

New Maritimes

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Father Andrew Macdonald

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Kaye Murray

Kaye Murray died on March 5th. She was in her eighty-first year. At the time of her death she was living with her daughter and son-in-law in Morrisburg, Ontario, having moved from her home in Lower Sackville, N.S., last October, due to her failing health. She developed serious circulatory problems in late February and died after a week in the Ottawa General Hospital.

Kaye was born in Halifax in 1908, one of seven children of Blanche Pirie and John Hill, an electrical tradesman and labour supporter. She was raised on Charles Street in the North End of Halifax. Through their mutual interest in socialism, Kaye met Charlie Murray, who she later married, at a meeting at the city's YMCA in the 1930s. Charlie died in 1985. They had four daughters and five grandchildren, and Kaye was an honorary grandmother or great-grandmother to at least as many others.

Kaye's living-room on the Connolly Road in Lower Sackville was a gathering place for progressives for nearly half a century. Some of her friends and regular visitors over the years included the late Roscoe Fillmore, the Communist author, political organizer and horticulturalist from Centreville, N.S., and the late Kenneth Leslie, the socialist editor and poet, who once lived in nearby Elmsdale. Kaye was very proud of the many flowers of Fillmore's in her garden, and she was very generous with them. She was, too, largely responsible for introducing the work of the Halifax Communist poet and journalist Joe Wallace — with whom her husband was interned during the War because of their union and political work — to a new generation of radicals in the Maritimes.

In more recent years, the editors of this publication were her frequent visitors. Kaye often suggested topics for articles, and her ideas were regularly discussed at editorial meetings. For several years, she had the custom of receiving the first copy of each new issue of the magazine, living as she did between the printer in Kentville and *New Maritimes'* Enfield office. In 1981, Kaye became a founding member of the New Maritimes Editorial Council, and she often told the story of how, at that time, someone visiting her home expressed scepticism about the

magazine's prospects: she responded that *New Maritimes* might well not succeed, but that she had supported causes with dim short-term prospects all her life, and that if this particular effort should fail, it was not going to be because of her.

Kaye's was a rare and rounded intellect. Reading and education were two of her highest priorities, and she fought to organize Home and School associations, both in Lower Sackville and in Loggieville, N.B., where she also lived for a number of years. Her ample bookshelves included much of her father's extensive progressive library, her own in-depth collection of publications on the history and politics of the labour movement in Canada, as well as an impressive reference library that was more a companion to her than a simple resource. She loved to tell of how a large dictionary, permanently opened on a table, was an important fixture in the home she was raised in, and of how Sunday's dinnertime recreation often consisted of the children running off to check the depths of the misusages in the minister's morning message. Kaye owned one of the best-thumbed copies of *Place Names of Nova Scotia* in existence. Her *Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage* was pressed equally into service. In the last few years, the listing and denouncing of the Maritime omissions in Hurtig's 1985 *Canadian Encyclopedia* was elevated in her living-room to a high form of rhetorical art. The entertainment afforded by its absences, she said, justified its price.

Kaye's wit was her personal trademark. In 1987, shortly before moving there permanently, she took a plane trip to visit her family in Central Canada. As she was being escorted to the boarding area by a handsome, attentive and smartly-uniformed airline official, Kaye looked at him, and then smiled back at me: "Nothing's too good," she said, "for the working class."

I carry that picture with me now, in the words of the poet Alan Cooper, like a "pearl inside the body."

— Gary Burrill

New Maritimes

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New Maritimes

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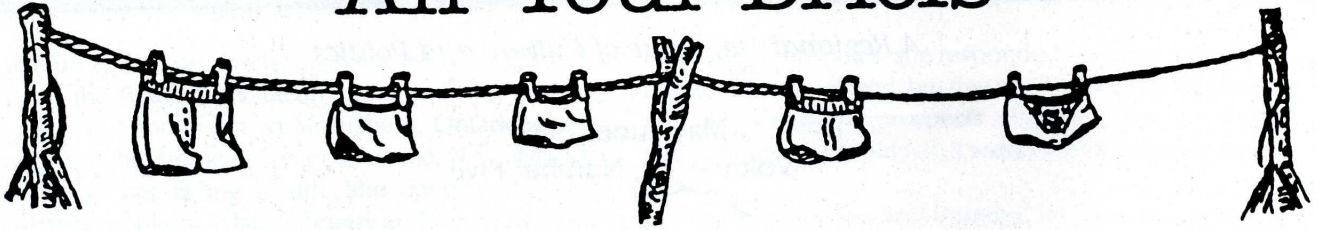
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Gaining Dar by Train

Kevin Whelton

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Air Your Briefs



Partners, or Managers?

Though I agree with Jim Lotz that *New Maritimes* has become a vehicle of academics who, out of self-interest, do not attack universities for being "the handmaidens of... nineteenth century capitalism," [see *New Maritimes*, "Air Your Briefs," March/April, 1989 issue] churches too are seldom reproached.

Mr. Lotz goes on to say that *New Maritimes* rarely mentions self-help/mutual aid and community development organizations which, he claims, are, unlike universities, vehicles of gradual and positive social change. His argument here is inconsistent because these groups—whether they be voluntary community kitchens, distribution centres for goods or labour, psychological support agencies, or what have you—are the handmaidens of nineteenth century ideology as well. Many of these groups, encouraged by today's neo-conservative governments, have rushed in to prop up social and health services abandoned under "restraint" policies. Indeed, universities and churches have been behind the conceptualization of "community development" and "self-help." The re-institutionalization of Christian charity for the poor and the infirm has been the result.

Social change is being promoted by these groups. However, the push is not forward, but backward in time, back to the nineteenth century. The dispossessed are being told they need spirit, not money, by a perverse combination of capitalist and Christian ideologies. Incidentally, all this reminds me of a recent "Pogo" cartoon. Albert, the alligator, while attempting the all-American political jingle, asks George Bush for a word that rhymes with "money." The President's immediate reply—"volunteerism!"

As *New Maritimes* relies more on

academically acceptable sociological and anthropological approaches to the study of Maritime history, the history of class struggle in the region becomes more obscured. Articles like Bill Parenteau's "Pulp, Paper and Poverty" [see *New Maritimes*, March/April, 1989] go a lot further to explain what is really taking place, and what the real solutions are, than do stories of "human interest" and Maritime traditions. Individualized self-help with voluntary mutual aid is no substitute for people's control, as opposed to capitalist control, of wealth produced.

It cannot be expected that capitalists, and their government/managers, will cooperate with the people's pursuance of such control. Mr. Lotz's vision of "the government as partners in ventures" ignores the political reality that "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

Larry Fyffe,
Fredericton, N.B.

A Good Taste

One of the disadvantages of leading a busy life is that there will be some potentially rewarding activities destined to be missed unless, by chance, they are brought directly to one's attention.

In such a case *New Maritimes* has recently served me well, by bringing to my otherwise-occupied attention the existence and, through reviews in recent editions, the tremendous worth of writings by Maritime authors.

It is strange, and illogical, how we can fall so easily into the trap of assuming that, simply because a product originates close to home, it won't be

any good. Except for *New Maritimes*, I cannot remember having my attention arrested by any other source promoting Maritime authors.

So I decided last Christmas to take the hint and explore this new area of literature. To its credit, the Charlottetown Library did indeed carry some of the titles listed in *New Maritimes*, and I chose two for a start: *Various Persons Named Kevin O'Brien* by Alden Nowlan, and *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* by Alistair MacLeod.

Now, of course, I regret that I am starting so late to enter a territory which promises a literary richness quite equal to many others I have already tasted, if the standard set by these two books is anything to measure by.

My one-word reaction after finishing Nowlan's book was "gem." I am still reeling from the powerful punch of MacLeod's book. And, as works of such quality should, they have left me with a thirst for more.

Not only will I read more of them, but I shall do my utmost to promote the reading of Maritime authors at every opportunity. It is the least I can do in appreciation.

Daphne Harker,
Cornwall, P.E.I.

Steadfast School

It is with great reservation that I am writing to comment on the letters of Ms. Andrea Currie and Ms. Jackie Barkley, which were printed in the March/April, 1989 edition. For clarity, these letters were in response to my letter, printed in the January/February edition. My reservation stems from a reluctance to continue this divisive debate with colleagues with whom I share a common mission. I also lament the pleasure with

which our common adversaries must view this debate. However, on reflection, which included the advice of my colleagues, I have decided that not to respond was to miss an opportunity to clarify our differences and to provide your readers with a more balanced understanding of the situation.

In the interests of space I shall limit my comments to the central points of difference I have with the two letters.

Ms. Currie dismisses the creation of the Maritime School of Social Work's Committee on Racial and Ethnic Affairs (COREA) "as evidence of a program that has not adequately addressed racial issues in curriculum design and course content." I am perplexed by the logic of this conclusion. As a formal organization, we have taken formal means to ensure that the multiple interests which occupy our attention are guaranteed representation in decision making. The creation and support of a standing committee is the highest form of organizational respect we can give to issues. Ms. Currie alludes to an organizational utopia in which there is a crystal-clear, universally-agreed-upon, single mission, and in which there are no competing goals or obligations. A "committee of the whole" approach to management might be appropriate in such a utopia. Unfortunately, we, like most institutions, fall short of this prescription of the ideal. Therefore, we have opted for a time-honoured committee structure as one means of addressing racism in our curriculum and practices. I could understand Ms. Currie's criticism better if the School did nothing to ensure that racism was not high on our agenda of concerns.

A related issue raised in both Ms. Currie's and Ms. Barkley's letters is the depiction of COREA and the School as separate and sometimes warring factions. Again, I suggest that this is a misrepresentation of reality. COREA could not exist without the active support of the School. Given our rotational form of committee membership, most faculty have at one time or another served on COREA. Furthermore, it is inaccurate to conclude, as Ms. Barkley does, that COREA has had to "struggle for its existence against a tide of indifference." What she describes as indifference I would describe as an inevitable consequence of division of

labour. Like all institutions I am aware of, the School has many goals which need attention simultaneously. In such a situation it is reasonable to expect that members allocated a particular responsibility might at times feel a greater urgency for their mandate than members-at-large. As Director of the School, with responsibility for all committees, I can assure you that this phenomenon is not restricted to COREA. To depict what I would describe as a fact of organizational life as School-wide indifference is inaccurate and unfair. To add substance to this comment, I cannot recall a single specific recommendation or request from COREA, over which the School had jurisdiction, which has not been adopted.

While these are the two major points I wished to clarify, I would like

your readers to understand the deep disappointment felt by members of our School community over what we regard as unjust and mis-targeted criticism. It is counter-productive to expend the type of energy necessitated by letters of this kind. As Ms. Barkley concluded in her final paragraph, a more laudable goal for all of us is to continue the struggle against racism. The School is steadfast in its commitment to this struggle. While we have not arrived at perfect solutions, we are proud of our accomplishments to date. We will also continue to welcome opportunities for fair and constructive commentary.

**Daniel O'Brien, Director,
Maritime School of Social Work,
Halifax, N.S.**

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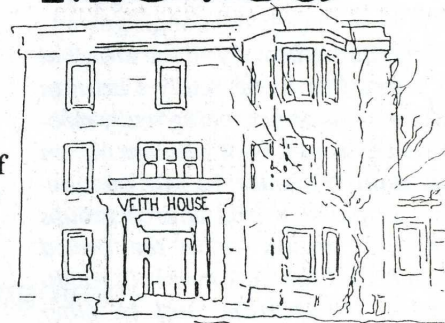
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Ours is the Power

A Christian Socialist on PEI Looks at his Faith, his Tradition and his Struggle

Liberation theology is a subject we're hearing more and more about these days. There has been, for example, the Vatican's 1985 silencing of the radical Roman Catholic theologian Leonardo Boff, in Brazil. There is the presence of radical Catholic priests in the cabinet of the government of Nicaragua. There has been the spate of documents from Roman Catholic bishops, in both Canada and the United States, calling for "economic justice" and what they refer to as "the preferential option for the poor."

Liberation theology — the idea that it's impossible to be really Christian without in some way being really revolutionary as well — is also having an important influence in our own region. In parishes and church groups across the region — in the United Church, the Catholic Church, in Anglicanism, Lutheranism and in other churches as well — more and more Christians are coming to see the necessity of an active social radicalism for an authentic religious faith.

One of the main institutions in the Maritimes which draws much of its vision from a radical, socialist Christianity is the Cooper Institute on Prince Edward Island. Named after the nineteenth-century PEI land reformer William Cooper, the Institute is engaged in development education, and does research in support of primary producers, workers and unemployed Islanders. The Third World experience of the Institute's members provides the basis for their consideration of local issues — all in the context of a worldwide system which gives rise to many of the problems that exist both here and there. Founded in 1985, the Institute is an important focal point for progressive socialists around the region.

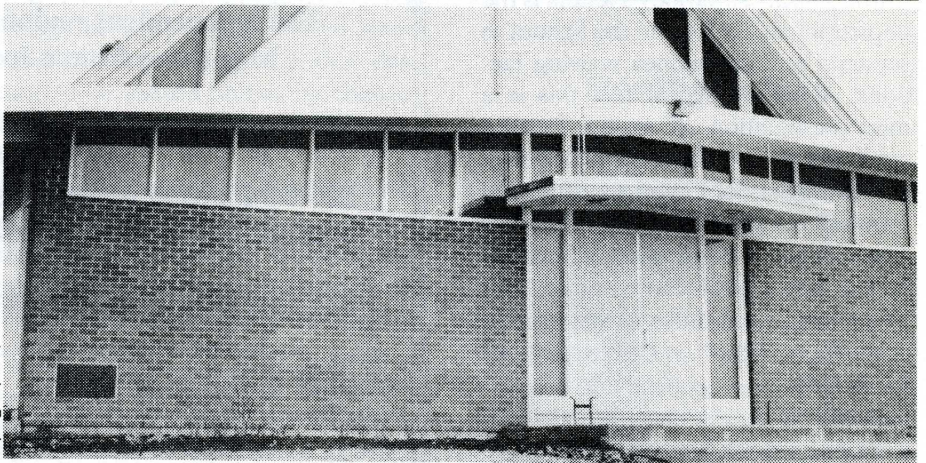
Andrew Macdonald

Father Andrew Macdonald is one of the Cooper Institute's founders. Born in Cardigan in 1933, he has served parishes in areas of Charlottetown, Souris and the Dominican Republic, and he is presently pastor of Saint Eugene's parish in Covehead, PEI, and of Saint Ann's in Lot 65.

