

‘Getting Enough Stamps for the Pogey’
and Other Strategies for Surviving Cape Breton’s Deindustrialization

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Abstract

‘Getting Enough Stamps for the Pogey’ and other Strategies for Surviving Cape Breton’s Deindustrialization

Jenny Ceridwen Cockburn

An investigation of the socio-economic impact of deindustrialization on the lived experience of Cape Bretoners, as they make sense of their changing world and attempt to improve the future of their communities, cannot be removed from its larger historical context, or from the larger political atmosphere that shapes Canadian policy. The framework within which the people of Sydney Mines and Florence conceptualize their predicament is informed by hegemonic neoliberal ideology which aims to reduce the role of the state and place more emphasis on the individual.

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the experience of displacement, contingent work and unemployment in the lives of men and women in Sydney Mines and Florence. This is approached through a focus on three areas: labour migration, call centre employment, and finally, unemployed community members’ participation in an experiment aimed at finding an alternative to the Employment Insurance (a.k.a. Pogey) system, called the Community Employment Innovation Project. This thesis demonstrates, through the contested discourses of community members around issues of workforce participation and unemployment and their implications for the future, the double bind in which community members find themselves caught. They are both encouraged to take part in community development, and condemned by the rhetoric for staying rather than migrating in search of work. This dilemma is most apparent with respect to the participants in the CEIP who are directly involved in building community capital but also bear the brunt of the stigma of unemployment.

To Eric and Tikiri;
To my parents for their enduring support;
And to the women and men of Cape Breton
who welcomed me into their homes and their lives,
and without whom
this thesis could not have been written.

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Socio-economic Consequences of Deindustrialization

Introduction

Sydney Mines. The name of this town itself invokes an image of the legacy of coal mining in the region, yet here, as with the rest of 'industrial' Cape Breton, the last few decades have seen a process of economic restructuring which led, eventually, to the elimination of the coal and steel industries in 2001. This process of deindustrialization resulted in high unemployment rates and a shift in the type of available jobs, principally in the service sector. As with other regions that have experienced similar processes, the economic effects of deindustrialization amount to an assault on the standard of living and social security and, as this ultimately affects family life, the extent to which communities remain intact and the very nature of their worldview.

However, as Leach and Winson point out, the limitations of much of the literature on globalization, deindustrialization and economic change is that it is missing information about how such changes play themselves out at the community level. This becomes more problematic with the reliance of policy-makers and other analysts on general statistics. Thus, it is one thing to know how many manufacturing jobs have been lost or gained during a specific period, but it is much more difficult to determine how changes in job opportunities affect different kinds of communities (2002:7).

The lived experience of the effort to work and maintain a household in the Sydney Mines and Florence area of Cape Breton after the demise of the coal industry is the broad focus of this thesis. The impact of deindustrialization affects everyone in the community. Most men and women, young and old, have family members who worked for the mining

company, Devco. The closed businesses and fewer pedestrians, combined with individuals' friends and family moving away or migrating seasonally for work have had a negative impact on the social life of the community.

Within local discourse there is an acknowledgement that the unemployment rate is high because the industrial jobs are gone and the service sector jobs that have come in their place are inadequate. At the same time, people working harder and sacrificing more, either financially or in terms of quality, such as time with family, often resent the unemployed (particularly those on social assistance) for appearing to receive money for doing nothing (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

Strategies that involve some members of families migrating for employment part of the year include the remainder of the year collecting the Employment Insurance benefits (EI) that they have paid into in order to stay home. To use the colloquial expression, workers collect the *stamps* (insurable hours or work) needed to get *pogey* (Employment Insurance). In this way community members can maintain a household in their communities. This is often both socially and economically rational in that the costs of permanent relocation, in terms of leaving social and familial supports and the financial burden of buying a home, may be greater than staying on the island.

The costs to the federal government in Employment Insurance benefits, as well as the high unemployment rate that resulted from the closure of the federally run coal industry, sparked efforts by the Canadian government to create jobs (at least temporary ones) and thereby cut its costs in the EI system. Human Resources and Development Canada devised an experiment that was intended to fulfill both these aims.

The Community Employment Innovation Project, or CEIP, has been controversial in Cape Breton. Some people see it as a wonderful opportunity for the unemployed to gain some employment skills and the self-confidence to follow their employment aspirations. Others perceive it as a tactic to make the government look good and progressive, while allowing the unemployed to do very little in exchange for minimum wage. Another concern has been that while participation in the CEIP was voluntary, the project was modelled after ‘workfare’ (a term derived from work-for-welfare), in which social assistance recipients are required to work in exchange for their benefits.

Though traditionally in Cape Breton, Employment Insurance has been more socially acceptable than social assistance (because workers pay into the benefits they receive), both social supports are sometimes viewed as contributing to lowering the work ethic and creating dependency. The local discourse surrounding these issues cannot be severed from the wider political economy in Canada, and this necessitates an examination of neoliberalism and how its agenda is perpetuated through projects like the CEIP.

This chapter touches on a number of key elements of deindustrialization, with particular focus on shifts in the experience of work as the types of jobs change, and the effects of these shifts on social networks, identity formation and migration. However, the picture would be incomplete without a discussion of the capitalist hegemony that informs the discourse on these issues. Following this theoretical discussion, the ethnographic chapters explore how individuals experience work and unemployment in and around Sydney Mines. This is approached through a focus on three areas: labour migration, call centre employment and finally, unemployed community members’ participation in the Community Employment Innovation Project.

Community, Displaced Workers and Contingent Workers

The difficulty in studying the impact of deindustrialization on a community and the responses of that community both to this process and to the subsequent governmental implementations that arise with restructuring is that the impact is not felt uniformly by its members. For example, retired men and women are affected by economic restructuring in different ways from younger people, and therefore may not relate to those with more difficult economic struggles (an issue that receives more attention in chapter six within the context of the CEIP).

I draw on Belinda Leach and Anthony Winson's description of community as "local social systems which are spatially organized, and within which there are both shared interests and conflicts based on class differences, as well as other factors such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity" (2002:181). By recognizing that within a community there can be contrasting perspectives on the issues that affect the daily lives of some of its members, I am in accordance with Leach and Winson's perspective that while a community is certainly more than simply a sum of its individuals, "wherever a substantial group of individuals within a community are adversely affected by events, community is also a victim, even though some members of it may refuse to recognize the injury" (2002:181).

However, in conceptualizing community, it is also important to keep in mind the role migration plays in altering these local social systems. Hastrup and Olwig warn against the tendency to ignore mobile community members because they are not immediately present during the ethnographer's visit, yet are in fact often of great importance to the more settled people (1997:5). This observation is particularly apt when

considering the lived experience of Cape Bretoners, many of whom have family and friends in other parts of the country.

Leach and Winson use the term ‘displaced workers’ as a concept which is meant to be generally descriptive and to apply to a broad range of workers for whom “economic restructuring has led to displacement from what could reasonably have been expected to be the normal course of their work lives” (2002:8). By keeping this concept broad they are able to incorporate groups of people who were not directly laid-off but who are displaced by no longer having the opportunity to enter into the labour market as easily or in the same ways as previous generations. This understanding of displaced workers is appropriate for the Cape Breton context, where the opportunities for entry into the well-paid jobs in the coal mining and steel industries have dwindled and become nonexistent.

A third instance in which I am influenced by Leach and Winson in my use of terminology is in their notion of the ‘contingent work world,’ in contrast to what they call the more ‘stable work world’ before economic restructuring across Canada. Contingent work incorporates forms of paid labour such as part-time, temporary, home-based and casual, all of which are associated with lower pay, the absence or inadequacy of benefits and frequent difficulties in qualifying for social assistance programs (Orr 1996 in Leach and Winson 2002:11).

Their use of the term ‘contingent work world’ is intended to emphasize both the dependent nature of jobs in the new economy *and* the way in which the nature of people’s jobs affects, and in some ways determines, most if not all aspects of their family life. While terms such as non-standard work or casualized labour could also be used, *contingent* is “the only one which actually connotes the importance of the relationship of

this form of work to something more powerful and in control, in other words, the actions of capital” (Leach and Winson 2002:10). Part-time, temporary and contracted work is conditional and dependent upon the moves made by the employer. Thus the term contingent work has considerably more explanatory power than any of the alternatives (*Ibid*).

Deindustrialization, Globalization and Class

In industrial Cape Breton, as with coal mining communities in Britain and the United States, mining work structured social relationships and practices; informing the ways they were gendered and acting as a central point around which broader identity processes, including political and community attachments were constructed (Parry 2003:231). With the coal mining industry’s decline in many of its traditional locations, communities have been thrown into crisis.

Facing management and employers with decreased power as unions become inaccessible, employees also lose their sense of companionship and solidarity with other workers and their sense of communality. This is felt even more by the unemployed, who become marginalized by the structure of the labour market.

In the transition to ‘global capitalism,’ capital mobility is a dominant characteristic, targeting areas where vulnerable workers will accept low wages (Bluestone and Harrison 1982), and undermining institutional labour supports, such as progressive legislation, state entitlements and Employment Insurance benefits. However, unlike plant closures in other regions in North America where private corporations have closed or moved (to places with cheaper labour), the private industrial capitalists from

Britain and the United States that owned the coal and steel industries in Cape Breton pulled out decades ago, and the federal and provincial Canadian governments took control of those industries. Recent deindustrialization involved governments downsizing and terminating the resource extraction and manufacture industries. In the case of Cape Breton, the importance of a discussion of deindustrialization, then, is not in relation to *where* the jobs and capital went, but rather how the closure of these companies affected the displaced workers and their families. This includes the shift to contingent work as well as unemployment and its impact on identity, particularly in relation to gender and age.

In a counter argument the deindustrialization thesis is criticized for ignoring the dynamic dimension of capitalism in the new service and information sectors, which have stimulated the growth of a substantial number of jobs in the 1980s and 1990s. Job growth is considered proof of the dynamic nature of ‘open’ market economies. While some recognize the social toll this can take, they see it “as a necessary evil if we are to have the dynamism that is responsible for long-term increases in living standards” (Leach and Winson 2002:26).

Nevertheless, company towns dependent on single industries, have proven especially vulnerable to fluctuations in demand or to international competition, as opportunities for new jobs are few and far between. Those fortunate to find new employment are often downwardly mobile – in other words, they earn less and lose seniority (Newman 1985). To put it another way, this type of restructuring involves what Bluestone and Harrison call ‘occupational skidding’ in which displaced workers find themselves skidding into unemployment, skidding completely out of the labour

force, or skidding down the wage scale. Consequently, in order for families to maintain their economic standing, there must be two or more workers contributing financially (1988:64). New employment opportunities tend to be in the service sector and, since jobs in this sector tend to be insecure and relatively low paying, lack opportunity for mobility and are rarely unionized, low-wage service sector jobs may be more exploitive and oppressive than those in the mechanized fields of production (Braverman 1974).

Leach and Winson argue that the important issue then is not so much the lack of jobs, “but rather the *quality* of jobs, as contractual, contingent labour becomes the dominant way of doing business in many sectors” (2002:15). This is a pertinent issue in the Cape Breton context, where the insertion of call centre jobs into the suffering labour market has lowered the unemployment rate, giving the appearance of improvement in terms of numbers (though the unemployment rate is still higher on the island than the provincial average). While call centre employment has provided some relief from the potentially devastating effects of deindustrialization, these jobs are, in financial terms at the very least, inadequate as a replacement for the manual labour employment traditional to the area.

