Columbia, the number of families considered low-income, working poor or who live in poverty and the number of newly immigrant families in BC, as the agricultural industry is known for its high employment rate of new immigrants and is notorious for exploitive employment practices.

In addition, the information concerning the previous permit system that was in place from 1944 to 2003, was quite guarded by the Ministry of Skills, Development and Labour. According to a publication developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, spokespeople for the ministry stated "...they did not track employer compliance with permits ... [and that] ...the ministry ... did not keep track of rejected, withdrawn or revised permit applications" (Luke and Moore, 2003:9). Apparently the various governments that have overseen the regulation of children's employment under the permit system developed in the 1944 legislation did not see it as a process that warranted much scrutiny.

The reluctance of government officials to track employer compliance and the overall lack of data collection and documentation of the previous permit

²⁴ In September 2005, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report based on research into the effects of these changes. This is discussed in the following sections.

process reflects the historical construction of childhood as a period in the life cycle where exclusion from the labour market is considered the norm. Because of this conception of childhood, children are regarded as 'economically useless' (Zelizer, 1985) and their economic activity is generally considered of little consequence (Hessternan, 2005:78). As Nievwenhuys (1996:237) notes, children are seen as "... ideologically separate from the production of value." As children's economic activity is generally viewed as unimportant, minimal effort is afforded to the collection of data pertaining to their economic activity .

The lack of accessible and comprehensive data poses a problem for the purposes of analysis. Direct data sources are inaccessible and much of the information that does exist comes from secondary sources such as newspaper articles, NGO press releases and a CCPA publication titled, "*Who's Looking Out for Our Kids? Deregulating Child Labour Law in British Columbia*," published in 2004. The CCPA report was co-authored by a former employee of the Employment Standards Branch, Graeme Moore. This means that the majority of the information concerning the workings of the previous permit system is based on anecdotal information and personal experience and not official records which makes it difficult to evaluate how effective the previous system was. Thus, the information provided in the CCPA report that pertains to the previous permit system is used here in a strictly descriptive sense in order to develop a general picture of how the previous system worked. The purpose here is to provide a simple comparison of the changes to the Employment Standards Act in 2003 with

previous practice. When possible, some supplementary information is provided from Legislative debates that took place prior to the passing of Bill 37.

The Previous Permit System for Child Employment

According to Graeme Moore a retired Employment Standards Branch employee, the prior permit system for child employment regulation that existed before the enactment of Bill 37 in 2003 was apparently developed to ensure the “best interests of the child” in employment opportunities (Luke and Moore, 2003). Although, the “best interests of the child” are not directly defined, in this context it appears to be understood as safe working conditions, time for leisure and play and, adequate time for school activities and education, and no risk of exploitation.

The permit system required that employers interested in hiring children under the age of 15 years had to apply for a child employment permit with the Employment Standards Branch (Luke and Moore, 2004). The permit system involved a number of steps before a permit was granted to an applicant. These steps included site inspections and employer interviews and consultations with school authorities, parents and guardians. The Director of the Employment Standards Branch consulted with the school authorities and parents and would only issue a permit after all three parties agreed that the opportunity was in the child’s best interest (Luke and Moore, 2004).

According to Luke and Moore, industrial relations officers employed by the Employment Standards Branch used an internal document, the Employment

Branch Interpretations Guidelines Manual²⁵, to determine the suitability of the particular employment opportunity (Luke and Moore, 2004). This document included guidelines for site inspections and employer interviews to determine the safety of the work site (Luke and Moore, 2004). Employment Standards Branch officers were required to evaluate work sites and job descriptions based on hours of work, transportation to and from work, type of work and location of work site, supervision, and provisions for tutoring for children working in the entertainment industry (Luke and Moore, 2004). The manual included an extensive list of inappropriate tasks for children including operating a forklift, using power tools, working with chemicals and working near or at a grill or deep-fryer (Luke and Moore, 2004). The manual also defined inappropriate transportation to and from the work site based on time of transportation and asked questions like; would the child have to ride public transit at night; or other means of transportation, would the child have to ride their bike down a busy highway (Luke and Moore, 2004). Depending on the answers to such inquiries, Employment Standards Branch Officers determined whether to grant a permit, or make recommendations to the applicant/ potential employer to revise and resubmit the application. The role of the officers was to ensure the safety and protection of the child and determine if any conditions for employment were necessary. If it were discovered that the conditions of employment set out in the permit were violated, the permit was terminated (Luke and Moore, 2004).

²⁵ The author was unable to gain access to this document.

Under the permit system, the government had a fairly direct role in the regulation of child employment. However, it was not without faults. According to Luke and Moore (2003:12), the ability of Employment Standards Branch employees to accurately assess the safety of a worksite was sometimes called into question and it was argued that the Worker's Compensation Board would be more appropriate for administering the permit system. Apparently, senior managers were made aware of this and the legal vulnerability of the Employment Standards Branch "... if a child was killed or injured while employed with a permit approved by the branch" (Luke and Moore, 2003). According to Luke and Moore (2003:12) nothing was done with the recommendations. Luke and Moore (2003:12) also claim that many children worked without a permit although they do not provide systematic evidence to back this claim.