Lorraine Begley is an Associate Editor of New Maritimes and a Sunday School teacher at Saint Ann's. Gary Burrill is studying for the United Church ministry. They spoke with Andrew about the background and content of his socialist Christianity one Sunday afternoon after church.

The real roots of my socialist thinking have to do with my time in the Dominican Republic. I was working in the '60s at Saint Pius X parish in Charlottetown, and had come to a certain point in my life where I was questioning whether or not I was really

doing anything. Was it worthwhile doing this sort of thing? Maybe this is just the natural process of adulthood, I don't know. But we had had a priest and a sister from the diocese who had gone to South America, and there was a general turn from the whole Canadian church in the direction of Latin America at that time. I went to the bishop and said, "I want to go." He said he wouldn't let me. And he kept saying no for two or three years. But in Antigonish [the diocese of eastern Nova Scotia] they had a Latin American program. They'd gone to Honduras and adopted a parish there, which they continued to staff over a period of years. We decided at a priests' meeting that we should have a program like this. The bishop capitulated and he named me one of the committee people to look into it. We did a study on it to see what would be the best method. Rather than the way they did it in the Antigonish diocese, we decided to go with the Scarboro Fathers* in the Dominican Republic, as part-timers — where we could go one person at a time and fit into a situation there. We called it the Latin American Mission Program (LAMP). I was the first



Saint Ann's Church in Lot 65.

volunteer.

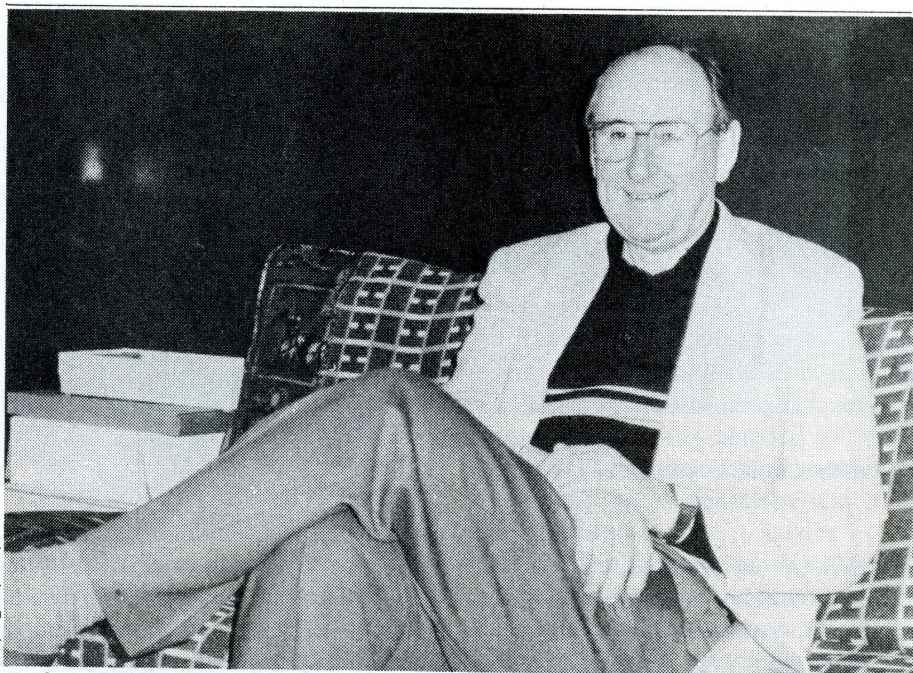
And when I got to Santo Domingo [the country's capital city] — '64 was the first time I had volunteered, but I didn't get there till '68 — that's when I really began to take more radical stands. I was a parish priest. But the thrust of being a parish priest there was to go out and organize small communities and get them talking and thinking. Popular education was very prominent. I was in a place called Azua and we had visits from two Christian brothers who were very hot on Paulo Freire's methodology,* and they used that method with the people in the parish.

I became involved with a group of seminarians, priests and sisters who were choosing the socialistic option — people from there and from other countries who were working in the Dominican Republic. Really, what we were doing was looking at the Roman Catholic church and how it was not taking the side of the people, the side of the poor. That was kind of a radical time in the church in Santo Domingo. Many people were looking at options where the poor and oppressed could get a better deal. We made friends with one of these groups. We would get together regularly with one of their members and go over the situation of the week. We would analyze what was going on politically — we were learning how to do class analysis. So, this was kind of a strong formation.

I went down there in 1968 and the Medellín Conference* was held the

**The Scarboro Fathers, now known as Scarboro Missions, which is short for the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society, was formed in 1918. It is a Roman Catholic community of priests and lay people involved in mission, both overseas and in Canada, where it began.*

**The "Freire method" of popular education, pioneered by Paulo Freire in Brazil in the early '60s, consists of teaching in such a way that the experience of ordering their environment, and understanding their surroundings, is empowering and radicalizing to those who participate in the process. Also known as conscientización, from the Spanish word for "consciousness-raising," its central text is Freire's classic book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*



Father Macdonald at home.

same year. Almost immediately we got those documents. In '68, '69, '70, those documents were very exciting because they were speaking about the lives of the people, and the problems of the people — they were speaking about poverty. The Medellín documents dealt with such things as catechism and liturgy and so forth, but they dealt first of all with peace and the whole concept of violence, and what they called the "violence of institutions." This was a

violence of the institutions that caused this response. This was a very liberating concept. The whole thing was a great big breakthrough, because these bishops from Santo Domingo came back having signed this document in 1968. I was just getting into the [Spanish] language in 1968-'69, and I knew that these bishops had signed the document and that they weren't forthcoming with the results of the Conference. I knew what the church had pro-

**"For ours is not the kingdom.
Ours is the power."**

-- Milton Acorn, "Sonnet in Hot Pursuit of Chaucer"

new thing. I hadn't heard tell of such a thing — to lay the blame, not on the response of the poor people who were talking about violent action, but on the

claimed, and that these were some of the very bishops who had signed it, but that this wasn't what they were carrying out. The truth was out in the open.

**The Medellín Conference of Latin American bishops was held to determine how to apply the re-direction of Catholicism of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) to the Latin American situation. In the Colombian city of Medellín, approximately 130 Catholic bishops adopted documentary statements of policy which, in a word, called on Christians to change society. The Medellín documents are widely regarded as the Magna Carta of liberation theology.*

This was the importance of Medellín. It declared that organizations like ours — of seminarians, clergy and sisters in the Dominican Republic — were not anti-Christian, but that social concern was a church thing, that we were, if anything, more faithful Christians because of our critical attitude. It's the same thing in Canada. The liberation theology for Canada has been expressed in many ways by the Roman Catholic bishops. They've said such things as, "Some Christians engaged in struggles for justice use what is com-

monly called Marxist analysis. This approach can help to identify certain injustices and structures of exploitation."** The Canadian bishops said that — it's written in their documents. You see, we felt we had approval from the teaching authority of the church. This has meant a great deal to me, because I can say, "I don't care about the opinion of some right-wing group, I have the approval and the authority of the church that I, as a Roman Catholic, have always accepted." I can operate in the way I've become used to. I can speak about that, and can pursue my vocation in good conscience.

I was back in PEI for a year and a half in 1972. I came back at Christmas and left again in May of 1974., and I spent three more years in the Dominican Republic after that. Between '74 and '77, I became more closely identified with this group of radical seminarians, priests and sisters. Vince Murnaghan and Marie Burge* were down there then. An election was taking place in Santo Domingo and they were involved in the pre-election struggle. They had made close contact with Marxist groups, and these were the people we found ourselves working with all the time. We collaborated very closely. It became quite hot... so that in fact we found ourselves hiding people who were running for their lives. It was quite tension-filled work at the time, because we were becoming more radicalized and it was drawing us in. In order to be faithful to our call we felt we had to become more committed. So I was defining my politics much more.

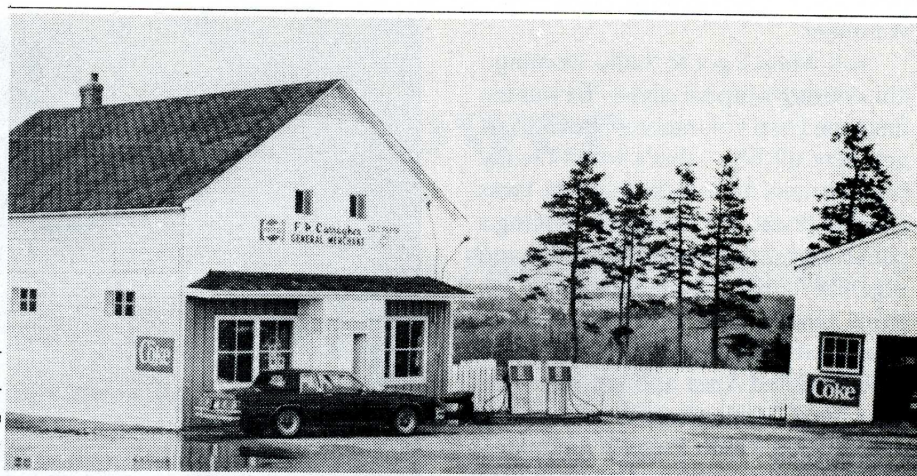
And did you find your own faith being changed and redefined at the same time?

Well, of course. That was the time of

**This quote comes from the section titled "The Marxist Alternative" of the Canadian bishops' 1977 publication, A Society to be Transformed.*

**Marie Burge, a former member of the Sisters of Saint Martha, is a staffperson with the Cooper Institute in Charlottetown; Vince Murnaghan is a Roman Catholic priest in Vernon River, PEI. They are co-founders of the Cooper Institute.*

Lorraine Begley



Lot 65, PEI, where, Father Macdonald says, "I've never been as happy as I've been in the last few years."

the whole new outgrowth of liberation theology. That* original book of Gustavo Gutiérrez's, *A Theology of Liberation*, [first published in Spanish in 1971, then in English translation in 1973], had a profound effect — because his thesis is that theology should come from the underside, from the lives of the poor. We have been accepting theology, he says, which is manufactured in the upper echelons, from the upper class, the bourgeoisie. He criticized all this European theology* that we have received — very strongly — from the point of view that it was not taking the true Christian direction, which is from the poor people. Jesus was a poor man and his whole theme was liberation. Look at the Old Testament, with the salvation of the poor Israelite people from Egypt through the experience of Moses and the exodus. Gutiérrez keeps referring to that situation in the Old Testament. That has had a very important effect on me, because it tells me that I should ally myself with poor people. But as Father Bill Smith of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace used to say, "it is not enough to be directed towards the poor, we have to be for the cause of the poor." That means you have to tie in with those groups and individuals who are really working for the poor. It means that when you say, "Okay, I am going to devote my life to the poor," that your scope of action has to be quite broad....

I read a lot of the liberation theologians. There are a lot of writings — José Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, for instance. But I do a lot of reading on Christianity; I don't do as much on

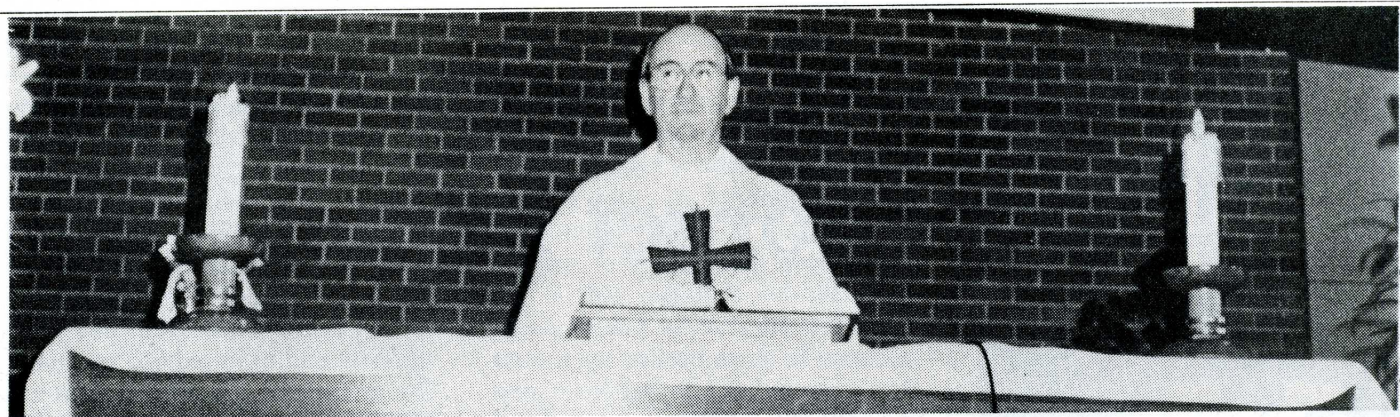
Marxism. I'm not so much oriented towards the political ideology as I am towards the faith angle of it. That really seems to be where my bent is.

One very key book for me is called *Christology at the Crossroads*, by Jon Sobrino. That is my Bible. He puts forth an image of humanity relative to the Reign of God — the idea that we have to be striving with the poor to set things right, and in so doing we are actually bringing about this Reign. This whole concept of the Christian life as making the Reign of God is not one that was taught me in seminary. It has come out of liberation theology, and it's had a very great impact on me: the idea that building this Reign of justice and peace and love, setting the unjust situations right and really moving from a situation of death to a situation of life, that this praxis* — you know, this word from Marxist language — that this praxis is what characterizes the Christian life. A lot of that sort of thing has come into my thinking through *Christology at the Crossroads*.

Was it a hard transition for you in 1977, in a political, cultural sense, coming back to parish work in PEI?

Actually, I wasn't convinced that there was any life after Latin America. I came back in '77 to the Basilica in Charlottetown. I was in a situation in the cathedral parish working with another priest and two nuns. I was

**"Praxis" refers to activity directed towards changing the world, and which is therefore bringing together a practical need and an abstract goal.*



Father Macdonald ministers to his parishioners.

three years there. There were a lot of problems back and forth. I often felt isolated. I was unhappy. But my friends who had been with me in LAMP, and who were also now back on the Island, they were quite decided that, "We have gone there to learn how to bring the message of the poor back to Canada, and we are going to do it." There was no variation from that ideal, and they were very, very helpful to me.