Katherine Newman argues that the deindustrialization thesis is an important starting point which provides a macro-level framework within which to situate local-level ethnographic studies. The discipline of anthropology, she argues, is in a unique position to explore the variations of concrete impact on class and occupational groups, as communities confront economic hardship with different resources in terms of skills, work histories, education, and financial and cultural supports. The abandonment of company towns is symptomatic of a fundamental transformation in the economic infrastructure,

which has left thousands of poor, working-class and middle-class families unable to control the circumstances of their lives (1994:121).

As technology has improved, capital has become increasingly mobile and has been able to use relatively unskilled labour. By contrast, labour is relatively immobile and is thereby placed at a considerable disadvantage. “This extraordinarily unequal relationship, played out on the backs of millions of people leading their ordinary lives, is what sustains the central place of class in social science analysis and in politics” (Leach and Winson 2002:5).

Class analysis is useful in making sense of deindustrialization and globalization as a political project rather than an inevitable process. This political project - neoliberalism - has had various interrelated dimensions. Perhaps the most visible, and significant for this discussion, is the transformation of regulatory structures of the state at its various levels. One important implication of these shifts for working-class people has been that the increase in contingent work undermines a major mechanism through which workers develop class consciousness: the shared experience of exploitation on the shop floor (Leach and Winson 2002:31).

Workers who work irregular, short shifts, whose co-workers during any particular shift change constantly, and who experience relatively frequent periods with little or no work at all, are unlikely to develop broadly-based forms of worker solidarity. Similarly, traditional working-class communities are fragmented by large-scale economic restructuring that results in the demise of resource extraction and manufacturing industries, and population movements (*Ibid*).

This statement succinctly draws attention to the reality of economic restructuring in which jobs are few and far between, and the ones that do exist, such as those provided by call centres, are designed to stifle worker solidarity. Moreover, it speaks to the

identity shifts that occur as individuals have a harder time building social bonds to co-workers, as the work environment takes on a whole new form (i.e., from the mine, steel mill or fish plant to the cubicle in an office).

Identity, Camaraderie and Social Networks

To conceptualize how the experience of work had changed in communities formerly dependent on one major industry, it is important to conjure an image of what it was like in the past; in the case at hand, work in a coal mine. Miners spent long days deep underground, working in dimly lit, confined areas. There was a constant risk in working with electrified, mobile heavy equipment, as well as hazards of sudden cave-ins, upheavals, flooding, methane gas explosions, and the ubiquitous coal and rock dusts. To accomplish the extraction, haulage, and dumping of coal, production crews had to work as coherent units. There were very few jobs in an underground mine which did not require a cooperative team effort (Vaught & Smith 2003:97). Hence, this physically and emotionally strenuous labour enhanced social bonds.

Jane Parry makes the important observation that the *social organization* of the workplace has a strong effect upon individuals' attitudes towards work, sometimes more than the work performed in these contexts (2003:241). Before the economic restructuring of coal mining communities, an important form of social capital was derived through work experiences that heightened male friendships and enhanced their sense of place within the means of production, reducing the significance of formal occupational status. Working in a high-risk environment brought compensations such as a strong sense of camaraderie. Men had to work together in small interdependent teams characterized by

reciprocal trust. Parry argues that the restricted labour market for coal miners, as well as women's increased entry into paid employment has disrupted the male breadwinner organization of labour, thereby necessitating that a more complex set of social relations be examined to understand what work means for these populations.

In industrial Cape Breton, unions grew with increasing strength for most of the twentieth century before the major manufacture industries were almost entirely wiped out. With the decline of mining and other manual labour employment and the emerging dominance of the service sector, the region has undergone a shift in the expectations of work experiences. The service sector overall does not foster a hospitable environment for worker solidarity. The jobs are often lower paying with fewer benefits and far less opportunity to cultivate worker camaraderie than the jobs they have replaced. Families have had to adapt to these changes as more women enter this labour market, and men migrate west in search of well-paying manual labour jobs. Furthermore, both young and old have been marginalized in relation to the labour market.

Tim Strangleman, Jane Parry and Mike Yarrow have each studied former mining communities in Britain (Strangleman 2001, and Parry 2003) and the United States (Yarrow 1990). Focusing on social networks, identity formation and the survival strategies of individuals, they show how displaced workers and their families make sense of, and respond to, deindustrialization. Reviewing some of their findings helps to situate Cape Breton in terms of commonalities with other coal mining regions with respect to the impacts of deindustrialization. In addition, the related research of other anthropologists (for example, Dunk 1990, Nash 1989 and Newman 1988) complements the discussion to illustrate the broader implications in shifts from working class manual labour jobs to

service sector jobs and unemployment. The themes discussed here emerge again and again in the following chapters in the lived experience of individuals in Sydney Mines and Florence.

Tim Strangleman's research (2001) explores notions of networks, place and identity in the context of the changing nature of community and social ties following mine closures in four former coal mining districts in England and Wales. He identifies categories of networks based on work, place, class and family, considering how they have changed since the collapse of the mining industry, as well as the growth of globalization. The singular character of the coal industry meant that it shaped many aspects of individual and community life. In the region's political history, there has been a very influential, strong and independent trade-union movement. Strangleman draws attention to the importance of examining political linkages to the industry as, even in its absence, it continues to shape the lives of people in the former coal districts. Taking into account that they are powerfully shaped by class background and experience, he focuses his attention on networks based on (former) occupations, where work and industry identities produce and reproduce social ties and connections.

In *The Changing Meaning of Work* (2003), Jane Parry explores how individuals have approached and derived significance from their paid employment and other forms of labour since the restructuring and the disappearance of traditional industries, such as coal mining, in the South Wales Valleys. To highlight qualitatively different ways of approaching and deriving meaning from work she creates two broad categories; 'strategic' and 'survivalist.' She found that individuals took one or the other depending

on their ability to access or utilize various resources in response to labour market restructuring.

Individuals in the 'strategic' category had re-assessed their occupational identities and had undergone a (risky and calculated) process of investing in their labour market futures at the expense of short-term loss. Those taking the strategic approach already had more access and ability to draw on the resources unevenly distributed throughout the population; they could negotiate the closest match between occupational ambitions and experiences. Their work was meaningful in part because of the potential for sociable relationships.

In contrast, the interviewees who took the 'survivalist' approach to work had little occupational flexibility and were less likely to experience work as personally rewarding. Employment was understood as a scarce resource providing financial survival; hence personal satisfaction was sought outside the labour market. Since their socio-economic positions prevented them from gaining occupational recognition, 'survivalists' drew heavily from memories and experiences outside the paid labour market in forming social identity, particularly in their political discourses and communal activities. They stressed the communal compensations of remaining in the village. Some did volunteer work to maintain their communal networks, as workplace-based solidarities were inaccessible due to age, domestic responsibilities, or labour market marginalization. Thus, in the absence of resources necessary to approach paid work strategically, 'survivalists' were often still able to utilize social capital to negotiate other satisfying forms of labour.

By including other forms of labour and looking at their interconnections, Parry gives significance to a broader range of activities (e.g. domestic labour, volunteer work,

community activism), allowing her to ask whether meanings are more easily found in labour outside paid employment. Though my emphasis is on individuals' relationship to paid employment, I am influenced by scholars who call for a more nuanced understanding of the interconnections between paid and non paid work, first in terms of women's paid and non paid work – particularly in places where the major industries have been male dominated (Binkley 2002, Lamphere 1985, Parry 2003) and second to include, as Parry does, different types of work such as volunteering, community activism and childcare. This is particularly useful in looking at a project like the CEIP which draws on the social capital of (usually) unpaid labour. Unpaid labour is valued when it is in public view to the extent that it contributes to the community. Yet, while there is pride in being an active community member, when compared with paid labour, unpaid labour remains denigrated. The CEIP has been designed to temporarily pay some of this labour, but following its termination, when the public sector is unlikely to be able to maintain the majority of these projects, participants will be faced with the dilemma of being a good community member through volunteer work and community activism, or being a 'good' Canadian citizen in the current political environment who takes part in the paid labour market even when it is at the expense of the sustainability of the community, i.e. through migration.

Like Parry, Tim Strangleman also discusses how miners understood their work experience and the way in which this affected their identity formation. He found that many former miners talked as though working in the mines was preordained. Knowledge about the industry was embedded in cultural networks and practices. Typically, fathers had been indifferent to their sons going to work in the pit, while mothers had discouraged

it. However, the lack of alternative jobs and decent pay led them in. The choice to work in the mine was part of a process of obtaining adult male identity. Yet Strangleman points out that place, identity and tradition dictate the form in which this occurs, so as not to overemphasize the commonalities between working-class or even coal mining communities. Occupational identity and community identity, norms and values are produced and reproduced within the context of the workplace and community networks. These networks shape and reflect work, generation and gender identities, both enabling and constraining identities within the context of place (2001:258).

Strangleman argues that class background in the context of a depressed labour market seriously affected displaced workers' ability to access stable well-paid employment. In general, the reality of post-coal work was part-time or short-term contracts with low wages and limited possibilities to advance. Many were left in dead-end jobs, or waiting by the phone. Even those in their late thirties found themselves too old to find employment. Informants provided anecdotal evidence that having a background in mining stigmatized older men in the eyes of potential employers who feared strong union mentalities. Analysis within a historical context allows Strangleman to contrast the networks in the past to those found today. Kin and cross-generational networks have grown out of the region's industrial past and yet have become vital to survival within the context of economic restructuring.

Likewise, in *Voices from the Coalfields: How Miners' Families Understand the Crisis of Coal* (1990), Mike Yarrow's analysis concludes that a history of periodic deprivation has fostered a resilience that has helped many survive the mine closures in Appalachia. However, the weakening of worker solidarity and inability to relate to

workers elsewhere with similar struggles may limit their ability to develop new strategies for dealing with the crisis. Yarrow found that there was less camaraderie as miners with jobs tried to save for their families rather than struggle in solidarity with their neighbours and former co-workers. This chasm was deepened further by growing concerns over long-term welfare recipients.

Yarrow emphasizes the adaptability and resilience of families despite a relative lack of other well-paid employment, which no longer enabled coal miners to be the sole breadwinners. Strategies that tended to bring families together were flea markets or roadside retail operations. However, many miners were forced to leave their families to seek work outside the region. Survival often involved wives working long hours at low wages. Thus, the unit of economic struggle became the family rather than the union that had been unable to stop job losses or provide much assistance to laid-off members. This placed more emphasis on the family to be there in an emergency (1990:46).

In Sydney Mines displaced coal miners have been divided into two groups: those who received severance packages and those who were eligible for early retirement and thus were more likely to be able to leave the labour force. Despite the parallels between the former coal mining communities in Canada, Britain and the United States, Strangleman's emphasis on place and specific local history in identity formation is also important for a scrutiny of the coal mining towns of Sydney Mines and Florence. Cape Breton Island has a cultural and political history that contextualizes the current employment and unemployment experiences in its own specific way and in relation to the rest of Canada (discussed in the following chapters and primarily in chapter three). In order to comprehend how deindustrialization has impacted the lives of Cape Bretoners

and particularly how they understand that process, it is necessary to take into account the larger political atmosphere. The framework within which the people of Sydney Mines can make sense of their predicament is informed by an ideological shift away from the previous Keynesian system, which was responsible for the welfare state, to a neoliberal project which aims to reduce the role of the state and place more emphasis on the individual.