The faults of the permit system, as reported by Luke and Moore, make it appear that it was also inadequate in regulating and overseeing the employment of children. Nonetheless, it at least provided some governmental regulation of children's employment (Luke and Moore, 2003).

The Current Process for Child Employment

As of December 2003, the permit system was dismantled and a new individualized system of employment regulation was established. According to the Employment Standards Fact Sheet: General Employment of Young People, published by the Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, Employment Standards Branch (2003), the written consent of a parent or guardian is the only

requirement an employer needs to hire a young person between the ages of 14 and 12 (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). This means that Employment Standards Branch officers are no longer part of the evaluation process in determining the appropriateness of the employment opportunity for the child. The employer must have written consent from a parent or guardian on file "...to indicate the young person's date of birth and [stating] that the parent or guardian knows where the young person is working, the hours of work and the type of work" (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). The Employment Standards Branch states that "[t]he parent or guardian is responsible for their children and must determine that the employment situations meet the best interest of the child and will not adversely affect the child's social, physical or educational needs" (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003).

There are two issues that arise out of an analysis of these new standards. First, in the old permit system, "best interests of the child" are not defined, although "best interests" are alluded to in that "...the child's social, physical or educational needs.." should not be adversely affected. "Needs" are not defined and are left open to parental interpretation. Best interests" are subjective and depending on the context, could mean different things to different people.

Second, the responsibility placed on parents to determine the appropriateness of the employment opportunity is also problematic, especially if

the child is employed at a worksite where their parents work as is often the case for agricultural workers²⁶. In addition, parents may not possess the skills or knowledge, nor the power to advocate for themselves let alone for their children. By placing the responsibility on parents, the government is absolved of its own responsibility.

As of December 2003, employers must adhere to the following employment conditions for children between the ages of 12 to 15. First, a young person must not be employed at the same time he or she is scheduled to attend school (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). The Employment Standards Act does not have conditions about working before school or the time of day or night they may work after school. Thus a child could potentially work before school which may interfere with their ability to concentrate on their school work. Second, a young person can work up to four hours on a school day and no more than 20 hours in a week that has 5 school days (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). On top of a regular school day, which is approximately 6 hours, an additional 4 hours of work turns the child's day into a ten hour work day (Luke and Moore 2003). Third and fourth, a young person must not work more than seven hours a day on a non-school day unless the Director of the Employment Standards Branch has provided written approval and a young person may work up to 35 hours in any week containing less than five school days (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). This may

²⁶ An article, written by Scott Deveau, September 9, 2004, discusses the various abuses experienced by farm workers. Accessed through The Tyee, www.thetyee.ca.

become especially problematic for children who live in school districts that have had to reduce the school week to four days instead of five days because of budget cutbacks (Luke and Moore 2003). Finally, a young person must be under the direct supervision of a person aged 19 or older at all times while working (Ministry of Skills Development and Labour, 2003). In a report published by the Worker's Compensation Board, "...rates of work related injury to males aged 15-24 have historically been higher than the rates of injury to males 25 and over and much higher than females of all ages" (Workers Compensation Board, 1998:2). This means that those 19 and over who are given supervisory authority by an employer may not possess the skills or knowledge to look after themselves on a worksite let alone supervise the safety for someone younger than themselves.

The enforcement and oversight of these employment standards are placed on the child worker and their parent or guardian. To assist parents and guardians in their evaluations of potential employment opportunities, the ministry developed a "self-help kit", downloadable from the ministry web site that assists workers in evaluating their working conditions and gives workers tools that enable them to advocate on their own behalf. Not only is this "self-help kit" available on a website which assumes people have access to the technology required to download it, it also assumes a certain educational background, a certain level of language comprehension and the ability to apply the information to the context in which the employment opportunity exists.

In an attempt to justify the removal of government in the oversight of child employment, on October 6, 2003 the Minister stated that a graduated fine system

would be put in place with fines ranging from \$500.00 for the first violation up to \$10, 000.00 for continuous or substantial violations of employment standards (British Columbia Debates, October 6, 2003:7194). The minister did not state how violations would be determined; the assumption being that parents and or guardians or children themselves would report a violation. However the minister did not indicate if there were other means of determining a violation such as third party reporting.

Employment Standards Affecting Children: The International Context

The changes made to Employment Standards are particularly interesting given that a variety of international agencies, to which Canada is supposedly accountable to, are engaged in various projects to combat child labour. As a member of the United Nations, Canada is subject to a variety of international conventions including those developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Since 1919, the ILO has developed approximately 10 conventions that deal with minimum age for employment. In 1973, the ILO developed Convention C138, Minimum Age Convention. ILO Convention C138, set the international minimum age for employment at 15 years with the option of 14 years for countries whose "economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed" (ILO, 1973). This convention, the ILO argued, was created in order to consolidate the various industry-specific minimum age conventions that preceded it. The ILO saw a need for a more general regulatory instrument that would incorporate all

previous conventions to create a more powerful tool to abolish child labour (ILO, 1973). Canada has yet to ratify Convention C138 without any obvious or public explanation. Other countries that have not ratified C138 include the United States and Singapore (ILO, 2004).