After that, in 1980, I went to Saint Margaret's and Saint Charles, near

then he was ordained. Phil got a bunch of us together to try to look at socialism and the church. We were struggling to define ourselves more, politically, and to take political stands. Then I felt, with others, that it wasn't going quite radically enough, and the group came to a sort of separation. But that experience was good, because it encouraged us and kept us going, kept us alive.

The Search Group was sort of a preliminary to the Cooper Institute. Several of us felt that we had been

Lot 65 died and I volunteered to go there and help out.

Do you feel that your socialist kind of Christianity is closer now to being accepted now than it was, say, when you first went to Santo Domingo?

Oh, the changes have been much more than I'd ever hoped for. The things that the leaders of churches in Canada have been saying are marvelous. Just look at the collaboration that's been going on between the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and United Churches.* It's wonderful. The thrust of the churches in Canada has been to speak with one voice to the government. If one church has come out with a strong document, the other churches have usually supported it.

A lot of church people now accept as rather ordinary what would have been described as left-wing a few years ago. My brother teaches political economics in the States. He and I have had some discussions over the church's pronouncing on economic matters. And he says to me that, "The way the church is going in the United States is a lot like the sort of things you're talking about." Well, even the American bishops came out with a document on the economic situation where they criticized institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, and where they talked about the preferential option for the poor. So the direction, the ideological direction of Christianity, is much better than I would have ever hoped. •

"Jesus manifests his love for the oppressors by being against them."

-- Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*

Souris. That was much better. When I went there we worked on programs with the parishioners — with workers and fishing people and farmers — doing analyses of different kinds of work. We tried different things, and there were many really good things there. It was hard, of course. It was really difficult to get enough farmers or enough fishermen or plant workers to form a group. You'd get four people to a meeting and you'd start talking in a critical way, say, about Usen Fisheries, and the people who worked at Usen would say, "We're lucky to have Usen Fisheries. We don't want anybody upsetting the applecart. We don't know what you're trying to do here." So of course it was slow.

We also started a group shortly after I came back from Santo Domingo called the Christian Search Group. For me, that was quite an influential group. A guy named Phil Callaghan got it going. He had gone to Santo Domingo,

doing a lot of worthwhile popular education, but that it was sporadic and we didn't seem to have a right direction on what we were doing. We felt that we needed some sort of organization, that we had to institutionalize as a non-church group. The Cooper Institute has been very good. It has given us contacts with a lot of other people who are doing similar things in Canada. It has opened up our mentality. Just by organizing Cooper, we immediately fell in with a whole network of people around the region.

I've never been as happy as I've been in the last few years. I left Saint Margaret's in 1985 and took a sabbatical leave. I studied French at Saint Ann's [in Pointe de l'Eglise, N.S.]. I went to Santo Domingo and spent three months doing a project in sociology there. Then I went to McGill and took a course in economics. I did some research on the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Then when I came home the pastor of

**"PLURA," an acronym drawn from the initials of the five churches which sponsor it, is the name of an ecumenical fund for social justice in Canada.*

Don't Forget Forget

The Ottawa Tories are getting much smarter. We used to be able to count on them to trumpet their right-wing agenda and, in doing so, to arouse public opinion and the otherwise docile media. Whenever they wanted to dismember a crucial social programme, some drooling Neanderthal in the cabinet, if not the Prime Minister himself, would gloat publicly about how they were going to kick all those widows and orphans out of the public trough. Now when they defile a sacred trust, they do it with such compassion and unction that public outrage is kept well within acceptable bounds.

Recently announced changes to the unemployment insurance system speak volumes about this new-found political *savoir-faire*. (The new UI rules were made public in early April, but must pass through Parliament before taking effect. Given the large Conservative majority in the House, it seems probable they will become law.) They also provide important insights into our future after free trade.

Three years ago the Forget Commission spelled out a basic plan for harmonizing the unemployment insurance system with the right wing's key economic goals for Canada — free trade, the unleashing of market forces on poorer regions, and the decimation of the welfare state. Forget proposed that UI become, purely and simply, a self-financing insurance scheme. Workers in low-unemployment regions would have access to benefits when "frictional" unemployment required movement from one job to another. But he suggested that the rules be changed so workers faced with "structural" unemployment and under-employment in poorer regions would have to move to where the jobs were. Forget proposed

Hard Times

Commentary on the Maritime Economy by Rick Williams

that the shorter qualification periods and extended benefits that are currently applied in high unemployment regions be cancelled, and that the special programme for self-employed fishermen be removed. He also wanted maternity benefits taken out of the UI system and handled some other way. So great and broadly based was opposition to Forget — for example, the four premiers in the Atlantic region denounced the proposals which they felt would depopulate their provinces — that the Mulroney government had to back off. Then, during the long lead-up to the 1988 election, the last thing the Tories wanted to hear was any open discussion of their plans for UI. The official word was "forget Forget!" The changes announced in early April represent a new and much more deviant approach to dismantling the UI system. First off, the fishermen's programme and the extended benefits for the highest unemployment regions are left alone, so this heads off the any immediate regional split within Tory ranks. Secondly, in an effort to head off opposition from women's groups, an important commitment is made to maintaining and, in fact, improving maternity benefits, even though the provinces hold the hammer on this. Thirdly, the nasty items are packaged in glossy wrapping-paper language about "reform and job training." Instead of cuts to a crucial social programme, the Tories' "spin" is that bold new steps are being taken to meet the needs of workers in a labour market that demands more skills and higher educational qualifications. The most fundamental change in the

new proposals is that \$1.3 billion (ten percent of total UI spending) will be taken out of unemployed people's pockets and used for job training. Many who now get benefits won't get them in future because of longer qualification periods. Many of those who do get cheques will receive them for shorter periods of time.

In a relatively low unemployment area like Halifax, for example, workers will need eighteen weeks of employment, rather than the current twelve, to qualify, and they will receive benefits for only 41 weeks, compared to the present 50. While things will be largely unchanged for very high unemployment areas like Cape Breton, the in-between regions of the Maritimes will witness serious cuts in the real incomes of seasonal workers. In areas where unemployment hovers in the eight percent range, workers will be required to have seventeen weeks of work (it's now eleven) and will lose five weeks of benefits. This is going to have devastating effects on a lot of families and communities where — after the tourists leave, or the harvest is over, or the fish plant closes — there's simply no possibility of finding six more weeks of work.

Even in better-off areas, there are real problems with these proposals. While the general employment situation in Halifax may be relatively good, specific groups, such as young people and minorities, have serious problems finding decent jobs. Given racial and sexual discrimination, for example, a black woman will always take longer to find a new job than her white counterpart, but the proposed policy lumps her in with everyone else, and punishes her for living in a more developed area. The Tories argue that their "reforms" will encourage people to get out of the "UI culture," — that disempowering

pattern of long term dependency on UI — by providing both incentive and opportunity to upgrade marketable skills. A close analysis, however, reveals that the training component of the Conservative plan is largely a fraud.

Firstly, if there are no jobs to be trained for, nothing will change. In many areas of the Maritimes it doesn't matter what skills you have, there just aren't any industries coming in to hire workers. For rural people, the programme will increase pressures to leave home, both to get the training and then to find jobs in which to use it. The overall effect of the new training programme, and of other pending changes to the UI system, will be to intensify the depopulation of rural communities in our region — an objective that Forget put up front, but which the now-savvy Tories will never openly admit to. In line with this, other changes are proposed to facilitate labour-force mobility.

Secondly, while there are some new jobs that require specific high-level skills, the great majority of jobs being created in the Canadian economy are now in the low-wage, low-skill sector — appropriately labelled "McJobs." Some 70 percent of new jobs created in Canada over the past five years have been of this nature, most of them employing women on a part-time and/or short-term basis. Current training schemes often make it lucrative for employers to get government money to train workers, and then to lay them off when the one-year training period is up and take on new trainees. Access to the really high-skill occupations often requires long-term technical or academic

training, but existing programmes don't support unemployed workers who want to go this route. And neither will the new proposals.

Right now, the Canadian labour market is being driven by the boom in Southern Ontario. There is a shortage of workers, at two different levels of ability, in that region: a relatively few highly skilled workers are needed in certain specialized areas of construction, manufacturing and services, and; much larger numbers of unskilled workers are required to feed the vast low-wage service sector — to work in restaurants, hotels, domestic service, and the like.

In construction, for example, high wages have lured most of the crane operators in the country to Toronto for work, and yet there is still a shortage of them there. Here, training might make sense, although one doubts how much longer the boom can last. On the other hand, there is a chronic shortage of low-wage service workers who are not moving to Toronto in sufficient numbers because of the enormous cost of living there. The right wing's great fear is that employers will have to raise wages — thus fueling inflation — to get the needed workers. One government response, design to forestall this, has been to manipulate immigration policies. But much more importantly, they are making these changes to the UI system to force unemployed people to move to poorly paying jobs in the service sector, and to put greater pressure on workers presently serving hamburgers or pumping gas to stay put, despite their poverty and lack of any



Fish plant workers in Chéticamp. The new UI changes will have devastating effects on families and communities where there are few job opportunities.



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hope for a better future.

Finally, current training programmes often hold much greater benefits for employers than they do for unemployed workers. As part of the general attack on the welfare state, government is privatizing the job training system. Companies are now being set up all over the country to make a profit training workers, either for their own use or for the general labour market.

In the Maritimes, for example, Sobey's has a programme to train welfare recipients for re-entry into the labour market. They pick only the most highly skilled and highly motivated candidates, then cream off the best of them for employment in their stores. It's a great deal for Sobey's; the government pays for their training programme, they get good employees, they gain the image of being socially responsible corporate citizens, and they probably make a profit on the training contract to boot. When the new changes come into effect, this corporate bonanza of job training will intensify.

There is one more thing the Tories would rather we didn't think about — there is an iron fist in the velvet glove. The proposed UI changes will create strong pressures on workers who now have jobs to keep them, despite the low wages and dreadful working conditions. Longer qualification and shorter benefit periods will be strong disincentives to exercise the one freedom that

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many workers in the "marginal work world" have long treasured — the option to quit, go on pogeys for a while, and look for something else.

Since most workers in the low-wage sector are women, the changes will both lower their already depressed incomes and reduce their leverage for winning improvements in grossly unequal pay structures. With no relief in day-care costs in sight, single-parent women will be caught between two equally negative options — the rock of greater poverty as workers, and the hard place of staying home with their kids and joining the welfare dependency cycle.

There will also be new penalties for workers who leave their jobs voluntarily, that is, "without good cause." They will have to wait five weeks longer for

their benefits, which will be reduced from 60 to 50 percent of insurable earnings. While the proposed legislation specifically identifies work-place safety risks and sexual harassment as "good causes," most women workers in the low-wage sector aren't in unions and so are much less likely either to know about their rights or to take the risk of being fired by trying to protect themselves.

Depopulating the rural areas of the Maritimes and Newfoundland, encouraging the development of the central Canadian economy at our expense, lowering real wages, "disciplining" the labour force to accept lousy pay and working conditions, pushing women down — further and further down — isn't this the very right-wing agenda that the "dinosaurs" like Forget and Erik Nielsen were spouting a few years ago? Yes, all the elements are there, but the sugar coating is very thick and the Tory hucksters are a lot smarter and a lot slicker.

We in the Maritimes must oppose these planned changes to the UI system with all our might. They are a major step in the harmonization of Canadian social programmes with the U.S. system, designed to grease the skids for free trade and to make our industries competitive with the sweatshops of the American south. The people of the Maritimes and Newfoundland made clear last November that we do not support this narrow and negative vision of the Canadian future. Now we are going to have to fight its implementation every step of the way. •

Rick Williams is an Associate Editor of, and frequent contributor to, New Maritimes.

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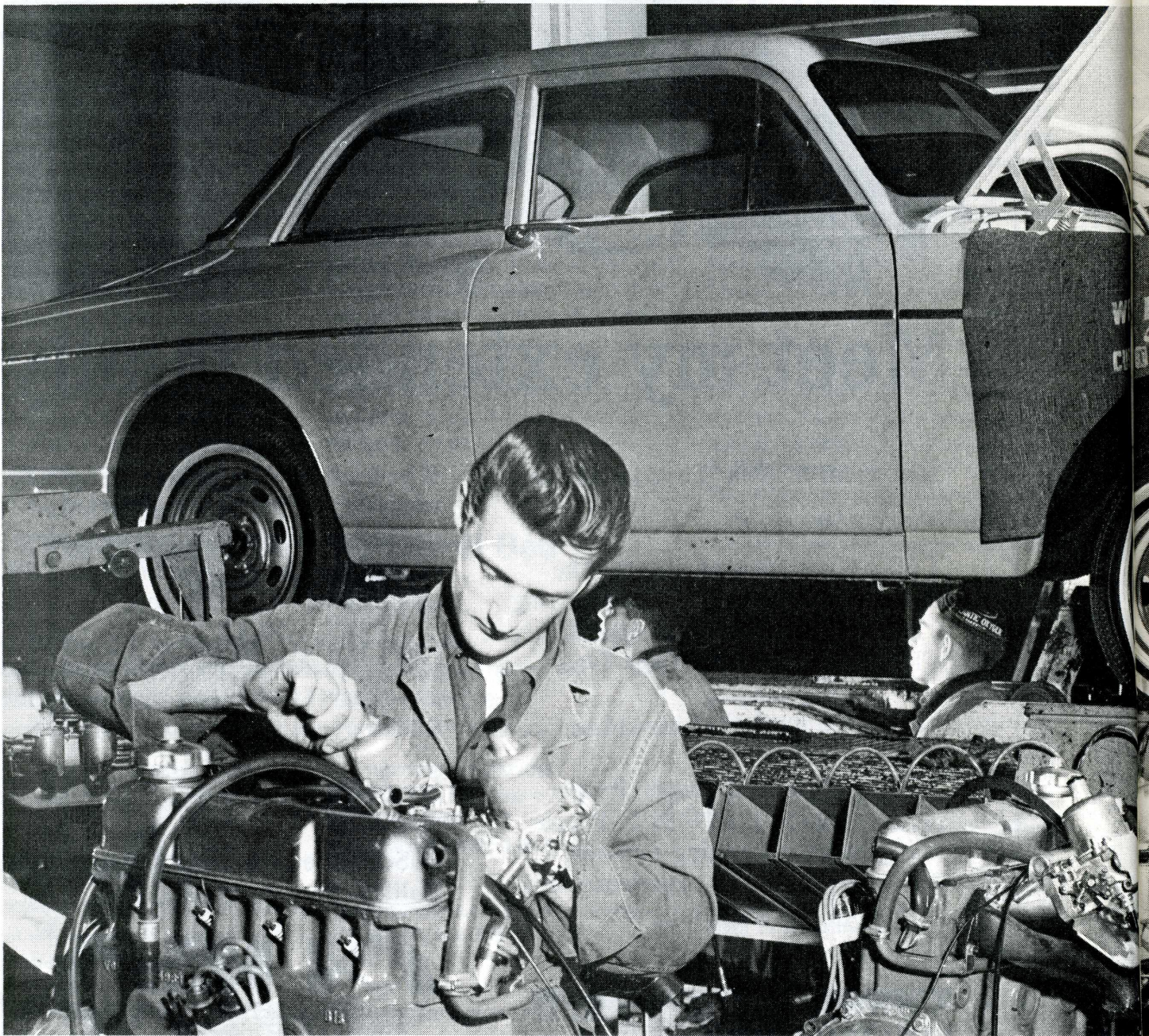
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"A Little Bit of Sweden"