Neoliberalism

Leach and Winson (2002) are helpful in explaining how neoliberalism has taken shape in Canada. They stress that the economic restructuring that has been promoted as natural and inevitable is in fact the result of carefully engineered corporate changes. In Canada, neoliberalism gained force in a crucial turning point in the federal election of 1988, when the victory for the Progressive Conservative Party sealed the deal on free trade with the United States. Promoted by conservative think-tanks, business councils and associations for years, neoliberalism has been avidly promoted by the Federal Liberal Party since the mid 1990s. Leach and Winson show how the proponents of the neoliberal agenda have undertaken extraordinary steps to ensure that neoliberalism would become the hegemonic discourse in society. “The ‘common sense’ understandings that shape any debate about economy and society have been decisively reshaped in Canada today so that discussion of key issues cannot take place without confronting new imperatives such as ‘competitiveness’ and ‘efficiency’.” But the content of these new imperatives is rarely examined, making it critical in shaping public discourse (2002:22).

In his study of white working-class men in northern Ontario, Thomas Dunk is concerned with the ways in which the processes of identity formation through gender, ethnicity, regionalism, certain leisure activities and common-sense thought allow the men in his study to both understand and express their class position and yet also inherently limit that understanding (1990:40). Like Leach and Winson, Dunk argues that the attack on the vestiges of socialism which exist in the welfare state relies upon common sense in the way Bourdieu¹ uses the term. "Leaving the economy to market forces is presented as an eminently commonsensical thing to do, since the law of supply and demand appears perfectly natural. Likewise any sensible person knows that one must live within one's means, hence it is only commonsensical that governments must cut back" (1990:151).

Dunk shows how the preference for common sense as a mode of thought is a class reaction to the unequal way different kinds of knowledge are validated in society. He argues that the working class is open to such ideological presentations because of its own preference for common sense as a mode of thought over theoretical contemplations. However, it is within this context that underlying structures of society, such as the neoliberal agenda gain acceptance rather than critique.

Dale Hathaway (1993) argues that a significant result of capitalist hegemony has been the successful creation of an apparent separation between the political and economic realms. This is seen whenever the public generally accepts that a plant shutdown or major layoff is entirely the result of market forces; that their decisions are arrived at as

¹ Bourdieu used the concept of "doxa" to analyze common sense. Doxa are the unstated assumptions that are unstated precisely because they are perceived as obvious and natural. They contain both orthodox and heterodox opinions; they are the field within which discourses and thought take place. (Dunk 1990:133).

though with only one possible successful outcome. Thus, the issues become classified as economic rather than political, and public debate is therefore suppressed.

Katherine Newman's (1988) study of workers displaced by the closure of the Singer sewing machine plant in Elizabeth, New Jersey, as well as June Nash's (1989) study of displaced General Electric employees in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, suggests that workers accept the ideology behind deindustrialization. In Newman's study workers blamed the abandonment of quality in craftsmanship in favour of quantity of production. White 'ethnics' saw a chasm of values - particularly in terms of taking pride in one's work - between themselves and the newer (non-white) 'ethnics' (1988:194). It was understood as a morality lesson of what happens to a company, a community and a country when traditional values are ignored. In the case of Pittsfield, studied by Nash, workers also criticised themselves. They took it as a given that the company had a primary responsibility to make money, not to benefit workers. In both cases, workers seemed to accept management and elite ideology about the nature of, and their part in, the capitalist system, and thus placed blame on themselves.

Mike Yarrow (1990) distinguishes between two competing interpretations established in order to make sense of the developments that have had such devastating effects on the lives of mining families. The first he labels 'corporate': the opinion put forth by local media, management, coal associations and many politicians. In this discourse, unions are seen as having gotten too strong. They have bargained up wages, benefits and working conditions to the point that coal cannot compete internationally, while protecting lazy, unproductive workers, leading to massive inefficiencies. The solutions are believed to be lower taxes, decreased safety regulations, cutting of labour

costs, increased managerial control and weakening or destroying unions. The counter argument, which he labels 'union,' sees the market as fundamentally altered by forces beyond the miners' control. A corporate plot is at work to destroy domestic unions and reduce labour costs by producing in low-wage, low-tax countries with lax regulations. In this scenario, protectionism is the solution to save American jobs by reducing imports and protecting the living standards of American workers.

Yarrow's findings suggest that miners and their spouses tended to combine elements from both the corporate and union explanations. They felt that the unions had protected unproductive workers, and yet they also saw the leasing to small non-union operators as a corporate plot to destroy domestic unions (1990: 48).

In the neoliberal perspective, the Keynesian welfare state - which protected workers by enforcing health and safety standards, regulating hours and child labour laws, and providing subsistence for the unemployed, elderly and disabled - is seen as having been taken too far. In the Cape Breton context, this includes the belief that the federal and provincial governments kept the steel mill and coal mines open too long, giving people a false sense of security and making them come to expect the government to be responsible for the region's economic wellbeing. The idea that Cape Bretoners grew so dependent on government that they have come to expect 'hand-outs' is in line with the neoliberal reshaping of public views, with one of the main objectives being to reduce the role of the state itself.

The moral argument that the union grew too strong, leading workers to expect too much money and allowing for the potential for laziness, is tempered by local discourse in the former coal mining communities that suggests that the government did not know how

to run the mining industry and thus it is to blame for mismanagement that led to inefficiencies and the eventual closure of the mines.

Unemployment and Dependency

Neoliberal ideology assails transfer payments that could sustain a community in crisis. With the transition to a post-industrial phase of capitalism, all forms of dependency are seen as avoidable and blameworthy. In their *Genealogy of Dependency*, Fraser and Gordon (1994) show how the usage of the word ‘dependency’ during the industrial era recognized some forms of dependency were rooted in relations of subordination; whereas in the post-industrial usage, that recognition is suppressed and focus is placed more intensely on the traits of individuals. In line with this neoliberal ideology is the belief that prolonged receipt of social assistance and Employment Insurance leads to a decline in the desire to find paid employment, which is then passed down to the next generation. Welfare dependency is seen as undermining one’s motivation to support oneself. This is a concern that is growing nationally as well.

However, Krahn and Lowe (1998) argue that long-term unemployment is not due to a weak work ethic and lack of effort, but rather the problem is frequently one of too few stable jobs. They point out that it is easier to blame the poor for their plight than to understand the structural conditions that create poverty (1998:403). Brodie notes that since the mid-1990s, the federal government has promoted a “human resources model that sees joblessness as an individual rather than a social problem” (cited in deRoche 2001:315). From this perspective, the roots of poverty lie in personal deficiencies rather than the structural features of the market system (deRoche 2001:315). In line with this

are recent policy initiatives that reject the notion of welfare as a right and focus instead on the duties attached to receipt of benefits.

As Burman (1988) has shown in his case study of the unemployed in London, Ontario, unemployed individuals suffer from the isolating effects of the absence of a sense of solidarity. In industrial Cape Breton, people repeatedly expressed a feeling of loss in their sense of community, stating that they had little opportunity to talk to and get together. Some who were fortunate enough to find work felt isolated by the individualism fostered in their service sector jobs, particularly when pitted against the strong union history of the manual industrial labour of the past. Furthermore, as the non-work, social events that brought people together become fewer and farther between, the unemployed are that much more isolated from their community.

As for the younger generation of men and women entering the workforce in Cape Breton, the limited number of jobs has both those with college education and those with little education competing for the same entry-level jobs. Hence, those who were near the margins are now even further removed from the labour market, where they once would have had access to manual wage labour in one of the few industries.

Leach and Winson show how restructuring has had an adverse impact on rural youth: the new generation about to enter the workforce. The erosion of summer employment opportunities for youth in small communities is one dimension of this. The lack of summer jobs places them at even greater disadvantage vis-à-vis urban youth when it comes to furthering their education in hope of securing stable work in the future. Given the importance of higher education and training prerequisites for most of the better

jobs in the new economy, further disadvantaging youth at this time is an especially disturbing outcome of restructuring (2002: 176).

The unemployed in Sydney Mines and Florence are stigmatized in local discourse by both the elderly people who worked hard for very little and by those working hard now at contingent jobs that provide low wages and limited security, or who sacrifice time with their families and time at home by participating in labour migration. Just as the miners' union is understood by some as having gotten too strong and asking for too much, despite the fact that it was made up of 'all good men,' the moral argument that places blame on the unemployed for their plight also blames the government for developing a system that is seen as contributing to laziness and a weakened work ethic.

National surveys do not support findings of a declining work ethic, but interestingly, show that the notion that the work ethic of Canadians has weakened continues to be a commonly held belief. In the early 1970s, most Canadians stated that given the choice, they would prefer working to unemployment and that work was a central aspect of their lives. Yet the same respondents doubted the work commitment of others (Krahn and Lowe 1998:404). Similarly in 1994, 68 percent of Canadians felt that "the existence of our social programs make it too easy for people to give up looking for work" (*Ibid*). Fifty-five percent felt that all our social programs would not be necessary if people took more responsibility for themselves and their families, and 63 percent supported cuts to benefits for frequent users of Employment Insurance (*Ibid*). Moreover, the same year 86 percent of Canadians surveyed were in favour of requiring welfare recipients to work in exchange of benefits (Quaid 2002; Evans 1995).

These beliefs have resulted in policy changes such as welfare reform and cuts to EI benefits, as well as an increase in programs designed to encourage people to return to the workforce sooner. However, these beliefs also reflect certain misconceptions about the function of such social programs. Frequent users of Employment Insurance, for example, tend to be seasonal workers. Employers benefit from this system by being able to rehire already trained employees. When EI is cut, the incentive for workers to return to their job the following season is diminished. Furthermore, cuts to this federal program puts more strain on the provincial social assistance programs, as the unemployed are forced to seek support elsewhere (deRoche 2002; Quaid 2002).

Cape Bretoners have long relied on seasonal employment. Nowadays, this tends to take the form of low paying jobs in the service industry, which in turn provide much lower EI benefits than those accumulated from the traditional industrial jobs in the region. Someone working in the tourist industry in Cape Breton for four to six months of the year would likely have difficulty surviving for the remaining months on the percentage allotted by EI. In a place with few job opportunities, people may be more likely to end up on social assistance, or migrate in search of employment.

Workfare, Make-work and the CEIP

In Canada, 'workfare' has taken on a much broader meaning than it originally had, where recipients were required to work in exchange for benefits. It has come to include, as a condition of income support, the requirement that recipients participate in a wide variety of activities designed to increase their employment prospects. These policy initiatives have been controversial and have been criticized for a variety of reasons.

There are often concerns (e.g., from trade unions) that providing cheap labour for employers will displace non-subsidized employees. Furthermore, these programs subsidize workers who would have been employed anyway, or - particularly when the private sector is involved - fill jobs that would have been filled even without a subsidy (Reynolds 1995). Furthermore, workfare leads to “revolving door” employment (i.e., a succession of short-term jobs) (deRoche 2001:326).

The Community Employment Innovation Project resembles the workfare model, but appears to offer a more constructive approach to the employment problems facing individuals on social assistance. By creating public sector short-term projects, it has tried to avoid displacing workers and has created projects that help foster community activities. However, many of these projects resemble the familiar make-work projects in the past, in which community based agencies, including economic development organizations and municipalities, could apply to receive placements to hire workers for specific projects and tasks.

Glynis George, discussing ‘dependency’ and unemployment among women in the Newfoundland context, could just as easily have been talking about Cape Breton when she points out that a dual system of income redistribution in which social assistance is distinguished from Unemployment Insurance² has been blurred by the involvement of provincial and federal governments in short-term job creation over the last several years. Historically, these jobs went to individuals who were deemed ‘less attached’ to a particular employer. They were designed to either ‘top-up’ a low UI payment or to extend the number of weeks one could receive benefits (2000:99-100).