In 1992, the ILO created the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). The aim of IPEC is "...the progressive elimination of child labour worldwide, with the eradication of the worst forms with urgent priority" (ILO, 2003). According to the ILO, the IPEC program is implemented in a number of ways: through country-based policy reform initiatives and institutional capacity building, and through mobilization and social awareness campaigns designed to "...change social attitudes and promote ratification and effective implementation of ILO child labour Conventions" (ILO, 2003).

In concert with IPEC, the ILO drafted Convention C182, the Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in 1999. This convention was created in recognition of "...the need to adopt new instruments for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour..." and to complement Convention C138 (ILO, 1999). In particular, Convention C182 is seen to address child labour concerns that are beyond the scope of labour legislation such as Convention C138 (ILO, 2005). The worst forms of child labour are identified as

"all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced compulsory labour, including forced production of pornography or pornographic performances or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed combat; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performances; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit

activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined by relevant international treaties; work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children” (ILO Convention C-182, 1999).

One hundred and forty-three countries have ratified Convention C-182, including Canada. In fact, Canada was commended on its international commitment in supporting this convention by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in October 2003 (The Society for Children and Youth of BC, 2004). However, according to a report generated by The Society for Children and Youth of BC, the committee was concerned that Canada had yet to ratify ILO Convention C138 and encouraged Canada “...to conduct nation-wide research to fully assess the extent of working children, in order to take, when necessary, effective measures to prevent the exploitive employment of children in Canada” (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, quoted in The Society for Children and Youth of BC, 2004). It is interesting to note that British Columbia, a province of Canada, has lowered the age of employment below international standards and passed its legislation at a time when this UN report was being delivered.

The Support and the Rationale for the Changes to Employment Standards

Although it appears that the changes to employment standards effecting children are part of the BC Liberal government’s neoliberal restructuring program, the changes to employment standards effecting children were not solely conceived by Liberal government politicians and policy makers. Various lobby groups representing small to medium size business owners, particularly those

representing the service sector, have been lobbying the provincial government since the mid-1990s, regardless of which party was in office²⁷. When Bill 37 was debated in the Legislature, the Minister of Skills Development and Labour stated that Bill 37 had been developed through a consultation process with employers and parents. In addition, part of the Minister's rationale for the change to employment standards affecting children was that the changes enacted through Bill 37 went further than the previous legislation to protect vulnerable workers.

The Consultation Process

The Minister of Skills Development and Labour, Graham Bruce, stated that the change to child employment standards is a step towards ensuring that "...employment standards are fair, effective and enforceable" (British Columbia Debates March 5, 2003). He argued that the previous permit system was too bureaucratic and did little to protect children because many children were already working without permits (Luke and Moore 2004, Richards 2003). He did not provide any actual evidence to support this claim. Bruce also stated in the Legislative Assembly that "...the changes to employment rules were developed and refined in consultations with parents and employers" (British Columbia Debates, May 5, 2003: 6466).

²⁷ The New Democratic Party was in office from 1991 to 2001 when they were defeated by the BC Liberal Party.

The liberal government did consult employers and their respective representational bodies concerning the changes to employment standards.²⁸ It appears that although these particular changes to employment standards happened recently, lobbying efforts from organizations representing the service sector began in the mid-1990s.

In 1994, a coalition made up of The Restaurant and Foodservices Association of British Columbia, The Retail Merchant's Association of British Columbia and The British Columbia and Yukon Hotel's Association submitted a report²⁹ to the Minister of Skills, Training and Labour arguing that changes should be made to employment standards. This coalition argued that the changes suggested in the report were "...necessary for employment [in the service sector] to continue to grow and for companies (like these) to remain profitable" (1994:2). In addition, the coalition expressed concern that "[b]usinesses in the hospitality and retail sectors face increasing competitive pressures on a number of fronts..." and that "...[BC businesses in this sector] need the assurance that the government is not going to become an unseen competitor through unrealistic and costly regulations" (1994:2).

²⁸ No evidence was found that indicated any consultation with parents although this does not mean that some sort of consultation process did occur.

²⁹ This report was prepared in conjunction with Price Waterhouse Management Consultants of Vancouver. It was accessed through the Legislative Library of British Columbia 2005.

In 2000, the Coalition of BC Business³⁰ produced a report titled *Labour Policies That Work: A New Vision For BC*³¹. This report contains a number of recommendations for changes to Employment Standards and the Labour Code. The Coalition (2000) called for the implementation of flexible employment laws that reflect individual choice and promote voluntary cooperation between employees and employers. The Coalition (2000) also made recommendations concerning the implementation of an entry level “training” wage and the reduction of the Employment Standards “paper burden.” It appears that the Liberal government addressed these recommendations in the changes made to the Employment Standards Act.