The Volvo Story in Nova Scotia

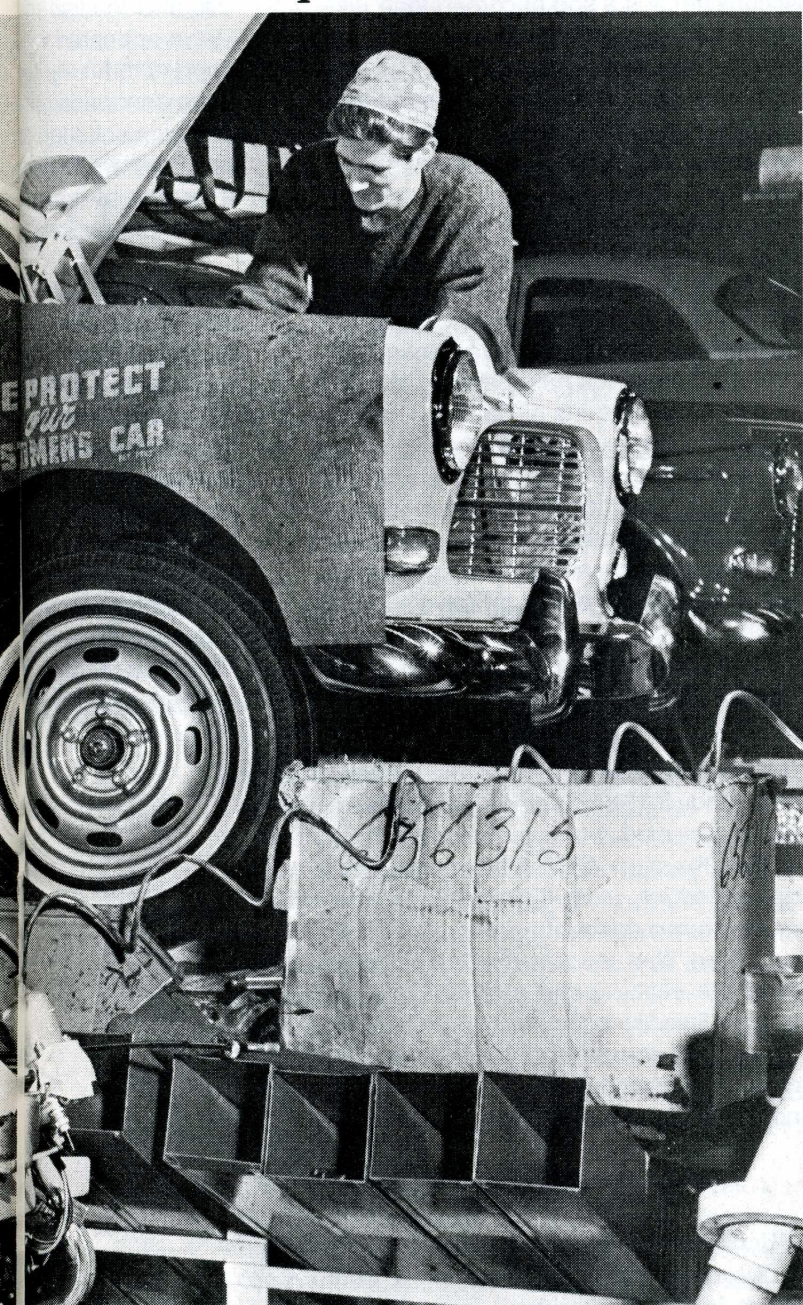


Volvo workers on the line at the old Dartmouth plant, before the 1966 move to the Halifax waterfront.

By The Volvo Research Group*

A Scandinavian king casts about for a handsome young prince worthy of the hand of his daughter, the beautiful Princess Asa, and finds two anxious suitors. To choose between them, he devises a contest that pits the pair against one another in a race to build a castle. One contender uses cheap materials and mistreats and browbeats his

workers in an effort to speed construction. The other, the valiant Prince Volund, opts for only the best of supplies and attracts skilled workers by offering excellent pay and working conditions, and even a medieval form of profit-sharing. Happily, Prince Volund is declared the winner of the contest, he and Asa marry, and, we expect,



N.S. Government Information Photo

* Group members are Paul Hardman, Reg Phelan, Anders Sandberg, Jo Stern and Bob Wall. This article is the result of research undertaken at the Atlantic Canada Studies section and the Gorsebrook Research Institute of Saint Mary's University in Halifax during the fall and winter of 1988-89. The Volvo Research Group would like to thank Vice-President of Volvo Canada Gunnar Jennegren and Canadian Automobile Workers' Union representative Larry Wark for their assistance. The Group is particularly grateful to the three assembly line workers who agreed to be interviewed in their homes.

Development Fable

When a profitable and successful industry moves into an underdeveloped area, great things are supposed to happen. Loads of jobs are created directly, and then local services and businesses expand by supplying the new outfit with all manner of materials. Local networks develop for the transport, marketing and sale of the newcomer's products. Finally, other industries take note, and the once-underdeveloped area starts to be considered in business circles as a good place to set up shop. Industries, and the people of the now-prosperous area, thrive happily together.

Happy tales of this sort are the stuff of dreams for politicians, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs in depressed regions, but they realize, too, that making them a reality is no mean accomplishment. Wooing that first industry — the "breeder," the enterprise that will attract others — is the first and most difficult hurdle. Corporate executives get nervous contemplating a new location, new markets, a new work force, new equipment, and new and different local rules and regulations. Big businesses operating successfully in developed areas or nations aren't anxious to risk their profits simply out of sympathy for the people of an outlying, depressed area.

So, concessions get made. A province or town offers a tax break for a new plant site to the prospective industry in the hope that, later, it can more than make up for what it has given away through the larger tax base that will be created when other industries arrive. Then, the theory goes, new jobs will lead to increased local spending, causing a spiral effect that

they live happily ever after.

This tale was told in an ad that appeared in recent issues of the *Financial Post*. It was paid for by Volvo, the giant Swedish auto firm, whose marketing savants have, over the years, been very clever in etching certain concepts about their products into public consciousness all over the world.

When car buyers think of Volvo, the first word that most often occurs to them is "quality." The next thing that comes to mind is the concept of happy, conscientious workers, well-paid and fairly treated, whistling away on the assembly line and taking a great deal of pride in their work.

There's more to all this than simple marketing genius. Nowhere in the world does capitalism work better than in Sweden, where Volvo is a major economic player. (Volvo's sales in 1984 were \$10 billion — 12% of Sweden's gross domestic product. In comparison, Exxon, General Motors and A.T. & T. com-

results in a booming economy, as jobs create other jobs and the gravy train of prosperity finally pulls into the long-quiet station.

When Volvo set up its assembly plant in Nova Scotia in 1963, local politicians, businesses and newspapers were jubilant. New industries, it was thought, would spring up to supply the car maker with parts. Local industrialist and business magnate Frank Sobey was typically optimistic when he said "The component-parts industry very often employs more people than the assembly plant and for this reason we consider this a sort of cornerstone industry and a step forward in the industrial development of the Atlantic provinces..."

Now, 26 years later, it seems not too soon to make some judgement on how well the reality of this "cornerstone" has matched all the high-sounding theory.

There are some plusses. The Volvo plant is still here, still turning out cars, still providing relatively well-paid jobs to 150 people. A new and modern \$13.5 million plant, designed and built with Canadian materials by Nova Scotia labour, is the lynchpin of the new Bayers Lake Industrial Park on the outskirts of Halifax. The Atlantic Container Lines pier on the city's waterfront has grown, in large part, because of the volume of cargo destined for the Volvo plant. And plans that have recently been announced for a \$2.6 million plastics manufacturing plant at Bayers Lake are probably related to Volvo's presence there.

But the Volvo story in Nova Scotia hasn't been all a bed of roses: there's a different side

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bined revenues make up 7% of the American gross domestic product.) Volvo's employees in Sweden enjoy conditions that most workers elsewhere are routinely denied [See Box, page 22]. Volvo owners, too, tend to be a very satisfied lot, as do Volvo shareholders, whose investments turn a tidy profit almost every year.

Yes, Volvo, that modern-day embodiment of the virtues of the mythical and medieval Prince Volund, seems, in its Swedish operations, to do well by its own executives, by its shareholders, by its workers, and even by society at large. But what happens when Prince Volund is brought to Nova Scotia?

Getting Along With the Natives

The official version of the Volvo story in Nova Scotia is one of success. When the Swedish car giant set up operations in the old Acadia Sugar Refinery on the Dartmouth side of Halifax Harbour in 1963, the local

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40% in its case. The Pact also helped Volvo by
easing access to American markets. Having
positioned itself in Nova Scotia in a timely way,
the company was able to trade on its position as
a newcomer to the Canadian auto industry, and
on its location in an economically depressed
area, to wrest special concessions in the
application of the Auto Pact's terms.

Despite Volvo's promises, since 1965 the
proportion of Canadian-made parts in Volvos
assembled in Nova Scotia has fallen dramati-
cally. At one point the company had a brief
flirtation with a local battery manufacturer, and
with Goodyear Canada, but these business links
were soon severed and no local parts manufac-
ture facilities have since been created. By 1970,
Canadian content was down to 20%, and today
stands at a paltry 5%. And even those few parts
— undercoating, glass, floor mats and shock
absorbers — are brought in from Central Can-
ada. Plastics come from France, headlights from
Italy, fuel injectors from Germany. Even elemen-
tary items like antifreeze and transmission oil
are imported from Sweden. Volvo does deck out
its finished cars with Michelin tires — imported
from a plant in Germany.

It may be understandable that, in the '60s,
the federal government was lax in strictly
insisting that Volvo beef up its level of Canadian
content. It was, after all, important to the re-
gional economy that the plant operate at all. But
why, over the past two decades, has Ottawa
allowed the situation to deteriorate to its present
sad state? Is it true, as the company argues,
that the size of the Volvo operation here has

always been too small to attract specialized
parts makers to the area? Is it true that manu-
facturers in Central Canada are unwilling to re-
tool to serve Volvo's small demand? Is it true
that the Halifax operation has always been only
marginally profitable, and so should continue to
be allowed to import parts duty-free?

The federal government seems to have
accepted these arguments. There is no evi-
dence that it has asked Volvo to fulfill its commit-
ment to increase Canadian content to 40%. Nor
is there evidence that it has used its system of
import duties to nudge the company toward a
policy of using Canadian-made parts.

Clearly, Volvo has done well by its operations
in Nova Scotia, particularly in recent years: in
the five years leading up to 1987, company
profits rose over 950 percent, a performance
bettered by only 16 other Canadian corpora-
tions. "We make money by virtue of the fact that
we have that plant," according to Björn Ahlström,
President of the company's parent corporation,
the New Jersey-based Volvo North American.
Would this happy corporate picture have been
possible without federal incentives and conces-
sions on tariffs, Canadian content and trade?
Perhaps not, but the lack of effort to confront the
company on these issues is disturbing.

As long as Ottawa remains aloof, Volvo will
probably continue to operate an "enclave plant,"
supplied almost wholly by parts from abroad.
The rosy soothsaying of a quarter-century ago
— of economic spin-offs and widespread
prosperity — is, by now, but a faint and irrele-
vant echo, as development fable has come hard
up against corporate fact. •

press and business community were ecstatic. Halifax's
Chronicle-Herald ran a ten-page feature on Volvo, "the
car with the 100,000-mile reputation," and local retail
merchants offered "Volvo Specials" during what they
called "Volvo Appreciation Days." Prominent provincial
politicians were soon sporting Volvos in their driveways,
and the car maker's Nova Scotia operations were consid-
ered an economic miracle, made possible by the in-
spired activity of Industrial Estates Limited (IEL), the
Crown Corporation set up by Robert Stanfield's Tory
government in 1958 to attract new industry to the prov-
ince and headed by retail and corporate empire-builder
Frank Sobey.

Within a year, there were signs that production levels
would rise dramatically and the company declared it
would be looking for a bigger facility once it reached the
5,000 mark in the number of cars produced annually.
Volvo Regional Manager F. G. Christensen, speaking to
Dartmouth Rotarians, assured them that the plant would

"definitely remain in Dartmouth."

That promise, however, was soon to ring hollow.
When the three-year lease on the Dartmouth refinery
expired in 1966, Volvo was lured by a number of govern-
ment incentives to move its operations across the Harbour
to Halifax's Pier Nine. IEL committed a million dollars to
finance development of the new site. Halifax City Council
chipped in with an attractive ten-year tax benefit package
that included highly favourable rates of property and
business tax and a provision that the City would receive
two dollars for every car that came off the assembly line.
The cross-harbour move was celebrated in the local press
— at least on the more populous side of the harbour —
and it was generally thought that the move signalled
future stability for the industry.