² Unemployment Insurance or UI was redesigned and renamed Employment Insurance in 1996.

It is understandable that the CEIP is conceptualized by several community members as a glorified make-work project. However, its primary purpose as a federally designed experiment was to cut the costs to government of Employment Insurance benefits. In chapter six, dedicated to that subject, it becomes evident that despite many of the projects providing little more than job experience in and of itself and thus, likened to ‘make-work,’ the CEIP differs in that it is designed within a neoliberal framework. The emphasis is placed on downplaying the role of the state; in this case, reducing the role of the Employment Insurance system.

As local anthropologist, Constance deRoche argues, “[w]hat characterizes the new workfare and workfare inspired cognate programs is that they not only target transfer-dependent people, but they redefine their role in the commonweal in accordance with neo-liberal ideology” (2001:313). In this philosophy, public services are seen as wasteful and inefficient and as responsible for creating both massive national debt and dependency in citizens. Thus, state redistributive functions are blamed for having created ‘dependency’ that is seen as both economically and morally dangerous (deRoche 2001:314). Programs that model themselves after workfare – that is, transfer-dependent people working in exchange for benefits – may be costly, and some purported savings accrue to merely shifting welfare costs to other programs and jurisdictions. Yet in neoliberal ideology, welfare reform is seen as a positive good for reasons that transcend short-term savings. In the neoliberal perspective, the commonsensical move for unemployed individuals is to relocate to regions with healthier economic climates. When the agenda of the CEIP is viewed in this context, it becomes apparent that while the project aims to prepare the unemployed for the workforce, it also promotes the political

ideology within which it was created. Thus, CEIP participants are both seen to be working in exchange for their benefits, and it is hoped will be more open to out-migration than other unemployed members of the community.

Resistance to Migration

The importance of a theoretical discussion of migration is twofold. There is the current political push for migration from governments that inform initiatives like the CEIP, but the impact of migration is felt by individuals who leave their communities *and* by those who stay, and this demands further exploration. Paraphrasing John Berger (1984), Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson write: “market forces, ideological conflicts and environmental change now uproot such a number of people that migration can more and more be portrayed as ‘the quintessential experience’ of the age” (1998:5). Consequently, Dawson argues that our aim should be “to capture the ambivalence that is at the heart of most people’s existences, of intense orientation to the here and now, and movement, spatial and temporal transience” (1998:219).

In Cape Breton, as with many other regions with high unemployment, dependency on state programs that alleviate regional disparities are viewed as a hindrance to the abilities of individual workers to adapt to labour market demands in the post-industrial era through retraining and resettlement to growth areas (George 2000). In this line of thinking, despite its social costs, migration is considered a necessary and inevitable process (Blomley 1994). Attempts to foster labour mobility, to inhibit regional dependency and to dismantle national standards are evidenced in changes to Employment Insurance and social assistance that make it more inaccessible and/or inadequate, and are

reflected in media discourse (George 2000:98). However, Nicholas Blomley draws attention to the implication that there is a trade-off between the claims of the local community, experiencing capitalist adjustment, and that of a national community that will forgo growth if this is not allowed to happen. Moreover, he questions a normative vision that opposes this imagined community to social gain, defined in terms of economic efficiency (1994:60).

Cape Bretoners have a tradition of migrating across Canada in search of work, but in the past, in contrast to the contemporary situation of unemployment, people could expect to return to Cape Breton and gain employment if they wished. With the strong attachment to place and local pride in the communities of Cape Breton Island, it is seen by some as an injustice that people must migrate in search of work. Cape Bretoners are in the awkward position of trying to avoid appearing to be asking for 'hand-outs' while trying to demand that they get the economic help they need to develop industries that will allow Cape Bretoners to remain on their island.

Exploring the case of community resistance to the closure of the lead and zinc mining industry in Kimberley, British Columbia, Nicholas Blomley asks whether the residents of single-industry towns have a legitimate right to resist the economic exile that would be their lot if the company were to pull up stakes. Blomley shows that despite the real hardships of life in Canada's single-industry towns, a strong sense of satisfaction can be observed among local residents, suggesting that people often value the places in which (and through which) they live for reasons that cannot be reduced to the rational pursuit of individual advancement (1994:58). Moreover, the costs of out-migration extend beyond

the economic realm into the emotional, as the necessity to move in order to find work may conflict with one's loyalties to extended family or attachment to community.

Yet through this experience of out-migration, networks are drawn out beyond local spatial boundaries, and institutions are established to enable people to try to maintain communal attachments. On the basis of her study of a West Indian community, Karen Fog Olwig (1997) argues that the strong propensity to migrate found among West Indians is counterbalanced by an equally strongly developed notion of attachment to place. In order to understand West Indian life it is therefore necessary to study the role of both fixed places and changeable and ever-expanding global networks of relations. She uses the concept of *cultural sites* to explain institutions which have developed in the interrelationship between global and local ties, such as the institution of sending money back to support family, or leaving family at home while men migrate for labour. Olwig's sensitivity to the institutions that arise from the effort to bring together the dichotomy of migration and attachment to place, allows for the strategies of Cape Bretoners to be explored in a more nuanced way.

The institution of male labour migration is rooted in a cultural tradition in Cape Breton. However, the decision to persist with this tradition is not simply informed by a resistance to permanent migration. It is a decision reached with the awareness that the cost of living can be much higher in an area with higher employment. Other considerations may be included in this as well, such as the costs of childcare if one decides to relocate without extended family. Thus, an unstable labour market can enforce the social networks that tie people to 'place' (Strangleman 2001; Yarrow 1990).

For many of Tim Strangleman's respondents, survival depended on strong ties with local extended family. Childcare by older (often, male) members allowed the younger generation to work. However, the search for work in low and unskilled labour markets, as well as the need for affordable housing, limited their options. Kin-based networks constrained former miners and their families, as well as the range of choices open to them, but became critical for survival and allowed them to benefit from the positive aspects of such close-knit communities. As Strangleman puts it, "Ironically, it is therefore the coping strategies adopted by individual families and communities in order to adapt to changing economic circumstances that also make them even more vulnerable to greater levels of exploitation by capitalism" (2001:262).

The Cape Breton Experience

This chapter has drawn out several issues around economic restructuring that impact in varying ways on the lives of individuals within regions traditionally dependent on one manufacturing or resource-based industry. Many of the forces at work here are beyond the control of displaced workers and their families. The strategies Cape Bretoners use to make sense of and survive in their changing world have been introduced in relation to the commonalities with other regions that have experienced similar processes. In addition, attention has been given to the larger political-economic context in which the people of Cape Breton are situated. In the chapters that follow the methodology chapter (chapter two), the lived experience of displacement, contingent work and unemployment are brought forth through the words of men and women living in Sydney Mines and Florence.

The Research Setting and Methodology

The Setting

Cape Breton Island is situated on the east coast of Canada off the mainland of the province of Nova Scotia. While there is a tradition of coal mining in other parts of the island, Cape Breton County is the region that came to be known as ‘industrial’ Cape Breton due to the steel mill in the small city of Sydney and the coal mines in the surrounding communities. In 1995 Sydney and the surrounding municipalities amalgamated forming the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM).

The ethnic makeup of this region is predominantly White and English-speaking, though there is a French-speaking minority due to the presence of Acadians in other parts of the island. The Mi’kmaq, who populated the area before the French and, later British colonizers arrived during the eighteenth century, make up approximately three percent of the population of Cape Breton county. There are two reserves located within the area encompassed by the CBRM, but they are not part of the amalgamated municipality. Within the former city of Sydney (mainly in the neighbourhood of Whitney Pier) there is a more diverse ethnic population due in part to the recruitment of steelworkers from the Caribbean.

The community of Sydney Mines (the ‘corner’ from which I pursued my research) is located on the north shore of Sydney Harbour. Of the 105,968 people residing in the CBRM, 6982 live in Sydney Mines, according to the 2001 statistics. Florence, the neighbouring town to the northwest, covers approximately 4.73 square kilometres, and has a population of 1,628 (Greenwood *et al.* 2003:186). These two

communities, along with others in the area such as North Sydney, Bras D'Or and Alder Point, are collectively referred to as the "Northside" by residents of the CBRM.³

Arriving in the Field

I set out from my home in Montreal with my little car packed to capacity with everything I thought I might need for three months; headed to the east coast for the first time, in search of my field site. I was accompanied by my large dog, and as it turned out my daughter, although I was unaware I was pregnant with her at the time. I arrived in Sydney on my twenty-seventh birthday, with butterflies in my stomach as the reality sunk in that I had entered a place where I knew no one and had no clear idea of where I would live or how my research would take shape.

Having secured a hotel room for two nights in Sydney, my introduction to the area came in the form of a discussion with the night watchman, who welcomed my inquiries and gave a brief synopsis of the local history as he understood it. The following day, I took a drive through Sydney, past the University College of Cape Breton⁴, to the larger surrounding towns of New Waterford and Glace Bay. I also drove to the north shore of the Sydney Harbour through Sydney Mines and North Sydney.

I was originally drawn to Sydney Mines because of something that had caught my eye while driving into the town. Upon entering the community from the access road off the highway, I had noticed that several houses had big signs on their front lawns protesting the 'strip' mining that threatened to destroy the land around their homes.

³ There are other communities located within the "Northside", but these three are named specifically because they are mentioned in the ethnography

⁴ The name of the school has since been changed to Cape Breton University

Though it is not the direction in which the research for my thesis progressed, this was my initial point of interest.

With not much idea of how to commence research in a small town, given that I had no contacts and very little money, I decided to return to Sydney Mines and ‘hang around.’ I was throwing the ball for my dog in the field next to one of the Catholic churches, when Marie⁵ approached me. She was a pleasant looking woman in her early forties. She had seen the Quebec license plate on my car and was interested to know my travel plans. As it turned out she was looking for a ride to New Glasgow (a few hours back in the direction of Halifax). She invited me over for tea and I followed her car to her home in the nearby town of Florence.

Over tea she told me about her struggles as a single mother on welfare, her attempt to participate in the Community Employment Innovation Project, which she saw as having backfired, and other aspects of her personal life, including the fact that her daughter had returned for the summer from university but had chosen to stay with her aunt, after she and Marie had had an argument over balancing finances. As the conversation progressed and I told more of my story of how I came to be there and what I was looking for, Marie offered to provide room and board. We arranged a weekly fee and I agreed to put a phone line in my name for the duration of my visit.

My incorporation into Marie’s household came with responsibilities. As an honorary family member, I was assigned chores, ran errands and drove Marie and her two boys (ages twelve and fourteen) to their varying activities. Yet it also had immediate social benefits. Marie introduced me to her friends and neighbours. She made phone calls to people she thought might be good for me to speak to; these included retired

⁵ All the names of local women and men are pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

miners, people on both sides of the strip mining debate, a call centre worker and a family member on a Sydney Mines community board.

On the other hand, who I spoke to, particularly in Florence, was subject to Marie's approval. To provide an example, early in my stay I was invited to a bar in North Sydney by a young woman living with her family in the same row of government subsidized housing as Marie. I thought it might be interesting to see the night life and to socialize with an age category closer to my own. When I mentioned to Marie that I was thinking of going out with the neighbour, she very seriously advised against it, saying that if I were seen socializing with her at the particular bar that she wanted to go to, it would ruin my reputation. Moreover, Marie would no longer be comfortable introducing me to some of her more respectable friends. Later that summer, the fact that I had almost gone to this particular bar was used by Marie (more than once) to exemplify how naive she thought I could be.