The Protection of Vulnerable Workers

In reaction to criticisms from the NDP concerning the Liberal government’s assessment of the permit system as useless in regulating the employment of children, Bruce stated in the legislature, during the second reading of the Bill, that in the past up to 300 employment permits were issued annually and about 3 per cent of the permits applied for were rejected (British Columbia Debates October 7, 2003:7229). In response, Jenny Kwan, an NDP MLA, stated in the legislature that “...evidence suggests that child labour permits were regularly declined by employments officers ...and anecdotal information indicates that child exploitation is wide spread in the agriculture and garment industries but that the

³⁰ The Coalition of BC Business represents approximately 27 organizations that collectively represent small and medium sized business in all sectors across BC.

³¹ This report is available for download at www.labourpolicies.com.

government has actively decided not to track compliance” (British Columbia Debates October 6, 2003:7196). No direct evidence was presented to support Kwan’s claims but considering documented evidence that farm workers are vulnerable to abuse (Deveau 2004), her claim is not totally unreasonable.

Bruce insisted that Bill 37 amends the Employment Standards Act to effectively protect children and that it also “...balances the needs of employees and employers with protection for vulnerable workers”(British Columbia Debates October 6, 2003:7193). Essentially the government believes that parents are in a better position to protect their children from potentially harmful workplaces than the state is. In reaction to a comment about deregulating child employment standards and the withdrawal of state oversight Bruce stated, “Parents should be allowed to decide. You know, parents ought to have a role and a responsibility in today’s society” (British Columbia Debates October 6, 2003:7198).

Recent research suggests that parental involvement in the enforcement of the new employment standards and working conditions is far from adequate and it further suggests that parents are not acting in the capacity suggested by the provincial government, particularly the Minister of Skills Development and Labour Graham Bruce. According to research conducted by Irwin, McBride and

Strubin³², 48.1 per cent of the 12 to 14 year olds surveyed stated that their parents did not evaluate the health and safety standards of their workplaces (2005:6). In addition, 58.3 per cent of the 12 to 14 year olds reported that their "...employer did not receive written approval from their parents" (Irwin et al. 2005:6). This is in direct violation of the employment standards for children set out by Bill 37 and further demonstrates the lack of parental capacity to regulate and oversee the employment of their children.

In order to be compliant with their ideological program of deregulation and privatization, the Ministry of Skills Development and Labour must decrease interference in the labour market. Bruce stated that "[t]his bill addresses our commitment to remove unnecessary regulation and implement employment standards that are fair, effective and enforceable" (British Columbia Debates October 6, 2003:7194).

The above statement by the Minister of Skills Development and Labour shares a similar ideological position with the liberals of nineteenth century Britain and Canada. Politicians committed to liberal principles were the most vocal opponents to the enactment of protective labour legislation as it was seen as interference in the labour market (Roberts, 2004). Although the BC Liberal

³² This research was published in a report titled Child and Youth Employment Standards: The Experience of Young Workers Under British Columbia's New Policy Regime (Irwin et al., 2005). The research is based on a survey of BC 624 public school students ranging from ages 12 to 18 years. The majority of the report focuses on the responses from 114 students who were currently working and although it is a small sample size, it does offer important supplementary information about the current working conditions of children and youth under the new employment standards legislation in British Columbia.

government maintains an ideological disdain for market interference, it continuously intervenes in the restructuring of the economy. In doing so, the liberal government is reverting to nineteenth century Victorian conceptions of familial responsibility through its action to legislate parental supervision of children's employment by arguing that parents need to take a more active role in the regulation of their child's employment. Furthermore, the legislation implies that parents are the most suitable people to oversee their children's employment relationships reinforcing the Victorian notion that the family is the natural safeguard against the harsh reality of the labour market and public life in general (Kent, 1999).

Bill 37 makes it easier for employers to hire children as young as twelve and legally allows employers to pay them 25 per cent less than the provincial minimum wage. The B.C Agricultural Council and the B.C. Chamber of Commerce both publicly stated that their organizations lobbied the government to dismantle the permit system. The president of the BC Chamber of Commerce, John Winter said that the chamber was consulted in 2001 about the changes to child labour law and that he saw no downside to it, "...we were looking for more flexibility in the Employment Standards Act, and a lot of what we wanted occurred ..." (Smith 2003). Executive Director of the B.C. Agricultural Council, Steve Thompson, in support of the change stated "[i]t will make it easier for youth to enter the workplace and earn some summer money. They will still need parental approval, and parents won't put children at risk" (Smith 2003).

The Contradiction Posed by Children in the Labour Market

It appears that the changes the BC Liberal government made to child employment standards stands in direct conflict with international standards as well as national and local efforts to deal with the health and safety of children. The re-regulation of child labour in British Columbia also illustrates the ideological conflict between the social construction of children as dependent and vulnerable, and in need of protection from the harsh realities of the labour market (Harevan, 2000; Hendrick, 1997; MacIntosh, 2000; Rose, 1996;) and the neoliberal push for a free market society (Jessop, 2002). In essence, the actions of the Liberal government of British Columbia contradict the historically constructed dependent status of children. The new employment standards challenge the historical construction of children as vulnerable and also challenges the Victorian family form within which children are supposed to be protected from labour market activity. Such a construction of children was used to address public concerns over the state of working children and women in the nineteenth century while at the same time providing an ideological justification for state interference in the labour market. The recent re-regulation of children's employment standards maintains state interference in the market in a way that promotes the primacy of the market instead of protection from the market.