But despite all this enthusiasm, in the decade following
its move the company continued to talk of its "insecure
position" to wrest further concessions from local officials.
Volvo's international President chided Nova Scotians for

not buying more of his cars, even if they were a bit more expensive here, where they were put together, than in the Ontario marketplace over a thousand miles away. Rumours circulated that the company could economically ship to the American market from its Belgian factory and probably save some money in the bargain. Volvo officials let it be known to the local press that other Nova Scotia municipalities were trying to woo them away from Halifax, and even that discussions had been held with the mayor of Québec City.

It was in this uncertain climate, further clouded by a downturn in worldwide car sales in the mid-'70s, that the tax agreement between Halifax and the company came up for renegotiation in 1976. At that stage, Volvo was paying, under the terms of the 1966 agreement, only 27% of its full municipal tax bill of \$130,000. Despite an understanding contained in the earlier deal that the company would pay its full tax shot by 1977, the ten-year agreement reached in 1976 raised taxes to only 30% the following year and stipulated annual 7% increases until the 100% level was reached. Acting Deputy Mayor Dennis Connolly opposed the deal, commenting that it was "unfair for the city to grant tax concessions to a company such as Volvo while ordinary citizens were annually required to pay their full share of taxes.... We can't run a city that way." But the Mayor of the day, Edmund Morris, and his fellow councillors disagreed, and Connolly's was the sole voice of aldermanic dissent.

In the decade after the 1976 agreement, civic jealousies were a constant background to Volvo's ongoing harbourfront operations. Businesses were flocking to Dartmouth's Burnside Industrial Park in large numbers, even though that city had ceased using tax concessions as a corporate lure in the early '70s. Across the harbour,

Halifax city fathers decided to set up their own industrial park, and began a long legal battle against Halifax County aimed at the annexation of valuable watershed lands on the city's western fringes. Finally, in late 1984, the city won its case in the Supreme Court of Canada and at ground-breaking ceremonies for the new facility in February, 1985, city officials spoke of having watched helplessly for years as businesses located "elsewhere," by which they meant, of course, Burnside in Dartmouth.

In 1985, IEL and Volvo jointly announced that the company would build a new, larger factory in Bayers Lake Industrial Park, on the old watershed lands. City officials were well-pleased with themselves at snaring Volvo as the prize tenant for their new park. Halifax Industrial Commission Chairman Gordon Archibald bubbled, in a prime cut of overstatement, that "Volvo is proportionately equivalent [to Halifax] to what the motor car industry is to Detroit." Civic bureaucrats also reasoned the move would free up valuable waterfront space and make Pier Nine available for fresh, revenue-generating development. (Four years later, the old Pier Nine location remains vacant and is shabbily derelict.)

It's perhaps not surprising that to sweeten the deal, the city came up with yet another ten-year tax break for the company, an arrangement that further puts off the day of "full" tax payments to 1998, which, if operations continue, will be Volvo's 35th year in the province, and its 32nd in Halifax itself. Altogether, the city is forfeiting millions of dollars over the period of the agreement.

Despite all this largesse on the part of municipal bureaucrats, last year found Development Minister, Rollie Thornhill heaping praise on Volvo for not requesting government money, for using its own resources to build the new Bayers Lake plant. But Thornhill was mum about a deal the province has struck with the company, one that might just prove to be the cruel, final kicker to the story of Volvo in Nova Scotia: should the company decide, down the road, to close shop, Thornhill's government has agreed to buy the car assembly plant, provided Volvo operates it for at least 15 years. Then, they will have the option, anytime they choose, of simply taking the province's money and going home.

The View From the Boardroom

Sitting at a large oval table in a comfortable boardroom specially designed to promote intimacy, overlooking assembly operations at Volvo's Bayers Lake facility, Plant Manager Gunnar Jennegren speaks about his company's links with the community. He defends the car maker's inability to live up to early hopes that it might become a magnet for regional industrial development. He argues that the volume of the plant's production isn't high enough to spur the growth of a regional auto parts industry. But he is proud of the 150 steady and well-paying jobs his company provides and believes that possibly as many jobs again have been created to handle and ship parts to the plant. He also points out that a local contractor was engaged for construction of the new Bayers Lake plant and that Volvo buys about two million dollars worth of local goods every year.

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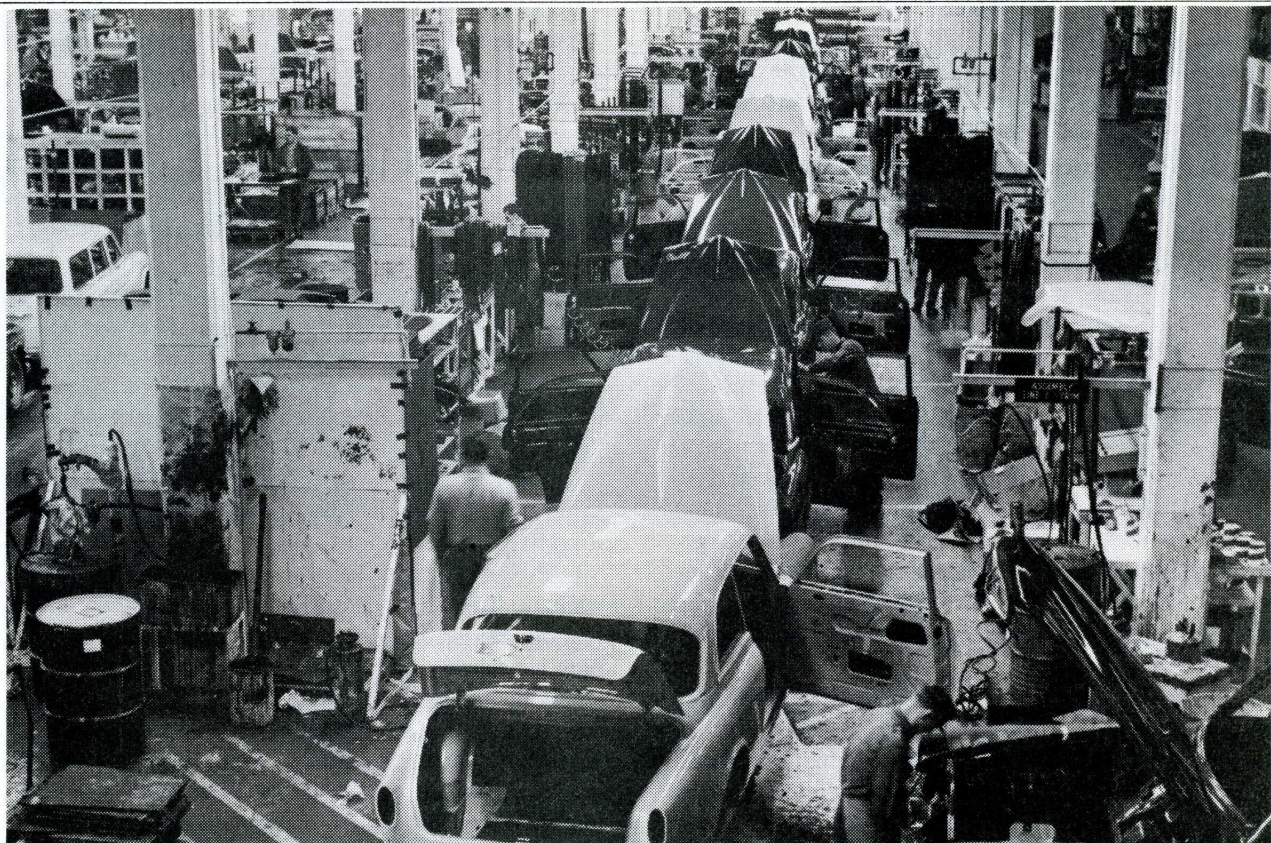
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N.S. Government Information Photo

The assembly line at the old Dartmouth plant.

Jennegren has no qualms about the preferential tax deals that have come its way. As he sees it's only good business practice for government to help industry locate and maintain operations in Nova Scotia.

He also speaks proudly of innovations made on the assembly line that were designed to improve conditions for the people working there. He tells us that each specific assembly-line task — known in the trade as a work cycle — takes about thirteen minutes, which compares very well with American-owned plants in Central Canada where a work cycle can take as little as one minute. Because of this difference, he explains, the Volvo assembly line moves much more slowly than do its Ontario counterparts, and so there is relatively little stress on workers. As well, the plant has windows all around — nobody is without a view of the outdoors — and is well-lit. Most handling of dangerous material is automated for the sake of workers' safety. To make it easy to put fittings under each car's body, the chassis is tilted 90 degrees.

Jennegren has strong feelings about the relationship between his company and its workers. He firmly believes that conditions at the Bayers Lake facility are exemplary, and suggests that the Canadian Automobile Workers' union (CAW) — the renamed and independent union that was formerly the Canadian section of the American-based United Automobile Workers (UAW) — is responsible for the state of labour relations at his plant, which have deteriorated in recent years. He feels that a long-standing union demand for wage parity with workers in Central Canada is profoundly unrealistic, and maintains that wage rates in the plant should be compared, not with those in Ontario — where the cost of

living is much higher than in Nova Scotia — but rather with pay scales at Volvo's European plants, where rates are four or five dollars per hour lower than in Halifax. He believes the union is being short-sighted in its wage demands, and that high wages here might well cause executives at Volvo's international headquarters to close the plant and then beef up production at existing European facilities. Union wage demands, he tells us, threaten the very existence of the jobs of union members, warning that "short term gain" might portend "long-term disaster." He hints that the Canadian union structure itself is a threat to present and future jobs, arguing that up-front wage increases negotiated by unions here reduce the likelihood of raids by rival unions, but often at the expense of the very economic viability of the enterprises involved.

Jennegren also has problems with the union-imposed seniority guidelines that dictate who is, or is not, eligible for a vacant job position. These strictures make it difficult for the company to implement job rotation, which would add variety and reduce stress for workers on the line. This, along with the low turn-over of jobs — 71% of employees have ten or more years at the plant under their belts — and the high unemployment rate in the region makes it difficult to increase the number of women and ethnic minorities in the workforce. (Currently, there are a few employees of minority ethnic origin, but not a single woman, working on the assembly line.)

Jennegren speaks candidly about a prolonged discussion that raged within his company a couple of years ago. At that time, some Volvo executives argued for closure of the plant's old Pier Nine facility, feeling that it

would be most economical to serve the small Canadian market from its European factories. They buttressed their stand by pointing to expected lower tariff rates in the near future, the greater efficiency of transporting fully assembled cars across the Atlantic Ocean compared to shipping only parts (the former, according to Volvo officials, is only half as expensive as the latter), and high and rising labour costs in Canada. But, other management people wanted to build a new facility at Bayers Lake to take advantage of both the highly skilled labour force that has developed here and Halifax's offer of reduced municipal taxes. They also warned that, should the worldwide trend toward free trade be reversed, it would be important to maintain a beach-head on Canadian soil. The decision on how to proceed, Jennegren says, was a difficult one, and it appeared at times that the final chapter of Volvo's story in Nova Scotia might indeed be at hand. The company's eventual choice to go ahead with Bayers Lake was a concrete display of its ongoing commitment to Nova Scotia, but it was not sufficiently well-appreciated by either its workers or the broader community.

Gunnar Jennegren's position is not an unusual one for a hard-nosed businessman to take. Industry creates employment, he believes, and management, unions, workers and society at large have to cooperate to ensure that the jobs and wealth created can continue. Many of the people on the assembly line, however, have a less than completely benign attitude about their employer.

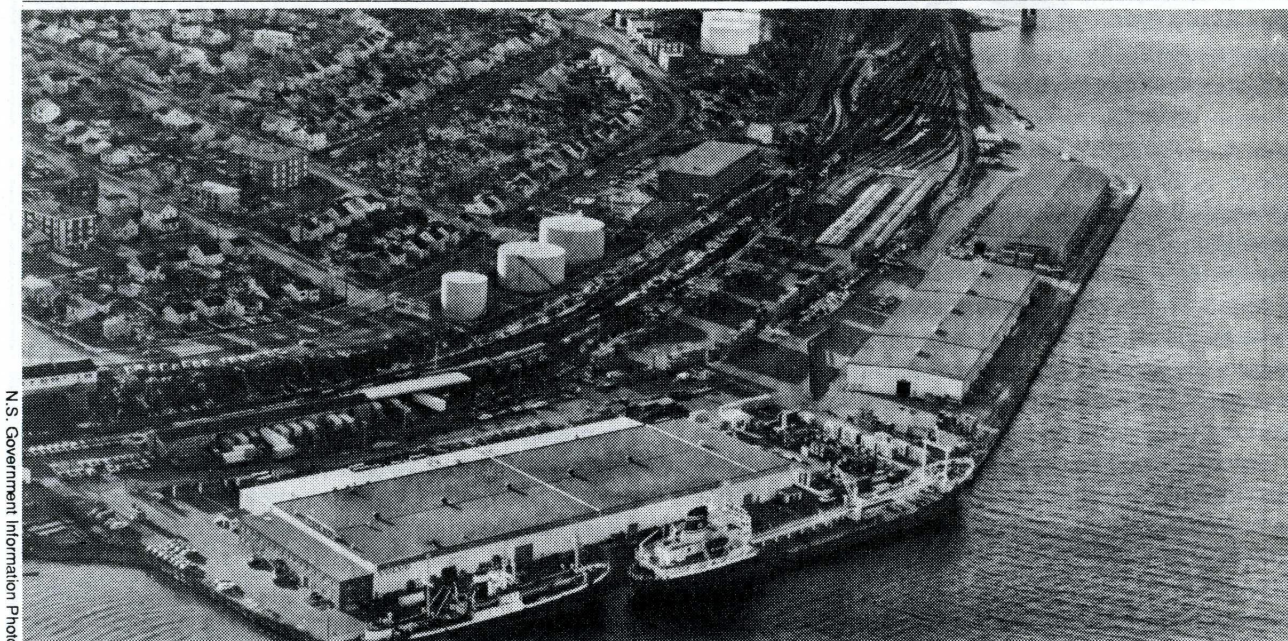
Labour's Love Lost

Internationally, Volvo uses ads like the one about Prince Volund and his beautiful Princess to trumpet the quality of its cars, its excellent employment conditions and the sense of shared responsibility between management and workers. But, for those working in the Halifax plant, fairy tales are one thing and the reality of day-to-day work on the line is quite another.