For the duration of my visit, I would start every day at Marie's house; taking my dog (and usually her puppy) for a walk, reading the Cape Breton Post and organizing my time around interviews and general participant-observation.

Participant Observation

Though I sometimes longed for privacy and quiet in my living quarters, Marie's home provided an invaluable setting in which to carry out participant observation on a daily basis. A few times a week Marie's friend would come over to visit and gossip. Marie's twenty-year-old daughter and her friends would also often come by. This forum

provided regular insight into some of the opinions on local issues and allowed me to ask informal questions.

In the early part of my stay, when neighbours had assumed that I was probably Marie's niece, my dog played an immediate role in facilitating my participant observation. Some of the little girls in the neighbourhood took to the dog right away and would come by to pick him up and include him in their games for hours each day. Locals became familiar with me through the stories from the children, and my presence in the yard with the dog gave people an opening for small-talk. Moreover, walking the dog provided an opportunity for routine that familiarized neighbours with me, and through the course of the summer, as I made more acquaintances I would sometimes sit on their porches for a while and talk casually about life in Cape Breton.

A few times per week I would sit at the coffee shop at the major intersection in Sydney Mines and write field notes until someone joined me. Acquaintances, and sometimes strangers, would sit with me awhile and share their opinions on current issues or talk about the history of Cape Breton. Frequently they would point to people walking by and tell me how that person fit into the community, and perhaps some gossip about them.

I had a few opportunities to attend events and meetings that took place in the community, including a dance with live local music and a 'storytelling' session, where members of Sydney Mines told stories from their youth on topics such as union strikes or events during the Second World War.

The importance of 'place' became clear to me early in my research as a number of people pondered over my last name, which they mistook, and would ask, "Colburn.

...North Sydney?” At many times I was aware of my outsider status despite being a Canadian with a Scottish background. Though I certainly remained an outsider throughout my stay, my identity shifted as I learned that I was pregnant. As this information circulated, people began to relate to me on different levels. I was no longer just (an urban student) “down from away,” I was now preparing for parenthood. This provided a new way for many people to identify with me, which came with a great deal of kind advice, in turn shedding light on some of the local knowledge about mothering, and the opinions on balancing that with paid employment.

The Interviews

Shortly after getting settled in my new home in Florence, a family member in Ontario provided me with a phone number of a woman on the island who would have connections to people involved in community development in various ways within the CBRM. This woman directed me towards community activists, community economic developers, academics and health care workers⁶. This took me to neighbouring areas within the CBRM such as Sydney and New Waterford. With a few of the interviews and conversations that resulted from this initial contact list, came several more contacts for people living in and around Sydney Mines. I pursued as many leads as I could and when themes emerged I sought out relevant contacts.

My initial aim was to talk to a cross-section of the community in terms of age, gender and social status. In addition to the casual conversations and opportunity to ask questions that arises from participant observation, I also conducted several semi-

⁶ My research might have taken in a different direction if I had been able to arrange to meet with members of the Mi'kmaq community, but unfortunately, despite my efforts this could not be arranged.

structured (usually taped) interviews. I interviewed retired miners and their wives; industrial labourers (both retired and still participating in the workforce); a retired police chief; a former mayor; proponents of the co-operative movement; community economic developers; environmental activists; people on either side of the strip mining debate; university professors; social workers; youth; call centre workers; and finally CEIP participants.

I wanted to obtain an oral account of the history and to get a sense of how the meaning and experience of work might have changed with deindustrialization, as well as how this had played out on the identities of individuals and their communities. As the weeks went by and I saw certain themes emerge, such as migration, call centre work and the CEIP, I began to narrow my focus and draw more from these areas, both in the questions I asked and who I chose to interview.

All in all, I interviewed forty-eight people in twenty-six interviews. Twice I interviewed groups of four, but usually an interview with more than one respondent involved a married couple. Thirteen of these interviews took place in and around Sydney Mines and Florence with twenty-nine respondents. While all the interviews contribute to this thesis in some way, the predominant voices throughout this text are those of men and women living on the 'Northside.' Of these twenty-nine, there were fourteen women and fifteen men. They ranged in age from their early twenties to their mid eighties. Seven informants were retired but of these only four had left the paid labour force completely. At least six were supported by Employment Insurance benefits (or had been prior to participation in the CEIP), and ten were on social assistance (or had been prior to participation in the CEIP) at the time of my interviews.

In several cases the interviews focused around work histories, but I also asked questions that I hoped would encourage the interviewee to tell stories about growing up in Cape Breton. Those who were nervous about being interviewed would often become more comfortable as they recalled life as a youth. They would tell stories of childhood memories that related to coal mining, such as the times when the train would take the coal to be shipped elsewhere, and the teenage boys would jump up on the top of the train cars and throw chunks of coal down for younger siblings to collect and bring home to heat their houses. Stories like this one and several others gave me insight into the history and local knowledge of the area.

Generally only one formal taped interview was conducted with each person or group, but my participation in the community allowed me to ask follow-up questions informally of several men and women whom I spoke to on a regular basis. However, the drawback to the timing of my research was that, as it was summer, many people were away or they had family visiting from elsewhere and were not prepared to spare quality time to take part in an interview. Thus, in September, the third month of my research I found myself suddenly very busy conducting interviews with people back from vacation or with more time on their hands, with their children in school or with their families having returned to their homes 'away.' This gave me less time than I would have liked to reflect on my data and return with follow-up questions where applicable. On the other hand, it gave me rapport with community members who had seen me and talked casually with me all summer and thus were more willing to be interviewed when the time came than would have been closer to my arrival.

Narrowing the Focus

One of the difficulties in focusing on a specific topic is in coming to accept that some aspects that affect the communities in question cannot be adequately considered in the analysis undertaken. Those interviews with individuals passionate in their struggles against perceived wrongdoings such as strip mining or the growing drug problem were hard to set aside as the thesis analysis developed.

Most difficult by far, was reducing the discussion of the current pollution problem to little more than a comment. I interviewed members of the environmental group, Sierra Club, some of whose lives have been devastated by the effects of living on the streets surrounding the steel mill, but who have received very little support from the municipal or provincial governments.

Despite the tar ponds' role in giving the region one of the highest rates of cancer and birth defects of anywhere in Canada, in Sydney Mines and Florence (and sometimes even in Sydney) the tar ponds seem to be viewed as a problem of Whitney Pier – a neighbourhood on the southeast side of Sydney, downwind from the former steel mill. Yet even though the Northside was less directly affected, toxins were being incinerated in Point Aconi while I was there. Though discussion and debate were suppressed, the editorial page of the Cape Breton Post regularly had letters objecting to the fumes in the air or to the political rhetoric of how to deal with the 'sludge' problem. As of the spring of 2005, the plans to clean up the sludge involved incineration (i.e., burning chemicals such as PCBs), which has been promoted as safe, but is far from being so.

As I narrowed my focus, I centred on the issues raised in the community – the moral arguments and disapproving remarks, the passing comments and the actions people

felt had really helped the community and the economy. The three areas that emerged repeatedly were out-migration and labour migration, call centre employment and the CEIP.

The impact on individuals and the community of the Community Employment Innovation Project caught my attention first because my host, Marie, had been a participant and had had a very negative experience. Disappointed with the discrepancy between what she had expected when she agreed to participate and the reality of the project, she had quit. I began to notice that the CEIP came up in conversations and there seemed to be quite a range of opinions on the issue.

When the conflicting perspectives of individuals within any community are taken into account, drawing conclusions can be a difficult process. This was particularly the case in trying to imagine analysis of my data on the CEIP. I was inclined to side with the critics who saw the project as promoting a neoliberal agenda in which the individual is to blame for being unemployed, and yet my interviews clearly showed that some people had benefited in important and sometimes intangible ways from this project.

It is my hope that in forming analysis around the events that affect the daily lives of the men and women in Sydney Mines and Florence who took part in this research that I have remained true to their experiences, and that they will still feel that their voices are represented even where their opinions differs from the conclusions I draw. The contested discourses of community members, as they make sense of what has happened on a socio-economic level to their communities and what the future holds, forms the basis of the following chapters.

“All they knew was *Hard Work*”: Life during Coal Mining

There is a rich history on Cape Breton Island that contributes to the strong sense of pride associated with being a Cape Bretoner. This may have been due, in part, to the isolation of the French and British colonial settlers (especially during the long winters) which internalized a feeling of distance from the rest of the country and even the rest of Nova Scotia. Moreover, the history of these mining towns is a story of hardworking men and women who had to organize and fight for some security from the whims of industrial capitalists who looked to cut wages even when the price of coal was on an increase (see MacEwan 1976; and Mellor 1983).

In order to make sense of the various responses to the deindustrialization of the area, some of this history must be examined. There are however, so many aspects of the history and culture on the island and specifically in industrial Cape Breton that cannot be explored here. For example, music is ‘in the blood’ of Cape Bretoners (as it was explained to me by young and old alike). Yet it, and probably many other interesting aspects, unfortunately cannot be given the attention it is due for lack of space. This chapter therefore deals with the social history of Sydney Mines and the surrounding area predominantly as it relates to mining.

I interviewed elderly retired miners and their wives in order to hear a local understanding of the history of the island from the lived perspective of particular members of the community. The men who worked in the mines during the 1940s and 1950s followed in the footsteps of their forefathers. In this chapter my aim is to retell that story, staying as true to those who told it as possible. There are themes that emerge

in this history that unravel in the chapters that follow as changing working conditions affect both notions of the meaning of *hard work* and social interaction and camaraderie among workers.

Industrial Beginnings

From the early days of Cape Breton's European colonization, coal was mined on a small scale by the government or through lease to private individuals. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century there were several larger scale operations. The great industrial expansion of Cape Breton county developed between 1890 and 1900, based first on the coal industry and then on the building of the steel mills at Sydney and Sydney Mines⁷ (MacEwan 1976:5).

Families from Scotland flooded into Cape Breton to start a new life and work in the coal mines. There were so many jobs to be filled that the recruitment extended to several other European countries and later (for Sydney's steel mill) to the Caribbean. In 1894 an American company, the Dominion Coal Company (called DOMCO and later DOSCO when it bought out the steel mill) was granted a one-hundred year lease for the Sydney coalfield.

By the 1930s, Sydney with its steel mill was at the heart of industrial Cape Breton. Across the harbour, in North Sydney - where the fish processing plants later opened - was the port (now the location of the ferry terminal to Newfoundland). To the southeast, the towns of Glace Bay, Dominion and New Waterford were developed around

⁷ The steel mill in Sydney Mines closed in 1920

coal mining, as were several smaller communities on the 'Northside', including Sydney Mines, Florence, Bras D'Or and Point Aconi.

The mining company maintained control over its employees through its ownership of the stores and the houses that the miners depended upon. Everything people could need or want was sold through the company store. The store stocked the highest quality goods, as well as tempting luxury items, thereby keeping people spending more than they could afford (Mellor 1983:x). According to the tour guide – a former miner - at the Miner's Museum in Glace Bay, in those early days, miners went down in the 'pit' before sunrise and came up after dark six days per week. They received \$0.68 per ton of coal, but they were often told they had come up a little short. Moreover, they were responsible for buying all their own supplies, including items not for personal use but needed by the mining company, such as explosive powder. People paid with credit against their pay cheques, and consequently were generally in a state of perpetual debt. Those who found themselves without work and in debt might be evicted, forced to spend the winter with their family living in a tent. Their children often starved and went without enough clothing (*personal communication with tour guide, July 15, 2003*).

The people, who had been recruited with the expectation of a better life, found themselves trapped in a cycle where there was no possibility to move or change their plight. With virtually nothing left to lose, desperate miners began striking. The first ones were blacklisted and had to leave the province to find mining work. Those who remained became the first union leaders.