Furthermore, by removing children's barriers to the labour market, the BC Liberal government is, in a sense, creating a highly competitive labour market with the potential to share similar characteristics with the highly competitive labour markets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and in

Canada. The efforts of the BC Liberal government illustrates its ideological commitment to ushering in a market free of state intervention. Such a project, for Polanyi (1944), is a stark utopia due to its destructive consequences for society and its unrealisable goal. Gill (2000:53) makes a similar comparison in his discussion of neoliberal reforms within the context of global restructuring when he observes that early nineteenth century labour conditions are being replicated, for example, by the persistent use of child labour in many developing countries, thus we can suggest that what is happening in BC is part of a global trend.

CHAPTER SIX: EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY WAGE IDEAL

The current climate of neoliberal economic restructuring in British Columbia may stimulate the need for families to once again institute multi-earner strategies, that include children, in order to maintain a basic standard of living. Since the 1970s, families have become increasingly dependent on dual wage earners to meet the basic survival needs of their families (Mahon, 2001; Secombe, 1993; Connelly and MacDonald, 1986). Picot, Myles and Pyper (1998) argue that a substantial decrease in the earnings of young adults³³ has occurred since the mid-1970s in Canada, and that young adults have changed the composition of their families accordingly in order to avoid low income status. In general terms this has meant a decrease in fertility, marrying late and increasing women's participation in the labour market (Picot et al, 1998:16).

The proportion of children in families with two or more earners rose significantly from 47 per cent in 1973 to 66 per cent in 1988 but then declined slightly to 63 per cent in 1995 (Picot et al 1998:16).³⁴ These families were apparently unable to maintain the family wage ideal as two incomes were increasingly required to provide an adequate income for their families. In

³³ Picot, Myles and Pyper define young adults as people between the ages of 25-34 years.

³⁴ Picot et al (1998:16) argue that the decline had to do with the fact that labour force participation rates of men fell and women's stabilized during this period.

addition, according to Statistics Canada (2004), the low income rate falls as the number of earners in a family increases. For example, in Canada in 2004, the low income rate for the 1.9 million families with children and two income earners was 3.7 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2004:15). The low income rate for the 440,000 two parent families with children and one income earner, families that fit the family wage ideal, was 18.4 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2004:15). To place this within the BC context, only 9.8 per cent of BC families in 2002 fit the family wage ideal, with a single earner, or male-breadwinner (Fuller and Stephens, 2004). These statistics demonstrate that families in Canada increasingly require the incomes of two wage earners to avoid low income status and maintain economic stability. In short, the "...world of a stable working class and nuclear family ...has melted into air" (McDowell 1991:407).

According to BC Stats, in 2000, 61 per cent of the minimum wage earners in BC were adults over 19 and 45 per cent were over 25 years. In addition, two thirds of those earning a minimum wage were in dual income families and 14 per cent were single with one or more children in the home (Small Business Quarterly, November 2001). A large portion of minimum wage or slightly higher than minimum wage job opportunities are increasingly found in the tourism industry and service sector, 88 per cent of minimum wage jobs are found in the service sector, 30 per cent of which are in food and accommodation and 25 per cent are in retail and wholesale trade (Small Business Quarterly, November 2001). In addition, 42 per cent of food and accommodation employment involves part-time work (BC Stats October, 2003). It is interesting to note that these were

the sectors represented in the lobbying efforts directed at the provincial government for reduced employment standards. In addition, Lee (2004:20) observes that minimum wages, after accounting for inflation, decreased over the 1990s. Furthermore, the average market income for the bottom 5 per cent of the labour market in 2000 was 30.6 per cent lower than it was in 1992 (Lee, 2004:20).

If the trend of increasing non-standard jobs, that began in the 1990s across Canada (Stinson 2004), continues more children will have to enter the labour market in order to contribute to their family's income. In addition, jobs that have historically been well paid and unionized, particularly those in the resource sector, are steadily declining as major timber companies and mining companies are shutting down their plants, leaving many rural communities with less and less economic resources in terms of access to good paying jobs. This is best illustrated by a quote from a resident of Lillooet, BC, "I've been here for 25 years and never seen it so bad. There are no more big-shot jobs. People need to adapt but they never thought of anything else" (quoted in Markey, 2005:364). Markey (2005:362) explains that the decrease in resource sector jobs in BC is in part due to external factors such as the long term decrease in commodity prices, particularly for forest products, minerals and fish³⁵.