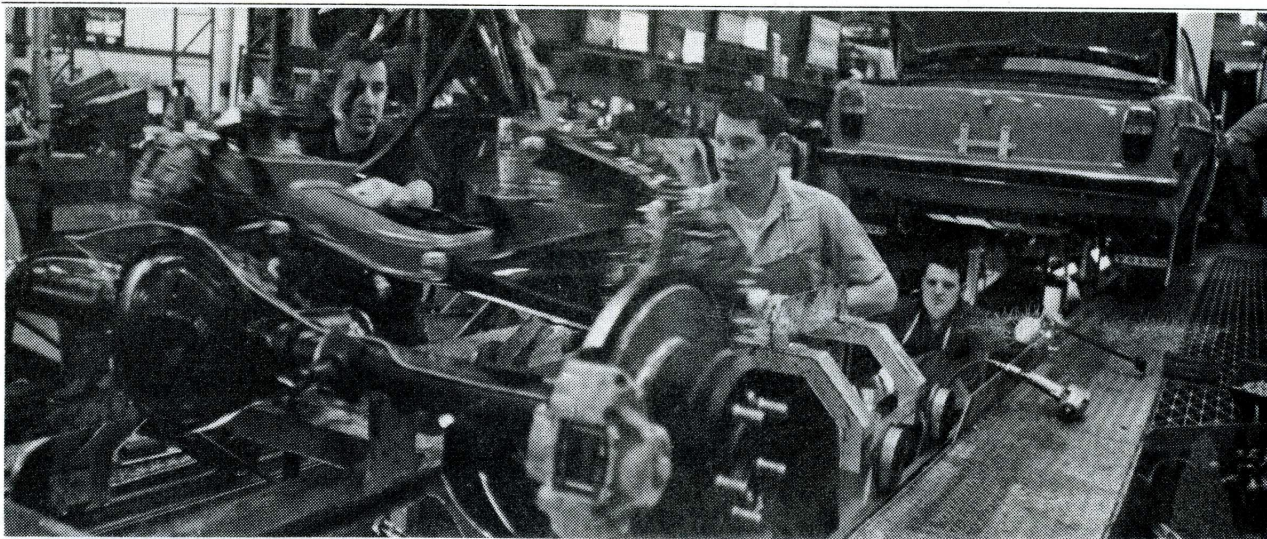
When Volvo began its Nova Scotia operations in 1963, workers chose the UAW to represent them and an initial three-year deal was struck with management. This provided for a cost-of-living bonus and guaranteed wage increases, although rates of pay were well below what auto workers in Central Canada were then earning. Local management, though, held out the prospect of bringing wages up to national standards in future by promising that when "production and new plant facilities reach a position comparable with the rest of the automotive industry in Canada, it is intended to be competitive in every way and treat... workers accordingly." In this optimistic atmosphere, 98% of the workers ratified that first contract and management complimented its employees, calling them "most friendly and cooperative... the response of the workers has been terrific and the quality and the enthusiasm we have found here is remarkable."

In the early years, labour relations at Volvo were excellent. The Production Manager at the Dartmouth plant developed a good rapport with the workers. "He knew everybody by their first name and knew when somebody had been sick or had a baby," recalls twenty-year plant veteran Percy Seel, who also serves as President of the CAW local at Bayers Lake. But things took a bad turn when a new Manager was recruited from Ontario, "to teach those farmers and fishermen a lesson," as Seel remembers it. A personality clash between the new Manager and workers was a major factor in the first strike at the Volvo plant in 1968. The workers were generally satisfied with the settlement that was eventually reached, but the strike put a confrontational edge on subsequent labour relations at the plant, although there was still an underlying cordiality and respect between the parties. "Tempers ran high but at least we were listened to," Seel recalls.

By 1974, the international automotive industry was in a bad way, largely as a result of the "energy crisis" that had developed the year before. In Halifax, Volvo was



The waterfront in north-end Halifax. Volvo's Pier Nine plant is in the foreground.



N.S. Government Information Photo

Assembly line workers at Pier Nine in the early '70s.

struggling with both the quality of its cars and with finding its niche in the automotive marketplace. In negotiations for a new contract, the UAW initially sought wage parity with Ontario auto workers, but later softened that stand. Nonetheless, differences on other issues, and particularly in the area of overtime scheduling, led to a 13-week strike. In the agreement that was eventually reached some gains were made, but on the crucial issue of overtime, the union had to accept much less than it had hoped for. Then, in 1976, Volvo workers suffered another setback when 80 employees were laid off, leaving only 160 on the job. Although some of those let go were subsequently called back to work, employment levels have never climbed back to previous levels.

The 1968 and 1974 strikes caused some resentment on both sides, but through the late '70s most workers were reasonably satisfied with conditions at the plant. That began to change, first slowly, then more rapidly, as the '80s unfolded. A new system was introduced for determining the amount of time allowed for each task on the assembly and sub-assembly lines. This had the effect of speeding up work, and the previous "breathing space" between repetitive tasks which had helped relieve stress — and had allowed the odd word to be exchanged between workers — disappeared.

When Volvo moved production to its new facility at Bayers Lake in the early fall of 1987, management thought it could reduce the work force and laid off 25 of the 150 workers then employed. A two-day wildcat strike showed the workers' displeasure and their feeling that 125 people were not enough to run the plant. Management's response was to undertake a costly (\$150,000-\$160,000) time-and-motion study which indicated that all 150 workers were required. Eventually, the company backed down on the layoffs, but animosities continued to grow.

When Volvos began emerging from the new Bayers Lake plant in October, 1987, management intensified its speed-up efforts. By the spring of 1988, daily production had jumped from 20 to 36 cars per day. Workers had to put in extra time at night doing sub-assembly work for the next day's production. Management tightened up quality control standards and levels of tolerance for

errors diminished. Absenteeism increased and frustration mounted on the line.

By the time negotiations came up for a new contract last year, the atmosphere had become so malignant that a strike was almost inevitable. The matters at issue — indexing of the company pension plan, changes to other benefits, wages and restrictions on union activity in the plant — were important, but at least as vital in the minds of line workers was the increasingly cavalier attitude of plant managers. The strike vote passed by a whopping margin of 111-1. Predictably, local management threatened to "quit Nova Scotia over wage demands," but this well-worn script of warning struck little fear into workers' hearts, and instead served only to further jaundice their view of management's honesty. The settlement eventually reached last October did contain some of the workers' key demands — most notably on the matter of pensions — but the underlying feeling on the assembly line remains one of confrontation, mistrust and frustration. One worker described the tense atmosphere as "a time bomb ready to explode at any time."

Today, production levels at the new plant are admired at Volvo's international headquarters. Praise appears in the form of statements in the local press and bulletins or even flowers wired from Europe. Similar praise has come from observers familiar with assembly plants in Central Canada. Study teams from Volvo's Swedish and Belgian plants have visited the plant on many occasions in the hope of learning how the high production levels are maintained. It is clear to all that the Halifax workers are skilled and conscientious.

Local management, of course, basks in such talk. But workers feel that while those running the plant gladly accept the accolades (and the flowers) from afar, they are less anxious to accept any responsibility when problems arise on the shop floor. "The men are always at fault," says one long-time worker, describing the common perception on the assembly line of management's attitude.

Workers recall one management representative whose solidarity with his peers was somewhat imperfect. During the two-day wildcat strike in 1987 over the lay-off of 25 employees, he confided to his colleagues

The Prince in His Kingdom

The marketers who dreamed up the tale of Prince Volund and his Princess did so, in part, to help play up the fact that theirs is a Swedish corporation, and to imply that that means it operates by a set of rules different from those followed by your average international industrial colossus. Some years ago, the corporation's chief executive said this of Volvo's relationship to its homeland: "I am always against Volvo being referred to as a multinational because, although I am rather international in my method of operation, I see Volvo as particularly Swedish.... This is why we retain such a very strong base in Sweden in relation to the distribution of our market. Although 70 percent of our market is outside Sweden, 70 percent of all our resources are in Sweden. For the future, we have approximately two-thirds of our investments planned for Sweden..." Over the years, the company has steered that course pretty accurately: in 1987, nearly two-thirds of the almost 300,000 Volvos produced internationally came out of Swedish factories. (The 8,500 put together in Halifax were but a drop in the international bucket.)

In spite of Sweden's reputation for social democracy — or even socialism — most businesses there manage to operate on a very efficient, and profitable, footing. Almost all workers are unionized, and both the Swedish government and the unions long ago adopted an almost religious commitment to full employment. This is clearly reflected in the country's labour policies and in the very low levels of unemployment — the Swedish rate has never exceeded three percent since World War II. Swedish companies have adapted themselves to doing business in this climate. After a recent large shutdown at a shipyard in the city of Uddevalla, for instance, Volvo and the government collaborated to place 1,000 of those laid-off at a new car plant there, with the local labour market board footing the bill for the necessary re-training of workers.

In return for this almost certain guarantee of work, Swedes pay a price: repeated changing of jobs and routine acceptance of new technology (Swedish industry is the most robot-intensive in the world), are facts of life for the Swedish workforce. At least, though, the country's full-employment policy makes these bitter pills easier to swallow.

The country doesn't suffer the wide wage differentials so common to most capitalist countries. Because of the history of collective agreements hammered out between the central Swedish trade union and the influential Employers' Federation, traditional low-wage industries, such as textiles, must either pay reasonable wages or shut down.

(High-wage industries, on the other hand, receive financial breaks from this system of bargaining, and the capital thus saved not only serves to embellish the corporate bottom line, but also to build up investment funds to help maintain a technological edge for Swedish firms over their international competitors.) A Swede working in a textile mill makes about 90 percent of what a Swedish auto worker takes home. In Canada, she would earn less than half as much as her Canadian car-making counterpart.

The system of collective bargaining in Sweden is highly centralized. Work rules and wages are negotiated on a national level, and this gives the Swedish labour movement bargaining strength that would make its Canadian counterpart green with envy. But it has benefits for employers as well: once a national deal is struck it is adhered to, and work stoppages and strikes are very rare.

Swedish workers have positions of responsibility, and some role in decision-making, on the shop floor. At a Volvo factory in Kalmar, Sweden, for example, different teams of workers have responsibility for various aspects of the production process. Each team contracts with the company to deliver an agreed output, but how they arrange among themselves to complete the task is a matter of their own choosing. This philosophy of worker responsibility will be taken a step further at another Swedish Volvo plant, scheduled to open soon. Here, each team will be responsible for the production of an entire car. This will almost certainly tend to increase satisfaction on the shop floor — one corporate strategist summed up the company's intent by remarking "I want the people in a team to be able to go home at night and really say 'I built that car.'"

Finally, when designing new factories, Volvo and many other Swedish companies try to incorporate improvements in light, space and noise levels and to, within reasonable limits, generally create the most pleasant working environment possible. Legislation ensures that workers have input even at this level.

In Sweden the rules of corporate citizenship are more stringent than in Canada, and so Volvo long ago adapted its operations to fit smoothly into the Swedish reality. In 1963, there was hope that the car maker might bring something of that reality, of its Swedish essence, to bear on Nova Scotia. But, almost three decades later, it seems clear that if Volvo managers meant to bring that essence along with them, then at least some of their luggage must have been lost between the Stockholm and Halifax airports.

that he believed the workers were correct in their assessment that 150 hands were needed to run the plant. After seeing the results of the time-and-motion study, his fellow managers came around to his position and it was decided to call back the laid-off workers. But the impolitic management man wasn't so lucky: rather than being praised for his insight, he was awarded a pink slip.

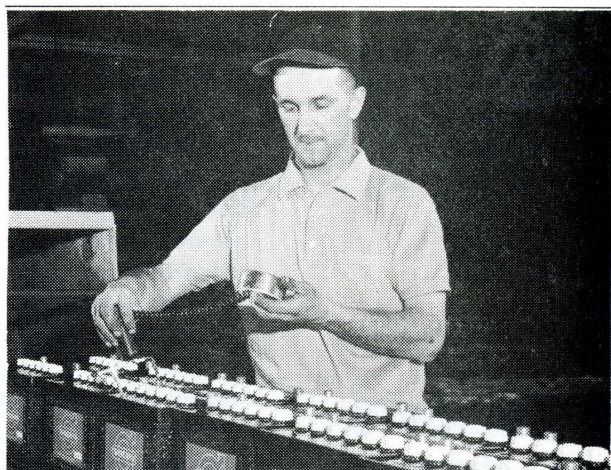
One Volvo employee who has worked with assembly line workers and engineers in Sweden has noticed that management there shows a great deal of respect to its employees. But at the Halifax plant, the Swedish corporation seems to have left all its respect at home. If Swedish line workers were brought to Halifax, says the former visitor to Sweden, "They wouldn't have anything to do with the interference and requests put on us here."

He also disagrees with the management claim that the 13-minute work cycle and lower line speed reduce stress. Rather, he says, it's the other way around. He remembers when the Pier Nine plant produced 60 cars a day, and recalls that "It was a breeze." There were more employees then, work cycles were shorter and the job was easier to do. Swedish workers, he says, wouldn't endure the conditions at the Bayers Lake facility.

Labour-management relations at the Halifax plant have clearly not lived up to the idyllic dreams of 1963, and many shop-floor workers lay the blame squarely at local management's doorstep. So, too, does Larry Wark. He is a local CAW representative and is closely involved with workers at the Volvo plant. Unlike Plant Manager Gunnar Jennegren, he doesn't believe that Volvo workers' wages are at all out of line, especially given the extent of government social and medical programs in Canada. CAW studies indicate that a Canadian earning \$14 an hour and enjoying the benefits of medicare and other government services would have to make \$21 an hour to pay for these services if he or she worked in the United States. He feels that management's claim that wages are lower at the company's Swedish plants than in Halifax doesn't hold water because of the much more extensive social programs available there. And the Halifax workforce, he says, is the most productive of the entire Volvo empire: the company's own studies estimate that it takes 33 hours of work to assemble a car at Bayers Lake, while it takes a full eight hours more to put one together at Volvo's second best plant. He also thinks that the port and industrial park facilities in Halifax, although also available to other industries, serve as a direct subsidy to the company.

Wark believes that the reason there is so little work rotation at the plant lies in local management's simple desire to save money. It can take a week or longer to train a worker for the 13-minute work cycle and that would require more staff and, thus, more expense. Although the collective agreement allows for such job rotation, the company resists its implementation, and workers tend to keep doing the same work they were originally trained for.