There were several important strikes through the first quarter of the twentieth century (including the longest and most violent in 1925). Though wage cuts were often a

threat, the strikes would temporarily secure wages and generally saw success in changing working conditions and the living situation for the community as a whole.

To counter the dependence on the company, the first signs of the co-operative movement appeared in Sydney Mines in 1906. A group of twenty-eight miners started the British Canadian Co-operative Society, opening a retail co-op store. Despite opposition from wholesalers and the banking community, the co-operative slowly grew. By 1929 it had grown to include four branch stores, a milk pasteurizing plant, a bakery and a tailor shop (<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/co-op/devearly.htm>: *retrieved on May 18, 2005*).

Co-operatives were popularized by the Antigonish movement (named after the town in Nova Scotia) started in the 1920s by two Catholic priests, Father Jimmy Tompkins and Father Moses Coady, who endeavoured to create adult education programs to make workers more self-sufficient and self-reliant. Through the 1930s and 1940s co-op stores and housing, as well as credit unions, grew up in the mining and fishing communities.

With the Depression of the 1930s, came a wave of mass unemployment. Those still working averaged two shifts per week, making sixty percent less than they had in 1920. They made too little to support one person, let alone a family with an average of five children. The population of Sydney Mines peaked at 10,000 in 1932. Its size contributed to it being the worst hit, with only five percent of its workers fully employed. The town itself was in debt to the bank, and was having trouble keeping its schools open (Mellor 1983:325).

Long after the economy had stabilized, many people experienced dire poverty. During my fieldwork, I heard numerous stories of families going without enough food and clothing. Layoffs and on-the-job accidents, as well as alcoholism, were major contributors to the struggles families faced to make ends meet. A man told me of his grandmother, who, when her children were growing up, had had to share a pair of shoes with her eldest daughter. A woman I knew had grown up receiving one pair of jeans and one shirt every Christmas that would have to last her through the following year. Elderly retired miners talked of having worked double shifts to support their families. Women traditionally provided domestic support in the household, but the fish processing plant in North Sydney also supplied paid employment opportunities for women.

On the other hand, some of the elderly people I talked to pointed out that even though life was so difficult at times in the past, by comparison to the present day, there were lifestyle differences that allowed communities to be more self-sufficient. It was common to have a vegetable garden and a small number of livestock, and people would barter with their neighbours. As one elderly gentleman explained it, “no one had any money, but we didn’t need so much just to *live*.”

‘Hard Work’ vs. ‘Mechanization’

As time went on, the coal mines continued to produce more reliably through the 1940s and 1950s, and though employment was limited in scope in terms of different types of jobs, there were once again plenty of jobs for men in Cape Breton. In my interviews, older people spoke with enthusiasm and nostalgia as they recalled the way life was before the mines closed.

ANGUS: Well, when I was a youngster [during the 1940s and 1950s], Sydney Mines was booming: stores on both sides of the streets, the economy was great because we had a mine right in town, and o'course lots of services around that. You had the CN wharf that employed about eight-hundred people. Schools, hospitals - you name it. It was a bustling community, and you go downtown on any evening or any day and the place would just be up and down the sidewalks loaded with people, eh? And uh, I grew up with that.

(Sept. 25, 2003)

VICTOR: After the war the coal mines were going steady and the steel plant was going steady, and all kinds of jobs around – if you didn't want one job you'd go to another job...Horses and wagons... and Saturday night the town [Sydney Mines] would be full of people and there was a water trough - right near *Robin's Donuts* - that's where the horses used to drink their water on the way back to the barn. The Salvation Army band would play on Saturday night...*people laughing*... it was a ball.

It went that way till prob'ly 'round the '60s when the industry started to go down and people started to migrate, just seemed like the churches were gettin' less people goin' to church, people weren't goin' to school, and that's when the drug culture kinda set in, and everything changed.

(Sept. 24, 2003)

On a smaller scale, Florence too had once bustled like Sydney Mines. No trace remains of the Co-op store that stayed open after the closing of the local mine. A building that now houses a convenience store and a boxing club for boys, at the only four-way intersection in town, was originally a hotel to hold the influx of men arriving to work at the colliery.

A retired couple, Eileen and Dale, living near Marie, had built their house in the early 1950s on what was then Eileen's father's land. Over the years they watched the little town of Florence grow. Later, as the mining industry declined, the government-subsidized housing, where Marie and her neighbours lived, was built to accommodate the rising number of unemployed single parents and the poorest members of the community.

DALE: ...There was a mine *right in* Florence until 1961! But the place was different then, everybody was working in the pit! *Everybody!* Ya know?

But that pit closed, so I got moved out to Sydney Mines to Princess Colliery, and I worked *there* for a number of years, and then I got up at the wash plant - where they wash coal - workin' for the same company, now.

And then a little while after, *that* closed. *Everything closed*. So they opened one up [a wash plant] on Grand road on the way to Glace Bay. So I went over there, and I was there for the last fifteen years of me workin' career. I worked for the same company for thirty-four years...

EILEEN: Well it changed hands, you know - the company.

DALE: Yeah, it was the Union Coal Company, but it was mostly Devco.

EILEEN: Yeah, it was the same I guess - always the government.

In actuality, the government prior to the creation of Devco did not own the company. Eileen's interpretation is interesting though, as perhaps it speaks to the absentee ownership of various industrial capitalists throughout the history of mining in the area, a situation that limited the control workers had over production. Or perhaps her understanding comes from the awareness of the often heavy involvement of government, as subsidies were provided to bail out failures or for technological upgrades.

By the 1960s, there were clear indications of a decline; fewer open mines and less coal being produced. In its place were the growing industries of oil and natural gas. This decline was felt in Sydney Mines despite the collieries themselves remaining open longer than several of those on the other side of the harbour. Within the union, many miners from Glace Bay and New Waterford had seniority. Consequently, these (now commuting) miners displaced those previously working in the Sydney Mines area.

VICTOR: What happened was there were three or four mines in Glace Bay and let's say three or four mines in New Waterford, and once say, about seven or eight mines closed, you had too many miners for the mines so seniority people come over here to Prince Mine, and that didn't go over too good.

Mining was different at this time, Jenny - it was all mechanized, and technology moved in and it just wasn't the same as the pick and shovel days when I was there.

After the navy, when I went in the coal mine there was senior men there that didn't have to retire when they were sixty-five, they were seventy and they were workin' hard...All their lives they worked hard for their family.

JENNY: Did it change the work ethic, do you think, to have things become more mechanized?

VICTOR: Oh, oh! Big Time! Changed the work ethic one hundred percent. You know 'cause those early miners like myself, worked hard for nine dollars a day, worked hard...and it ended up they were comin' home with \$600 bonuses, \$1200 pay cheques, \$1500 pay cheques prob'ly for less work in a year than what a miner [in the past] did in a month – that's just my opinion on it. Not to say...they were more educated on it, with technology – all the people in my day - and people before - all they knew was *hard work*, you know?

(Sept. 24, 2003)

EILEEN: Years ago everythin' was done by hand so naturally it took so long but then when technology come in to cut the coal – oh, it just went so fast!

DALE: And then newer technology come in down the Prince mine – there wasn't even a shovel in *that* place. Everything was done by machine.

EILEEN: The days of the pick and shovel were gone.

DALE: Gone forever.

JENNY: Was there a difference in the type of workers? Did the work ethic change when they didn't work as much with their hands?

DALE: Hmm I really don't know, but you know what? I worked down at this pit where you worked harder [than some of the more technologically advanced mines] and I liked it better than any place I ever worked, because it was a beautiful bunch of men. Everybody helped each other [...] but once you get up on the surface it's a different thing all together.

(Sept. 9, 2003)

John deRoche (1987) has documented the resistance to mechanization from miners in the first half of the twentieth century. He suggests that each generation of miners believed their system was best and saw technological changes as impeding camaraderie and pride in craftsmanship for the next generation of miners. However, he also shows the logic in the resistance to mechanization from the perspective of workers

who had a practical knowledge of how to mine coal. Mechanization threatened to eliminate the need for so many workers as technological advances increased the speed and efficiency of production. Thus, mechanization at times has eluded the workers' ability to regulate output. Within the context of capitalist social relations, technological change, then, is inherently a process of politics (deRoche 1987:121). Among my interviewees the belief that the technological advances were a detriment to miners also included a moral commentary about the union's demands for high wages even as the job became safer and seemingly easier.

Most of Jimmy's working life was spent mining coal from 1943 until 1972, when a back injury forced him into early retirement.

JIMMY: ...There was no glory in it – I'm tellin' you! You were surrounded by rats in the pit...– great big fellas. So we suffered the consequences, you know what I mean? But um, I didn't mind the mine – not the one down here, [...] in Florence – that's somethin' to work in because you were that cold into it and the air surface was just wonderful, you know what I mean? But this one in Sydney Mines it had hardly any air. [...] It was electrical, and it was that warm, you could hardly breathe in it, ya know? ...I had thirteen years in there. I used to say to myself – I'd be settin' down in the mine – I used to say 'God will I ever get out of here alive?' That's a fact!

Turning to his wife Neila, I asked her how she felt about her husband having to 'go down in the mine'.

NEILA: Well I wasn't too pleased, I wasn't! You know, I was frightened all the time [...] It was scary, you know. I would just worry about him getting home from work, and he'd tell me stories, ya know... [She trails off shaking her head].

The older retired miners remembered not only the hard long days in the mine, but the dangerous working conditions. Jimmy vividly remembers the dangers of the job,

prior to the technical advances of the 1970s and 1980s. I was not spared the unpleasant and sometimes graphic details, as he recalled three separate instances in which he saw another miner die in front of him. One of his older brothers died in a mine and Jimmy had stories of some 'close calls' himself.

NEILA: It was a hard life.

JENNY: Did you see working conditions change from the time you went in – from the time you started to when you left?

NEILA: Oh, yes!

JIMMY: Oh, everything was mechanized – the mine went mechanized. What you call mechanized was everything was automatic, you know what I mean? [...]Where I used to work, I used to haul – what they call haulin' the coal ...and that's the way the system was when I left. Everything changed since I been in it. But this here, you hadda work fer your money. Down here, they didn't work fer their money, because it's mechanized! Everything was mechanized! The machinery was all mechanized. They had a belt system [he draws me a picture of the belt running with coal on top, moving towards the top and falling off the conveyor belt at the mine's surface]...I never witnessed any of this, but this here mine down here, they call uh, Prince Mine, that's where I thought I'd be goin' but I didn't. And that's how they got the coal outta there – all by belt system...and they were down about three or four miles underground – that's under the water too!

When I hadda work, I hadda use the shovel or somethin' like that. I really had to work for *my* money! But these fellas didn't and they were collecting over a hun'ed thirty-five dollars a day. And that's the difference what it was in thirty years!

(Aug. 20, 2003)

The common theme in the telling of the history of Cape Breton, whether in interviews or casual conversations, was *hard work*. Tied to this was a sense of pride at having succeeded in raising families in Cape Breton despite such difficult conditions. My interview questions regarding shifts in work ethic as mining changed developed from comments like Jimmy's above, and others. While there is no doubt that working conditions and pay improved greatly, it is not my intention to suggest that the miners

working in the 1980s and 1990s did less work or cared less about their jobs. The opinion that miners did not have to work hard after the technological advancements is not one that was shared by all, and only once did I hear someone under fifty years of age take this perspective (in my presence). This opinion is important here, not because of whether or not it is right, but because it reflects a contested discourse. Beliefs varied about how hard miners had had to work once mining had advanced technologically and likewise, about what had happened to the community's attitudes towards work since the deindustrialization of the area (discussed in depth in chapter six). Within the communities of Sydney Mines and Florence, and the area in general, individuals today express strong opinions on whether people really *want* to work or whether the unemployed are to blame for their plight.