Children from families that are single parent families, families identified as belonging to a visible minority and/or newly immigrant families, may become

³⁵ Markey (2005:362) also notes that the softwood lumber dispute with the United States over duties, has also negatively affected BC's economy, particularly in rural areas.

increasingly overrepresented in the labour market due to fact that these families are overly represented as families that experience poverty. According to statistics provided by *First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition*, single parents, visible minority and a portion of new immigrant families are overly represented as families that experience poverty. Families that identify as having Aboriginal identity experience poverty rates up to 39.6 per cent, the visible minority population in BC experiences a 31.7 per cent poverty rate, immigrant families experience a 44 per cent poverty rate with families arriving after 1995 experiencing a 53 per cent poverty rate. Overall, in 2000, the child poverty rate in BC was 19 per cent³⁶.

It is also interesting to note that the overrepresentation of visible minority and new immigrant families as families that experience poverty is also related to labour force participation and access to adequate work. Silver et al (2004) note that women of colour are increasingly vulnerable to economic restructuring, particularly labour market restructuring, which increases employment in non-standard, part-time and low wage work. According to Cranford et al (2003:16), women of colour in general experience higher instances of part-time employment and represent 17 per cent of workers who have permanent, part-time employment.

When the above statistics are taken into consideration in the context of neoliberal economic restructuring in British Columbia, it is reasonable to surmise

³⁶ These statistics are compiled into Fact Sheets available for download from First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition's web site at www.firstcallbc.org.

that increasingly children will have to work in order to bring income into their families. Working class, working poor and low income families are losing their buying power in terms of maintaining the standard of living demanded by a consumer society. This falls in line with the general conclusion that historically, poor families have had to use a variety of “multi-earner strategies”, that included children, to maintain an adequate standard of living. But this also directly challenges the family wage ideal and the Victorian family form.

Just as children contributed to their family’s income during the transition to industrial capitalism, undoubtedly more children will increasingly have to do the same as the Fordist regime of accumulation is transformed into a neoliberal regime. There is evidence that suggests this is already the case. Irwin et al (2005:25) reported that the 61.9 per cent of their respondents indicated that they were working for spending money. Irwin et al (2005:25) further reported that 13.4 per cent were saving for university, 7.2 per cent were working for pocket money and to help with family expenses and 3.1 per cent stated they worked to help out their family. Although a high percentage of the respondents claimed they were working for spending money, and a minority to help with family expenses, both “strategies” ultimately contribute to a family’s economic capacity. Depending on the socio-economic position of the family, “spending money” for clothes, movies and other items, lessen the burden on the family to directly provide these things. Irwin et al (2005:25) note that a young worker’s “...ability to generate their own spending money may, in low-income families, enable funds to be diverted from allowances and pocket money to general purposes.”

It appears that children's status as economically useless (Zelizer, 1985) was brief and applicable for only middle class families. In the conclusion of her analysis of the changing valuation of children "...not for their economic contributions but for their distinctive personal characteristics" (Zelizer, 2002:377), Zelizer (1985) wonders whether children's economic value will change again, as they become 'useful house-children' as families increasingly rely on dual income earners requiring that children perform unpaid labour in the home. In a later article, she revisits this statement and surmises that children may never have lost their 'economic value' particularly in cases where children provide unpaid labour in family businesses and in the home (Zelizer, 2002). Zelizer (2002:381-82) quotes statistics gathered from a children's marketing specialist who estimates "that children in the US perform 11 per cent of total household work³⁷." In addition, Morrow's (1996:66) research of the everyday lives of secondary school children in Britain discovered that 31 per cent of the boys and 53 per cent of the girls she surveyed performed domestic labour in the home.

Children's unpaid labour in home provides further evidence that the family wage ideal is being challenged. Within the Victorian family form, women, as mothers, were to provide unpaid labour in the home to maintain the family (Luxton, 1980). As mothers are increasingly entering the labour market to provide an additional income for their families, children are taking on the some of the unpaid labour domestic labour that women have traditionally provided. An

³⁷ The author was unable to locate any statistics regarding Canadian children's unpaid labour in the home.

increase in the amount of unpaid labour performed by children in the home suggests a direct challenge to the Victorian family form.

In an analysis of instances of child labour in contemporary Britain, Hobbs, Lavalette and McKechnie (1992:97) conclude that due to the "...relatively constant amount and type of employment available throughout Britain ... child labour [is] a structural feature of the capitalist labour market." Mizen, Bolton and Pole (1999:423) have also argued that paid employment is a normative aspect of childhood in Britain. The paid jobs of children more often than not require little to no skill and offer low pay. Mizen et al (1999:425) observe that children represent the lowest paid and vulnerable section of the workforce. It appears that the employment of children never did stop in Britain.

It seems that the family wage ideal did not live up to its expectations in Britain or in Canada. Since its inception, the family wage ideal has been an elusive reality for many, particularly those who represent the lower echelons of the working class. The incorporation of children into the BC labour market demonstrates that the neoliberal restructuring is enacting similar social changes that occurred during the emergence of the capitalist labour market and the push for a free-market society in the nineteenth century. Friedmann (1999:152) notes the similarity between nineteenth century social policies and contemporary neoliberal-inspired social policies and argues that social policies that "...hold the family responsible for poverty" are a return to the morality of early capitalism.