Percy Seel and Larry Wark are not alone in their criticisms of the way the Halifax plant is run. Although the workforce is highly competent and conscientious, many feel strongly that local Volvo management dis-



N.S. Government Information Photo

A worker at a battery factory in Springhill, N.S., which for a few years in the mid-'70s supplied the Halifax Volvo plant. For the past several years, Volvo in Halifax has imported its batteries from Europe.

plays an attitude that went out of fashion in Sweden decades ago, and that, as a boss, Volvo may be worse than most other Canadian employers. Why, then, do workers stay on in a working environment that none — as far as our research could uncover — are happy with? The answer is clear, and quite predictable. In an area of high unemployment, a job that pays decently enough to see to a family's needs, even if the only other thing it offers is day-in-and-day-out frustration, is a rare commodity that's not to be passed up lightly. The Halifax Volvo workers know this. Management reminds them often.

When Volvo set up shop in Nova Scotia 26 years ago, many thought it nice that "a little bit of Sweden" was taking root in the province. The company's managers and supporters here will argue that we've witnessed a quarter-century-long success story — the steady, well-paid jobs are still there, the Bayers Lake Industrial Park seems to be taking off and there have been, at least, a few small spin-off benefits for local enterprise. But a look at how it operates on its home turf back in Sweden makes it's clear that — given a more constructive political climate — the company could be doing things differently. The numerous tax breaks and incentives that have been showered on the company have failed to generate most of the hoped-for spin-off benefits that were so much ballyhooed more than two dozen years ago. And, by now, most Nova Scotians who work for the company believe that what has grown here is not a company devoted to respect for, and cooperation with, its workers, but simply another business out to get the maximum return on its investment. Volvo in Nova Scotia remains an "enclave" economy, divorced from local suppliers and Canadian content — and even alienated from the affection of the human beings who work at its plant.

Volvo's reputation as a reasonable, responsible and innovative corporate citizen has been more than a bit muddled by its history in Nova Scotia. If, rather than building castles, the gallant and noble Prince Volund had run Volvo's operations in the province, he would probably have gone to his grave a bachelor. •

1/Shirley Tillotson
Lies Our Mothers Told Us

The changing contours of time and place are thoroughly personal in this book

The Corrigan Women, by M. T. Dohaney, Ragweed Press, Charlottetown, P.E.I., 1988; 193 pages; \$12.95 (paper).

Secrets, silence and protective lies infest the lives of the Corrigan women. Each generation of this Newfoundland family saves up a private store of painful truths to be used like some terrible purgative herb as a therapy of last resort for their daughters. Dohaney's novel tells us how this outport family moves through its cycle of dishonesty and confession, its sickness and healing. In its rich and sometimes violent emotional texture, *The Corrigan Women* belongs in a class with such works as Allistair MacLeod's *Lost Salt Gift of Blood*. But most remarkable is the way Dohaney makes the Corrigan women's emotional lives historical. Even though sex and death are fixed realities, in this novel their consequences follow channels marked out by the

changing force of immigration rules, church law, labour markets and recruitment regulations.

All this is accomplished in a warm, sparsely-written narrative of less than 200 pages. Dohaney creates the historical context through her characters' perceptions without resorting to descriptive paragraphs. She situates "the Cove," not on any objective map, but through the geography of the Corrigan family's needs. In the scenes set before World War I, a single woman in the Cove needing a home can't afford to travel the distance to her sister's place in the States; for a man seeking a well-paid job, the mill in Corner Brook is the nearest place he can go. The pre-war economy is represented by the decayed elegance of the former sea captain's house where his descendants carry on a meagre existence, sustained by only a few farm animals and minimal cash income. The changing contours of time and place are thoroughly personal in this book, and yet between the



Beyond the Road

lines is sketched much of twentieth-century Newfoundland's political economy.

The foreground of the narrative, however, is occupied by emotional drama. After an opening scene set in the 1970s at a snow-swept graveside, Dohaney tells, in sequence, the stories of three Corrigan women. Bertha, who comes to the Cove as a young woman to be a housekeeper for the fading Corrigan family, acquires the name by marriage just after World War I. Carmel, Bertha's daughter, exchanges the name for "Strominski" in a bad deal with a bigamist. And, finally, Carmel's Tessie inherits "Corrigan" through the female line. On her falls the greatest weight of withheld truths, but the legacy of revelation is richest for her as well. The facts she learns are perhaps not so terrible, but they are bound up with the intense emotional freight imparted by the role these secrets have played within her family. The novel's closing scene returns the story line to the moment before the burial that the narrative began with. As Dohaney closes the circle of the story, she suggests in a hopeful way that Tessie may not be the last of the Corrigan women.

But for Tessie to carry on the family ways is clearly no unambiguous triumph or joy. The lives of her mother and grandmother were sustained by endurance and framed by the hardest of forced choices. For Bertha, the threat of starvation and homelessness formed one of her life's boundaries, the care and feeding of dependents a second, and the standards of righteousness and shame a third and shifting limitation. These constraints — and not romantic passion — dictated the time and conditions of her marriage. In contrast, the pledge of wedlock for Carmel seemed to permit both passion and comfort. But when that promise was broken, she too was forced onto paths narrowed by shame and necessity, and she found herself exiled in Boston, separated from her daughter by the low wages of a boot-factory job. When Tessie rejects the idea of marriage, escapes the Cove and finds prosperity, she apparently, for a time, frees herself from the traps that snared her foremothers. When she comes into the legacy of the Corrigan secrets, her freedom takes on new meaning.

Tessie creates her freedom in reaction to her past. She rejects marriage, the Cove and the convent to seek her own fortune, knowing that she doesn't want to live as have her apparently complacent mother and grandmother. But the past she leaves behind is

essentially unknown to her (until the end of the narrative, which is also its beginning). That ignorance allows her to think of herself as separate and different, capable of cleanly detaching herself from the past. But she comes to discover that her ties to place and people are profound and complex. Like the young alder bush that grew on her Uncle's Martin's grave, her uprooting may be fit and necessary, but it is painful, too, in measure with her debt to the past.

Through Tessie's story, Dohaney speaks against a too-easy rejection of the past. Only ignorance allows us to congratulate ourselves on being feistier, more independent, less shackled by oppressive ideologies than our ancestors.

We're no smarter or braver than Bertha or Carmel. If not today then certainly one day we will find ourselves, just like them, trapped by forces quite beyond our control. Bertha was confined by an economy that simply did not offer respectable, prosperous spaces for unmarried women. Carmel was intelligent and had commercial training, but she was out of luck searching for a white-collar job in the Boston of 1946, where she was competing with newly returned veterans, the recognized breadwinners. Both women suffered dramatic blows in the apparently private world of sex and marriage, but it was largely through the pressure of their historically specific economic and social circumstances that their particular disasters were transformed into life-altering tragedies. Only when Tessie comes to know something of this does she recover a sense of connection to the Cove.

As well as prompting us to the task of understanding our parents' past, Dohaney also explores, through the stories of Bertha and Carmel, how our mothers and grandmothers helped create the myths and silences that obscure both these women to their children. If Tessie grows to adulthood without knowing the Corrigan secrets, it is not because she failed to ask any questions. But the shame that was so powerful a constraint on her foremothers' choices prevented them from speaking freely to each other, or to Tessie. As children, Tessie and Carmel are sensitive, and they pick up in the community echoes of the troubles in their family's history. But Bertha, and then Carmel, both refuse to speak of the past. They hide behind safe fictions, partial truths that allow them to avoid their own pain and, they hope, spare their daughters embarrassment or worry. But, for their daughters,

Through
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The Corrigan Women



M.T. Dohaney

A community that suffers deprivations will likely share a heritage of hurt that goes beyond the material



Beyond the Road

A Newfoundland village. Dohaney situates "the Cove" through the geography of the Corrigan family's needs.

the cost of these denials is a lurking sense of unexplained danger and nameless shame. For their mothers, hiding their stories costs them the respect their daughters would have given them, a respect which might have healed the injuries inflicted by the judgements of the Cove, of the church and of their own cruel self-condemnation. But the mothers' fears are not trivial, nor is their shame only a weakness of character. Neighbours, priests and the Cove children confirm, by taunts or complicit silence, the necessity of lies. Only when some terrible thing has happened to their daughters could the Corrigan women say, "This happened to me, too, and look — I survived."

By sharing their secrets only at moments of crisis, the Corrigan women did, indeed, survive. Their story illuminates one necessary theme of women's history in the Maritimes and Newfoundland — appreciation of survival's daily price in self-denial, in hard labour and in perseverance. But *The Corrigan Women* highlights another theme — a more critical one. We are inheritors of an emotional legacy, each of us in our own families, but also all of us together. The meaning of the Corrigan women's "private" lives was shaped by their community, their economy, their church and their state. The Corrigan secrets were formed in large part by social forces, and so are not particular to only occasional families. The conditions for private tragedy are often social — lack of housing, absence of job opportunities, wars, sickness brought on by malnutrition or stress. A community that suffers these deprivations together will very likely also

share a heritage of hurt that goes beyond the material. The Corrigan women survived, and Tessie is helped by her foremothers' hard work to escape some of the Cove's penalties. But she also inherits a mixture of fear, shame and mistrust handed down by Bertha and Carmel. Out of this pain comes Tessie's rejection of the Cove and her past. This repudiation helps her survive, but to live in the fullness of possibility requires something more. She needs to know, understand and share the story of the past.

So, *The Corrigan Women* gives us heroines, but it also challenges us. We are no better than our parents or grandparents, but we have different opportunities. A novel like *The Corrigan Women* offers us the chance to explore the past in a clear-sighted way, neither romanticizing the hard life nor ignoring the oppressions that can be found at the heart of family, but appreciating the humanity in lives twisted by circumstance. And because the hidden secrets of this novel are in important ways specific to women, it can prompt us to move away from the many lies of silence that continue to shape women's lives.

Many women have done so, and their difficult honesty has been the foundation of women's shelters and health networks, housing and support for victims of child abuse, advocacy for prostitutes' rights, rape crisis support, and the campaign for more and better homemaker services. All these organizations, and others, speak clearly of women's real experiences and needs. They give women new places from which to speak out. Individually and collectively,

though, we continue to shore up our daily survival by shoving painful realities aside. As Adrienne Rich wrote in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*: "Lies are usually attempts to make everything simpler — for the liar — than it really is, or ought to be."

Perhaps Dohaney's honest and loving book will be a means by which her readers can move a bit farther beyond the protective but self-destroying simplifications that di-

vide generations of women and obscure the often painful complexity of our lives, and of our past. Perhaps this novel can help us not to lie. •

Shirley Tillotson, a native of the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, is pursuing studies in women's history at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

2/Ellison Robertson Soul Searching in the Company Store

***The Company Store*, by Sheldon Currie, Oberon Press, Ottawa, Ontario, 1988; 133 pages; \$12.95 (paper), \$25.95 (hard bound).**

Ian MacDonald is leaving his Cape Breton home to join the air force. As he stands waiting with his family on the station platform, the author tells us that "They had no words for whatever was going on." So, from this book's very beginning, the articulation of words — or their absence — is central to its thematic richness. And later, when a confrontation between Ian's mother and father is described, we are told of a rush of talking by his father that serves as a danger sign, a serious rupture in the taciturn progress of this family's hard, working-class

lives.

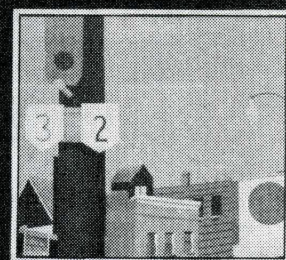
Ian's departure (which he views as an escape) is set against the image of his great-grandparents' emigration from Scotland, when they left behind "sheep, dogs, shelter and every heavy thing, but they took as much of music, religion and literature as they could," and hoped they would be able to keep "each other and whatever was in their heads and hands." Ian's departure, on the other hand, is a break with the past and with family, rather than a continuity. It is a break more shattering for his family than any ancient diaspora, and it overwhelms whatever different hopes they might have had for his future, and leaves them mute.

"Beginnings not ending get the talk going," the author notes. He then offers a description of the trip west which we

The articulation of words — or their absence — is central to this book's thematic richness



Inside an eighteenth-century Scottish Highland cottage. Scots who came to Cape Breton left behind "sheep, dogs, shelter and every heavy thing..."



The Company Store

A novel by
Sheldon Currie

Ian returns to a place of drunken pipers and grime- covered buildings

abruptly learn Ian is remembering as he makes the return journey some years later. As his train moves east along the bank of the Saint Lawrence River, Ian recalls a conversation he had with an air force padre, Father Paquet, about his impending return home. "It won't be there when you get back, you know," he tells Ian, and then goes on to talk about his own experience of separation from his Quebec family and community. When you leave, he asserts, "you leave your history behind." It is this relationship between departure and past, brought to the foreground early in the novel, that the subsequent narrative explores and questions.

As he returns to a place of drunken pipers and grime-covered buildings, we are taken through a series of encounters between Ian, his family, his community and his memory. From his ambiguous position as the returned (but not prodigal) son, who may well set off again, Ian is able to see with a clarity he earlier lacked. Yet, he is still too deeply implicated in the life and history of home to make simple judgements.

He returns to find his home in an uproar: father just back from a six-day tear during which he is rumoured to have had an adulterous affair; mother crying over the ironing; the parish priest trying in vain to intercede; his sister refusing to leave her room.

Behind her bedroom door, she is studying. "I like geography," she says. "Studying

places where anything might happen. Or history, when everything happened, or thinking about the future, when anything might happen." The present, though, is crowded by anxiety and doubt, with little potential for action. His sister, we are led to suspect, might be planning her own version of the escape Ian attempted earlier.

Meanwhile, Ian's father has lit out again and Ian goes to try to find him. During his search, the details of a past event come forcefully back to him. A few years earlier a mine accident had injured his father, Angus, and killed two other men. As Angus lay in hospital then, his body mangled, his survival uncertain, he displayed a stoicism which he perhaps knew he would need later when, mended and cut off from compensation, the only way to support his family would be to return underground. But Angus himself will say nothing about it.

After his father's accident, Ian wants to work in the mine, but he is repeatedly refused underground work. Finally, Ian learns that his father's experience had prompted Angus to call in an old favour owed him by the mine boss: Ian would not be hired. It was then that Ian quit school and joined the air force, possibly saved from his father's fate, but not from wrestling with its meaning.