Devco and the End of Underground Mining

Recognizing that the coal mines were becoming too costly to maintain, Dosco (the company which had taken over both the coal mines and the steel mill in 1930) estimated in 1965 that the Sydney area coal mines had only another fifteen years of life. Nor would it be profitable to open any new mines (Donald 1966:33). Taking over the business for almost \$12 million, the federal government established the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco) in 1967 to phase out the coal mines and find new employment opportunities. Taking control of the main assets - four collieries and the associated activities - Devco continued with the assumption that the mines would not operate beyond 1981, however it did open one new mine, Lingan, southeast of Sydney.

The oil crisis of the 1970s gave a brief advantage to the coal industry again, and plans to phase out the industry were put aside. Nevertheless, in 1979 the Sydney coalfields were only producing six percent of the national total, compared with half a century earlier when they had contributed nearly half of Canada's coal. Having been designed to pay for itself, Devco was never able to deliver, and as the years went by the federal government pumped approximately \$1.6 billion into Devco's coal division.

WILL [*a community economic developer*]: ...when the private industrial capitalists moved out of Cape Breton and left us kind of high and dry, uh, there are some who feel that maybe that was the time at which we should have 'let the grandfather die', but in fact the two levels of government – first the federal for the coal mines [...] and shortly there after the steel company went down and the provincial government took over which was Sysco – what you had, interestingly, was two more absentee owners; one in Ottawa and one in Halifax.[...]

There was kind of a power shift almost in that uh, there were great deals of decision making authority, and power became vested in government and people looked then to government for solutions. And most of the time they just threw money at it, which was always translated that "as long as I'm working, I don't care what they do - as long as *I* have a job, and my *son* has a job".

(Aug. 18, 2003)

In January 1999, Devco announced its plans to close the remaining mines, and privatize Prince Mine. With thousands laid-off already and the potential loss of the last eleven-hundred jobs or so, miners staged strikes and protests, which were met by more layoffs and faster closures, as well as the concern that buyers would be reluctant to purchase Prince Mine after such disruptions from workers.

VICTOR: Unions have more strength today, [...] and in my opinion that's what happened to the coal mines – the wages - they got to be beyond what they were puttin' into the work ethic, and makin' big wages for the work – and maybe that's the change of life, I dunno, but they were makin' big money for less work – more pay for less work. It got to be that way over the years.

JENNY: So do you think that that played a big part in ending the coal...?

VICTOR: Yes! Yes I do. Yes. I think it did – now, *all good men*, you know, but if someone's gonna go an' offer you that big bonus, big money – you'll take it.

JENNY: Sure, especially if everyone else is.

VICTOR: Absolutely, and what happened with everything is prices started to go up and... there's people that you'd get there, coal mining, and they're making 75,000 dollars, 60,000, whatever.

(Sept. 24, 2003)

Angus, like many men in the area, worked for several years at the (now closed) Heavy Water Plant in Glace Bay, before being hired by Devco as a maintenance planner. Though technically not at the level of management, Angus expects that the miners viewed him as such.

ANGUS: I used to have to go underground and estimate what it would take to, you know uh,... project how long it was gonna take to finish mining certain areas based on the rate of uh, production they were gettin' everyday...

JENNY: So could you see ahead of time the closure of the mines?

ANGUS: Well yeah, I wouldn't say before other people because it was known, you know, quite widely known that mines only have a certain life expectancy, there's only so much recoverable coal there [...] and these mines here when they're submarine mines, they go out under the ocean, and the farther out you go the more expensive it is to recover that coal, and the cost per ton gets way outta scale.

(Sept. 25, 2003)

In addition to mining reserves becoming less profitable, mine disasters injured and killed miners and closed mines, including more than one fatal roof collapse at Phalen Mine.

ANGUS: ...[I]t woulda been prob'ly going strong except fer what happened at Phalen, the Prince mine had lots of coal out there as well but the thing is you've got to get the cost per ton down because [...] you've gotta cut down on yer labour cost and you gotta get efficient and there was a lot of resistance to a lot of things that we were – that management was tryin' to do, in terms of efficiencies, and unions. ...I don't mean to speak about unions in a bad way, but sometimes you have ta, ya know, bite the bullet and realize that if you don't get efficient there'll be *nothin'* there.

... Now there's mistakes on both sides as far as I'm concerned. I think in the end, they coulda kept things going but – the way I sum it up in my own personal thought is that uh, as time went on – there's a different generation of miners now, more apt to uh – more radical. There has been a radical generation of miners, although a lot of good people...

JENNY: The *later* miners were more radical?

ANGUS: Well, yes and no, the older miners were kinda radical but, I don't know if that's the right word to use, but it seems to me that between management and the mine – like the miners themselves – it seems that they lost the *collective wisdom* of how the mines roll efficiently, that used to be. ...[L]ike the miners had a respect for management and vice versa. They worked closely together, and I know it was necessary to get unions 'cause there was a lot of things not being done the way they should be done safety-wise [...] but it just seemed to me as time went on, down that road, ya know, when things shoulda been gettin' better for everybody, seems like there was more mistakes bein' made to make it worse for everybody. And that's on both sides of the table – I wrap that up when I say the 'collective wisdom' of how to do it [...]. There's always a suspicion of management, and rightly so, cause they've been treated like dogs over the years, if you go back to any of the things that have been written about the early days of mining it's scary. No wonder they're bitter, still to the very end.

...I was transferred over to Prince Mine, in Point Aconi within the maintenance-planning department over there as a supervisor, until uh, Langan Mine closed. And I think that was in '92, if I'm not mistaken. And when that closed, o' course, it caused a ripple effect – all the people that were laid off from there. You know how the union and seniority thing all goes, they all start bumpin' around to different places, right?

And um at that time I was given a choice of either uh, I could take a severance package and go, or I could uh stay on and work in the security department, which I decided to do [until 1996]. Then I got called back, outta that department to work at Phalen, 'cause they were doing the revitalization of that mine [...]. So that pretty well kept me busy [...] until uh they started cutting back. And in '99, because I was a junior person out there in the department I was in, [...] I got caught in it in the first cutbacks, and that finished me at Phalen. So I took my retirement in '99.

Ultimately, Prince Mine (having found no buyer) was the last to close in November, 2001. During my fieldwork almost two years later, miners and their families were still waiting for money they believed was owed to them by Devco.

JIMMY: See we're owed money from the company, ok. There's \$35 million. I just got this letter today [from the union], stating that it's in court now. The money's there – it shouldn'ta went to court anyway. It's the miners' money – give it to them! But the government gotta get their share. There's no justice! It's all for the rich and nothin' for the poor.

As of October 2004, forty million dollars of surplus pension funds was awarded to approximately six-thousand miners and their widows. At this time it remains to be seen how that money will be divided.

Devco's original purpose to set up well paying, high-tech jobs was never fulfilled, and though miners were offered retraining programs (mostly through Employment Insurance) many ended up unemployed, with two-year severance packages. This was met with anger and frustration not only due to job losses, but because some individuals would qualify for early retirement at fifty-five regardless of how few years they may have been employed as a miner while others with perhaps thirty years experience were only fifty years old and therefore did not qualify for retirement benefit.

ANGUS: I brought my pension plan with me from Atomic Energy and transferred it over to Devco and I just kept paying on it, and when I retired, *I had always paid into it.*

...A lot of situations at Devco, fellas got a pension that they never had to pay a cent into, because of the fact that they were closin' the mines, ya know, ahead of time. And other fellas, were only like a week away or so and they didn't qualify for pension. There's some real horror stories!

A call centre worker told me one such 'horror story' of her father who worked as a miner with Devco for twenty-five years, only to find himself six weeks shy of the cut-off age for retirement.

ANN: My dad's union - there was always something goin' on that always brought the miners and everybody – like dad always said: if you ticked off one miner –

“run!” ‘Cause you got the whole group after ya. And that’s the way it was [...] one big community. If something was happening to you, it was happening to everybody else.

They went on strike one year when I was maybe nine or ten – it was a long strike – lasted almost a year or somethin’, and we were getting’ ready to go back to school and my parents just didn’t have cash to get us back and the union all come out and they got us scribblers and backpacks and everything we needed. (We ate more Kraft Dinner that year than I care to remember). But they set up food banks for everybody because the money just wasn’t comin’ in. But I mean, like, now it’s not around here anymore. ... You don’t get that sense anymore which is weird ‘cause you’ve always had that around here. If somethin’ happened to yer neighbour, it was happenin’ to you.

JENNY: Do you think that’s because people aren’t all working together, or... what do you think happened?

ANN: I think it’s that. But I think there mighta been a little bit of animosity in there too because some men were able to get the pension and some guys weren’t, some guys were short on it, and it was kinda like “how come he got it and I didn’t? And I worked my butt off and he sat over in the corner and did nothin’.”

JENNY: So it divided people?

ANN: Yeah, exactly, and then what happened is a lot of them moved away. They’re just not here anymore, unfortunately.

With the end of the mining and steel industries, many families have left the island in search of a livelihood. However, many families have also developed strategies for remaining on the island. The most common one is for men to go to Alberta to work in the oil industry (and other manual labour jobs) for usually three to six months per year. By working part of the year and collecting Employment Insurance for the remainder, men can provide for their families, while maximizing the time they can remain at home with them. The next chapter looks at the issue of migration and strategies for keeping Cape Breton as home base.

Working ‘Away’: Out-Migration and Seasonal Employment

The majority of the men and women I interviewed over the course of my fieldwork have spent most of their lives on the ‘Northside’ of Sydney. They have lived through the economic booms and busts of the coal industry and ultimately its closure. They have watched their friends and neighbours and often their own children, leave in search of work, but for various reasons they have chosen to remain in their communities on the island.

Some dream of seeing other places and possibly settling down somewhere else, but familial commitments keep them here. Marie once said she would love to go to Fort McMurray, Alberta, one day. So many men from ‘down east’ went out there each year to work for a few months, and she had heard Alberta was very beautiful. She went on to tell me how she had once spent a few days in Ottawa and thought that when her kids were grown, she would like to move there.

Other people I talked to, both young and old, said they would never dream of leaving. I sometimes heard comments like “I’ve *already* lived away, I wouldn’t do it again”. Yet, each year the population of Cape Breton dwindles and ages, as young people move away to start families in other parts of the country, most notably Calgary. However, many people are dedicated to remaining on the island, particularly those who have already established families and own homes. Many do not want to start all over in another place, but need to find a way to support themselves until retirement. For those, the oil industry in Alberta provides an opportunity for men to work for several months while their partners and children maintain a home in Cape Breton. Despite the high costs

to travel back and forth from Cape Breton Island to Alberta, it is often the most logical decision from an economic standpoint, compared to the costs of relocating and renting or buying a home in most other places where work is available in Canada. Furthermore it allows families to maintain their social and familial networks.

KRISTY (twenty-four and looking for work): A lot of people that live around here *have* to move away. Like, there's people that worked in coal mines and whatever – like they worked *all* their life there and now like, people with families and that, have to pick up and leave for a couple of months to get enough stamps⁸ for the pogey⁹, and then come back and live on Unemployment [EI] and go away again. That's just *normal* around here and it shouldn't be that way.