It also signifies the privatization of poverty alleviation in that, increasingly, responsibility for social regulation is given over to families. McDowell (1991:412)

notes that "... the state is [now] less interested in the social reproduction of working class families ..." and is more interested in securing the appropriate conditions for a "free market" society in instituting the primacy of markets. Neoliberal policies promote individual and family responsibility (McKeen and Porter, 2003) which shares a strong similarity to liberal policies enacted in the nineteenth century. Not only do such policies reflect a commitment to the instituting of the market principle in society, policies such as these also reflect the Victorian morality of the nineteenth century. This is clearly illustrated by the Minister of Skills Development and Labour's statement that parents should have more responsibility in today's society.³⁸

In addition, McKeen and Porter note that neoliberal restructuring facilitates a shift from the state to the market and the family in terms of meeting social needs (2003:109). This is inline with the classical liberal conceptualization of the sovereign individual (Heywood, 1992:32) as neoliberalism promotes individual responsibility and not state responsibility in terms of meeting social needs. The neoliberal push for privatization does not simply mean that governments sell crown corporations and reduce taxes; it also means that the social is relegated to the private. It reinforces past notions of poverty as a private, personal matter that must be dealt with within the confines of the private family, not as a consequence of political and structural changes (Friedmann, 1999). Instead of the state enforcing employment standards and supplementing the social needs of the

³⁸ See page 92 of this thesis for the entire quote.

working class, the family or a child's parents or guardian is forced to regulate employment standards and additionally, the family and the children of families will increasingly have to meet their social needs previously, in part, provided by the state.

The neoliberal restructuring in British Columbia and the increasing inclusion of children in the labour market illustrates the fact that the privileging of the market in society is an interconnected process involving state action and forms of social regulation (Block 1990:41). It also illustrates that "...because family forms are embedded in socio-economic structures, family life is bound to be altered in close association with transformations in prevailing modes of production" (Seccombe 1993:195).

In the case of British Columbia, families are now able to count on the incomes of their children if and when the need presents itself. Given that the BC Liberal government argued that the change to employment standards did away with unnecessary regulation demonstrating a strong commitment to liberalism similar to their predecessors in the nineteenth century, it appears that liberal ideology has partly triumphed over Victorian ideology³⁹. Considering that Victorian ideology shaped the conceptualization of children as vulnerable and in need of protection from the labour market, the change to child employment

³⁹ The family wage ideal is still alive and well however. According to recent statistics generated by Statistics Canada (2006), in 2003 the average annual pre-tax income of women over 16 was \$24,000.00. The average annual pre-tax income for men in 2003 was \$39,000.00. Women's annual pre-tax incomes was 62 per cent of men's pre-tax incomes in 2003. If the family wage ideal did not exist, the wage disparity between women's and wages would also not exist.

standards in British Columbia apparently disregards this conceptualization of children by affording children easier access to the labour market.

Conclusion

The overall argument presented in this thesis is that the interconnected relationship between ideology and economic change shape how working class families maintain economic stability in capitalist society which in turn also shapes the economic activity of children. Furthermore, it was argued that the family wage ideal worked to construct a particular type of labour market which in turn worked to limit working class family strategies to maintain financial stability.

In pre-industrial society, family survival was predicated on the contribution of all family members to the production and consumption aspects of the household. The contribution of children was a necessary part of family survival strategies. Tilly and Scott (2001:104) remark that children were afforded no special treatment as family labourers and were "...a family resource only if their labour could be used."

The ascendance of capitalism as the dominant mode of production brought about industrialization and a push for the development of a market society. This radically changed the survival strategies of families. Families became increasingly reliant on wages earned outside of the family household for their survival. With the emergence of a competitive capitalist labour market family members, as individuals, had to sell their labour on a labour market, a stark contrast to the communal aspects of pre-industrial family survival strategies.

Regardless of these changes, children's contribution to their family's survival remained important. Despite the contribution of children, the presence of a competitive labour market, characterized by low wages and exploitation, made it increasingly challenging for working class families to maintain economic stability.

Various segments of society worked to address the crushing poverty of working class families in the early nineteenth century in Britain. The labour movement, beginning in the early part of the nineteenth century, initiated campaigns to fight for better working conditions for workers which included limiting the presence of children, and women, in the labour market. Later, middle class reformers also took up the plight of working children within the context of their overall concern with working class poverty and the potential it posed for social unrest (Seccombe, 1993).

Victorian ideology presented a solution to the ills of the working class - the adoption of the Victorian family form, consisting of a male breadwinner, a female homemaker and their children. Within the Victorian family form, women and children were constructed as dependents, requiring protection from the harsh world of the market. The family wage ideal emerged, based on the Victorian conception of the proper family and was promoted as a necessity for the maintenance of the working class and for the prevention of the dilution of men's wages by the super-exploitation of women and children (Segal, 1990:298).

The notion of the family wage ideal and the construction of women and children as dependents played an important role in the enactment of protective

labour legislation. The various legislative debates that ensued during the first half of the nineteenth century centred on whether protective labour legislation posed a problematic interference with the free market. To resolve the disunity of liberal and Victorian ideology, women and children were determined un-free which justified their need for protection from the labour market (Rose, 1996).