The widow of one of the dead men says of her husband, in the plain poetry of hurt,

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—Albert Einstein**

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N.S. Government Information Photo

Cape Breton miners: The Company Store suggests real events in the lived history of Cape Breton's coal mining towns.

"He was an awful good man." Almost always it is the women who must survive and make sense of the aftermath of this harrowing life-and-death struggle to earn a living. Even if a man survives, as Angus has, he is marked by the ordeal and constrained by the limited possibilities for expression or release in this male-dominated society. The women, for all their suffering (or because of it) have no doubt about the necessity of carrying on in their roles as child-bearers and nurturers, and this is often crudely, but effectively, expressed in their frankness about sexuality as the natural companion to both life and death. (This same theme is also clearly set forth in some of the author's earlier works.)

For Angus, hope has been sustained in the belief that his work was building a better future. "We thought we were building something that we could pass on and enjoy watching our children build on to. But if we did build anything it looks like nobody wants it." In fact, the "something" they've built is wanted, by Ian, but it is the shared life of family and experience that he seeks, rather than the shaky material existence of a declining mining town. From the slight distance necessary to a full understanding Ian sees, as the "alienated" native son, just what he might be returning to. A humorous piece of Ian's mawkish writing composed in adolescence, presented to the reader on the night his father burns the company store, suggests a possible means of articulating what Ian and those around him have lived. It then becomes clear that "escape" is not his only option.

The Company Store suggests real events in the lived history of Cape Breton's coal mining towns, but doesn't deal with much of that actual history. The compression of several generations into the undated era of one young man's family and memory serves to give an intensity to the narrative, but it also leads to a generalized expression of history that neglects certain vital aspects of Cape Breton society. The company store itself is a symbol of the absent controllers of the miners' lives, the directors of a system that can arbitrarily rob a man of even the illusion of a fair wage for fair work. (The infamous three cent pay Angus received is an often quoted real-life event in Cape Breton lore.) The final gesture of rebellion — the burning of the store and the destruction of its accounts — is a strong force within this novel, partly because the actual history of class struggle has been set aside in favour of a few moments of dramatic, heroic posturing.

To accept only this bravado would, indeed, be to "leave your history behind," but as the novel ends — with Ian sitting in the kitchen, closing his eyes tiredly against all he has remembered — it is not the dark of despair he sees, or even the darkness of the pit where he might yet end up working. It is, rather, an inner and contemplative darkness. And it is the beginning of a present in which things, finally, may now be changed. •

Ellison Robertson, an Associate Editor of New Maritimes, is a Cape Breton writer and painter.

The
compression
of several
generations
into one era
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the
narrative

Travels With Traders -- and Young Poultry

Kevin Whelton lives in Petit Rocher, New Brunswick and has been a frequent contributor to New Maritimes, writing on the problems of forestry work and small woodlot operators in New Brunswick. He is currently travelling in Southern Africa, and sends us this report from Dar Es Salaam, the capital of the East African nation of Tanzania.

Kevin Whelton

nation by cutting rail links and imposing other measures that put an economic squeeze on Zambia.

In order to break Rhodesia's stranglehold on its external trade, Zambia appealed for Western aid to help build a rail link with its neighbour, Tanzania, on Africa's east coast. When these pleas fell on deaf ears, the two countries



together in 1967 accepted an offer of aid from China. Full service on the new TAZARA railway, between Kapiri Mposhi, Zambia, and Dar in Tanzania, finally began in 1975.

Getting from Lusaka to the railhead at Kapiri Mposhi involves a three-hour road trip by bus or taxi. Zambian busses are notoriously overcrowded and are usually booked several weeks in advance, so I made my way through the rain to the taxi park in the market. There, drivers wanted to charge me \$40 for the trip, but I soon found a "pirate," or unmarked taxi, that would deliver me, along with another passenger, to the train station at half the going rate. There was little opportunity for conversation during the trip because of the blaring of the radio and the incessant chirping of about 1,000 newly hatched chicks that occupied the back of the station wagon.

I arrived in Kapiri Mposhi with four hours to wait before the train was to leave. I decided to take a walk, so I gathered up my luggage and set off. I had only gone a few steps when a soldier ordered me back into the station. I had mistakenly left a small parcel behind, a gift from a friend in Lusaka,

and this had aroused suspicion. The soldier ordered me to open it, and, when it proved not to be a bomb, he became much more relaxed and explained to me the reasons for his nervousness.

The African National Congress (ANC), by far the strongest and most able of the organizations fighting for an end to apartheid in South Africa, maintains its international headquarters in Zambia. White South African agents, usually posing as tourists, are sent to Zambia both to punish the country for the hospitality it extends to the ANC, and as part of the apartheid regime's general efforts to promote instability amongst its majority-ruled neighbours. A trick of these counterfeit travellers is to leave bombs, disguised as harmless packages, at strategic points, such as railway stations. Little wonder that my behaviour had caught the diligent officer's eye!

The crisis of the forgotten package was hardly over when I was told by a plainclothes policeman to follow him to the police station to discuss a dispute about my \$20 taxi fare from Lusaka. I went along with him, fretful and full of worry about what the problem might prove to be.

When we arrived at the station, the taxi driver and his other passenger were both there, and the story of their dispute soon unfolded. The driver, a Zambian, had rented his car to the passenger, a Tanzanian, to transport the baby chicks to the train station. When I came along with my \$20, they had together agreed to take me with them. Their difference was over how my fare was to be divided between them. The Tanzanian maintained that they had agreed to divide the \$20 equally between them, while the Zambian driver insisted that their arrangement was that he would get \$15. The

Getting from place to place in southern Africa is always an adventure. I found myself in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, and wanted to get to Dar Es Salaam — most often simply referred to here as "Dar" — on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

Zambia is a land-locked country that has long been befuddled by problems of transport, both internal and international. When it gained independence in 1964, most of its road and rail links went through what was then the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, and on from there to ports in apartheid South Africa or Portuguese-controlled Mozambique. The following year, Southern Rhodesia's racist white-settler regime announced its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from London and became the renegade nation of Rhodesia, led by Prime Minister Ian Smith.

This self-legitimized regime worked to ensure ongoing white rule and pushed blacks far out onto the economic periphery. Soon after UDI, black nationalist guerrillas began the long battle that would culminate, in 1980, in their ultimate victory and the establishment of the new, majority-ruled state of Zimbabwe. Some of these guerrillas used Zambia as a base from which to launch attacks against Rhodesia. The Smith regime acted swiftly in retaliation against the new



Tanzania Today

Dar Es Salaam.

police officer who had fetched me sat in judgement, and, after asking each of us a few questions, he ruled in favour of the Tanzanian. My fare was promptly divided equally between them and we all went on our way.

After these run-ins with officialdom it was soon time to board the train. I embarked with some feelings of trepidation because I had read and heard several accounts that described the rail journey to Dar as unbearable, unreliable and even downright dangerous. Some tales indicated that the food would give me hepatitis or that the scheduled 39-hour trip might take up to four days to reach its destination, *if* it arrived at all.

I entered an empty compartment of four berths. A few moments later, the Tanzanian who had received a favourable judgement on the division of my taxi fare joined me. I was glad for a familiar face and we soon fell to talking. Chagula was his name, and trade was his game. He had brought merchandise from Dar the previous week, had sold it, and was now returning with his freshly acquired cargo of hatchlings, which are apparently in short supply in Tanzania at the moment. He is a frequent TAZARA traveller and he quelled my fears by assuring me that the trip would be quite comfortable.

And indeed it proved to be so. The food was both nourishing and cheap and drinks were freely available. The plumbing may have been a bit short of the standards I'd expect on the Ocean Limited, but that particular shortcoming is far from rare anywhere on this continent.

During the evening (the train had left at 8:45 p.m.) our conversation was interrupted several times by visitors, fellow Tanzanian traders who were friends of Chagula's. They settled accounts and, speaking in Kiswahili, which along with English is a national language in Tanzania, they exchanged stories of their latest dealings in Zambia.

When we reached the border, Chagula borrowed the Tanzanian equivalent of about \$40 from me, explaining that he didn't have enough money to pay the import duty on his chicks. He then went to see his cargo through the border crossing formalities. "Things," he told me, "tend to disappear when customs officials are around."

After we crossed the frontier into Tanzania, our four-berth compartment gained its full complement when we were joined by two Tanzanian shopkeepers of Asian descent. They were friendly and eager to talk about developments in their country, which has seen a number of changes in recent years. In 1985, Julius Nyerere, who had served as President since independence in 1961, gave up his post to Ali Hassan Mwinyi. During his term, Nyerere pursued socialist policies and earned respect and admiration in Africa and worldwide. Although Nyerere is still influential in his nation's political life — he has remained as Chairman of the ruling party — the new President has begun to put his own stamp on Tanzania's development. My newly found shopkeeping friends seemed to approve of their new leader, who, they

said, was making life easier for people running their own small businesses. And, although Nyerere's socialist principles and policies sometimes brought him into conflict with small traders, my two new companions seemed to have a great respect for him.

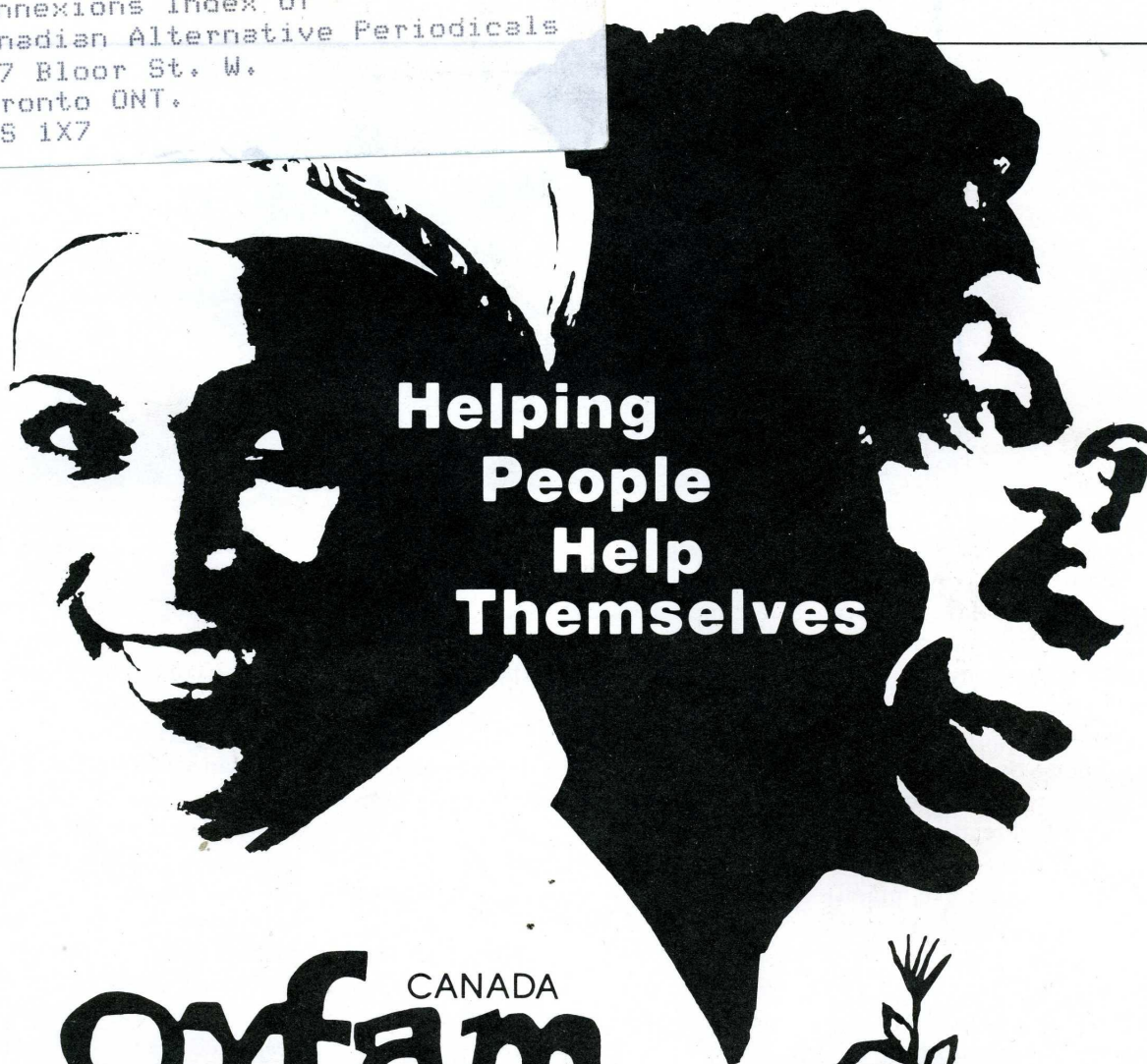
Asian traders dominate commerce in both Tanzania and Zambia, and Chagula told me about the different attitudes of Asians in the two countries. Zambian Asians, he said, were "tricky" to do business with, and many of them looked down on blacks. He viewed Tanzanian Asians, on the other hand, as quite different, and remarked that they respected their black compatriots.

At the first stop inside Tanzania, Chagula disappeared. When the train pulled away, he returned and paid me back the money he had borrowed. While the train had been stopped he had gone out onto the platform and sold some of his chicks so he could pay his debt to me.

The four of us spent the second, and last, evening of our journey in the dining car exchanging talk and sampling Zambian beer. The following morning it became quite warm in our compartment as we neared the coast and Dar, which is well known for its oppressive heat. Just before noon, we pulled into the station in the Tanzanian capital, a scant 15 minutes behind schedule. I wished my three travelling companions well, and set off in search of a much-needed bed and shower.

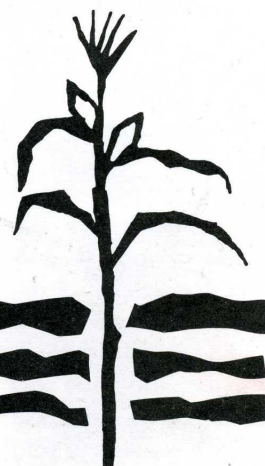
The journey had been long and tiring, but the making of new friends and conversation had made it also pleasant and enriching. •

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