The regulation of women's and children's labour in Canada shared some similarities to what occurred in nineteenth century Britain. As a colony of Britain, Canada experienced industrialization much later than its colonial master. The process of industrialization and the emergence of a capitalist labour market also contributed to the growing poverty of the working class in Canada, as it did in Britain. The labour movement and middle class reformers in Canada also lobbied for the removal of women and children in the labour market, as did their British counterparts.

Victorian notions of the family and the family wage ideal were also present in the debates surrounding the enactment of protective labour legislation in Canada. Despite the enactment of protective labour legislation, many working class families still required the income of more than one wage earner to maintain economic stability. The responsibility to provide a secondary income fell onto women as children were no longer afforded access to the labour market. However, the family wage ideal remained persuasive and worked to justify the low wages of women.

The family wage ideal remained as an ideological presence in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century in Canada. While the family wage ideal remained an ideal for a portion of working class families throughout the first half of the twentieth century, attaining the family wage ideal became more of a possibility within the context of Fordism and the relative economic growth and stability that occurred after WWII. Despite the relative prosperity of the period, women's labour force participation rates increased, although their wages remained lower than men's. This signified that the family wage ideal still remained an ideal for many working class as male wages declined which further challenged the economic stability of working class families. The various economic crises of the 1970s, coupled with the rise of neoliberalism, further challenged the economic stability of working class families. It was during this period that the labour force participation rates of women doubled.

The current context of neoliberal restructuring in British Columbia and the changes made to child employment standards offers an opportunity to examine current challenges to the family wage ideal and the economic stability of working poor and low-income families. The motivation for the changes to employment standards affecting children, particularly the lobbying efforts of certain sectors of BC's economy and the rationale that children will be less vulnerable under the amended Employment Standards Act demonstrates the government's commitment to neoliberal ideology, and its commitment to the notion of market primacy.

The changes to employment standards affecting children in British Columbia demonstrate the ideological conflict between neoliberal policies and the Victorian construction of children as vulnerable requiring protection from the harsh realities of the labour market . The analysis highlights the contradictory aspect of the changes to child employment standards, in that while promoting neoliberal policies aimed at reducing the age of employment eligibility for children from 15 to 12 years, the BC Liberal government is reinventing children as individual workers, contrary to the Victorian construction of children as dependent and vulnerable.

The inclusion of children in the labour market poses a problem for the family wage ideal. The problem is that if the family wage ideal was a reality for the majority of families in BC, the need for children to enter the labour market would be unnecessary. Given the context in which the changes to child employment standards happened, families may have to increasingly rely on the incomes of their children to maintain economic stability just as they did in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The government's change to employment standards affecting children directly challenges the Victorian notion of the family wage and in essence is working to re-shape the Victorian family form into a neo-Victorian family form that consists of individual income earners who are responsible to provide their own economic support. This underlines the importance of political movements that call for a living wage for everyone.

Options for Further Research

The change to child employment standards in British Columbia offers a substantial opportunity for further research in a couple of key areas, specifically with regard to the effect of the inclusion of child labour in the labour market may have on the overall value of labour and how the inclusion of child labour in a labour market might be considered an indicator of poverty. The effects of the inclusion of child labour in the labour market are currently undocumented. The provincial government is not collecting data on how many children are working and, as mentioned previously, Statistics Canada does not collect data on the economic activity of people under the age of 15 years. As further changes occur in the economy and the labour market in BC, it will be increasingly important to track the numbers of children working as this could be used as an indication of the overall poverty rates of families and of the effects of privatization on the ability of families to meet their needs. In addition, longitudinal studies that track the number of children working in BC could address whether or not the inclusion of children in the labour market creates a highly competitive labour market and produces a downward pressure on wages. Friedmann (1999:157) comments that

[a]lthough they now take place globally rather than locally, the old problems of destructive levels of competition are returning to labour markets, including [the] displacement of men by women and of adults by children

Some economists and policy makers who study child labour have argued that the existence of child labour indicates high levels of poverty or that there is a relationship between high poverty rates and exploitation of child labour (Basu,

1999; Dessey and Pallage, 2005; Longford, 1995). What they do not address is what it means when a government makes allowances for the inclusion of child labour in a labour market where it had been previously excluded. The changes made to employment standards in BC also offer an opportunity for further investigation into the relationship between governments and ideological projects.

Finally, the changes made to employment standards targeted at child workers in BC occurred 'under the radar.' It appears that very few people actually know about them.⁴⁰ The exceptions, perhaps are those who are in direct contact with children, particularly teachers⁴¹. Further research that is publicly accessible and that addresses the real possibility of children's employment becoming an overall norm in British Columbia would be beneficial in terms of public interest. It may also provide the means to lobby for effective poverty policies that do not perpetuate the existence of poverty and furthermore provide the means to lobby for employment standards that actually protect vulnerable workers.

⁴⁰ This observation is based purely on the subjective and undocumented observations of the author.

⁴¹ The BC Teachers Federation (www.bctf.ca) and the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (www.firstcall.org) both launched campaigns targeted at changes to employment standards that effect children.

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