(Sept. 12, 2003)

JIMMY (retired miner in his eighties): They're goin' out west and they're out there makin' a big amount of money and they go out for six months, three months. They're back and forth trying to get out there – look at the money they gotta spend to get from A to B!

I was talkin' to a young fella down here by my son's place – that's what he's doin' – goin' back and forth, back and forth, ya know? "Geez, I gotta do it" he said. And it's hard on a life ya know, I mean when you're away from your family like that and you gotta travel back and forth to make a living – holy gee whiz, it's terrible!

(Aug. 20, 2003)

Living in Cape Breton, Working in Fort McMurray

Raylene had found it very difficult to adjust to life without her husband, John, during the periods he had worked in Fort McMurray in the last few years. Unemployed and living in a rural area, she found herself drinking excessively. This year however, in seeking help for her drinking, she had developed more of a support network that would provide some opportunity for socializing if her husband headed out west again.

⁸ "Stamps" are insurable hours of work needed to get Employment Insurance.

⁹ "Pogey" is the local term for Employment Insurance benefits (EI). According to the *Encarta World English Dictionary*, in Canada the slang term refers to EI or any other welfare benefit provided by a government for the unemployed. While pogey may be used as a synonym for welfare in other places, in Cape Breton it is strictly used for EI.

Raylene walked her dogs on the same little rocky beach where I would sit and write field notes while my dog played in the water (until the nearby strip mine expanded, destroying the path to the beach). Raylene is in her early fifties with two grown children still living in the area. She is a kind-hearted, devout Christian who left school after only fifth grade and worked in the fish processing plant in North Sydney for over two decades before a back injury forced her to quit. In a place where many dogs are either left chained in the yard, day and night, or left outside to roam wild, Raylene and I found a common bond in our dedication to our pets. We would have long talks as we walked, or while picking blueberries.

Despite being quite vocal about her opinions on the local economy in casual conversations, my questions were often met with comments like “you should talk to my husband about that”, or “he’s the one that knows about that stuff”. I sat with John one afternoon in their kitchen, while Raylene busied herself making tea and muffins.

JOHN: There used to be a bit a work here but in the last while there hasn’t been much. [...] Raylene, she used to work in a fish plant, and then I used to work in construction. [...] We used to do a little cod fishing. Had a couple years of work in Port Hawkesbury, then at the power plant – year and half or so, and the rock quarry – was there for about four or five years.

JENNY: Is that still open?

JOHN: No

RAYLENE: No. Gone like everything else.

JOHN: Well there’s strip mining I guess. From year to year there’s a little bitta construction. The last three years I’ve been goin’ out ta Fort McMurray [to do construction] over in those gas plants in the tar sands.

JENNY: ...Seems like so many people have gone out there.

RAYLENE: They have to. Here they’ve got nothin’!

JOHN: Almost everybody I know – they work out there for so long and then they got enough for UI¹⁰.

...I got a lotta buddies that go up ta Guelph, Ontario – they're working there, right? They don't wanna go out west. There's less hours there, but it's closer, ya know? But I got a funny feelin' it's all gonna hit the wall together eh? Out west and Ontario, eh?

RAYLENE: Yeah, it will! That won't last.

JOHN: Yeah well, there's a lot more work out there than here though. ...[T]his year I don't know, I'll probably have to go out there again.

JENNY: So are you guaranteed a job out there?

JOHN: You register when you get out there with the labourers' union and you wait for your number to get low, and then you know what jobs there are and you bid on a job. But that's only out west, Ontario you can't just call in to get a job.

...[B]ut right now I tell ya, I wouldn't rush at goin' out there. There's like 25-hun'erd on a labourers' union list [...]. And ya gotta git yer number down somewhere around five or six or seven hun'erd to get a half decent job. As I say there's lots on the list right now. And my brother down here, he's on the list out there and he's 13-hun'erd and my other brother he works on [...] those ships that haul cargo in Ontario. He's been doin' that since ten years now.

JENNY: How long do you stay?

JOHN: Three or four months. [...] Well, one year I was out there six months eh?

RAYLENE: Yeah, tell me about it [she shakes her head]

JENNY (to Raylene): And you were here by yourself all that time?

RAYLENE: Yeah. It was hard.

JOHN: Well like I say, she got the dogs and lots to do but...

Raylene has told me that if she did not have the dogs she would pack up and go with John out west. They have moved around together in the past. In 1982 they lived in

¹⁰ Unemployment Insurance (UI) was redesigned in 1996 and renamed Employment Insurance (EI), thus it is still popularly referred to as UI

Calgary, and they spent three years in Halifax. John worked in construction and Raylene was a waitress.

JOHN: Out in Halifax there was a lotta work there too – and there still might be some, but I's makin' more out west so we decided to go there. 'Cause if I go upta Halifax to stay there – it'll cost me just as much as if I go out there right? 'Cause ya know, you gotta pay for yer room and everythin' else and then you usually work a lot more hours out west. 'Cause around those gas plants eh, they got a lotta money ta waste eh?

JENNY: Do they pay for your accommodations out there?

JOHN: Yap. They got their own camp and they provide everything, transportation to the job site.

Thinking of a comment someone else had made to me, that there were so many Cape Bretoners out west that they formed their own clique in the camps, I asked John:

So when you're out there do you have sort of a small Cape Breton community out there too?

JOHN: No, it depends. There's usually a lot of guys from down here, but there's a lot from B.C. too, and Saskatchewan too. I don't know the place but I think it's not in very good shape from what I hear.

JENNY: What's it like going out west and leaving your family back at home? ...is that hard on you ... or do you just sort of adapt to it quickly, or...?

RAYLENE: Yeah it's hard.

JOHN: Well as I say you don't really have a whole lotta choice, so you gotta coupla choices eh? You can either do it or you can go up to North Sydney on welfare, eh?¹¹ [He laughs].

RAYLENE: And after how hard we work why would we wanna go on welfare, eh?

JOHN: And it's not every year you have to go, like a lotta years I do find work in this area.

¹¹ The social assistance office for the 'Northside' is located in North Sydney.

...It wouldn't make any sense to try to buy a house anywhere else 'cause what you get for a house here would only be a down-payment there. Cause they're a lot more everywhere else and rent's a lot higher right?

RAYLENE: And you're not guaranteed the work is always gonna be there.

JOHN: So we keep goin' with what we got. That's about it.

RAYLENE: That's about all we can do.

(Aug. 21, 2003)

Migration is not new to Cape Breton. At the coffee shop and in other social gatherings, older men would tell stories of leaving home as young men and hitchhiking to Toronto, some making a way for themselves for years before returning, others finding themselves unemployed and homeless.

"Cape Bretoners have always gone away to work. That was our choice from working in the mines," I was told matter-of-factly when I asked a retired carpenter and landlord how he feels about three of his four grown children living in other parts of the country.

From a mining family, Sandy explained how miners used to have to kneel in water to shovel the coal, hence arthritis was a common ailment. In his father's case, his knees grew so bad he had to retire in his mid-forties. The oldest of nine surviving children, Sandy felt responsible to support his family and so left school at age fifteen to make a living. He worked away for several years, including eight months of each of the first four years of his marriage. It was not Sandy's first choice to work away. He had actually been hired immediately upon applying at Franklin Colliery.

SANDY: When I went home and proudly told my father, he said 'No!' He didn't want me workin' in a mine. I's angry an' I said 'well, I'll have to go away then', an' he said he don't care where I go as long as I don't go down in the mine.

In 1956, two months shy of his sixteenth birthday, Sandy headed to Ontario with a fake birth certificate claiming he would be turning eighteen. He got a job on the 'lake boats'; shipping in Ontario.

SANDY: At that time all training was provided on the job. Now you have to go to school to *learn to tie knots*! Costs 25 hun'erd dollars or something! [...] People from here and Newfoundland also, are reliable workers. People from Ontario would get one pay check and leave so they liked havin' fellas from the east coast.

(Aug. 23, 2003)

Many men began, like Sandy, by working away until they had settled into family life. With the fluctuations in the coal industry, it was not unusual for a miner to take a few years to work on the boats and in other industries in Ontario. The obvious difference from today is that it involved a *choice* to work in one place or another. One need only compare the statistics from the last Census, in 2001 to the previous one in 1996 to see how the population is diminishing. According to Statistics Canada, the population as of 2001 of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality was 105,968, down from 114,733 in 1996; a drop of 7.6 percent (Statistics Canada 2003).

Another change is that while it is not unusual for young people to move temporarily to major urban centres for educational and job opportunities, there is little evidence of most returning home afterwards, according to a report put together in February 2004 for the CBRM city council. This report forecasted population trends on the island to the year 2021, and estimated migration rates between 1996 and 2001 (Heseltine 2004). The report's figures showed net out-migration from the CBRM in nearly every age and sex category, but the most striking was the level of out-migration among young adults (age twenty to twenty-nine). It suggests that as many as one-third to one-half in this group leave the region. While it is normal for areas in Nova Scotia

outside Halifax to lose people in their twenties to the provincial capital, the level of out-migration from Cape Breton is considerable (*Ibid*).

Youth and Out-Migration

As university graduates migrate to mainland Canada in search of work there is growing local discussion of Cape Breton “losing its best and brightest”. The concern, as it was explained to me, is that Cape Breton will have difficulty developing unless young people have an incentive to stay. Yet with limited potential for employment, most have little choice. The individuals in their early twenties that I spoke with, attending the University College of Cape Breton, seemed to have the same range of opinions about going ‘away’ as anyone in any other age category. I spoke to four women and two men (all between twenty and twenty-two years old) in university about their plans and expectations for their future. Each expected to live ‘away’ for a while, and generally expressed a desire for adventure. However, some hoped to raise families on the island, while others expected to make a living elsewhere, perhaps retuning after retirement.

One woman, running a youth outreach program in an impoverished area of Sydney Mines, strongly objected to the rhetoric of “losing the best and brightest”. She pointed out that it does nothing good for the morale of the youth who choose to remain. The rhetoric implies that those who want to succeed in life must leave, but it can also be used to reinforce the perception of laziness and the lack of initiative of those who stay on the island, as concerns over generational poverty and dependency persist (discussed in depth in chapter six).

In two group interviews, I spoke with three men and three women in their twenties at the community centre. Five of them had already lived in other parts of the country. The young people at this community centre were considered ‘youth at risk’. In other words, they were seen as being more likely than most to experience problems such as homelessness, drug addiction, or incarceration. Through the outreach program, they were participating in a project to help them gain employment skills and self esteem. The young men and women here had similar views to the university students and anyone else I spoke to. There was general consensus that it was unfortunate that people were forced to move away in search of work, but most felt they would like to move for a while.

Leanne, a twenty-six year old married woman with two small children, had lived in Edmonton for two years. She estimated that there were about sixty people living there who had migrated from Sydney Mines. After having to quit her housecleaning job when she lost her babysitter, she had decided that she missed Cape Breton enough to return. She would like to go back to Alberta when both her children are old enough to go to school.

Billy, twenty-two, moved to Fort McMurray but was only there three months before he decided to return to take care of his ailing mother. Now he would like to return but cannot afford to get back there.

Jessica, a twenty-eight year old single mother of three who lived in Guelph, Ontario for six months, said “I find a lot of young people – they don’t really like this place. They can’t wait to get out of here. But I don’t look at it like that. I *was* away, and I *missed* home.” I heard comments like Jessica’s many times, in which “away” was

conceived of as a homogeneous place where people were not as friendly and there were little or no family ties.

Cape Breton's Aging Population

While younger families are moving out west to support themselves, one of the concerns is that elderly people no longer have the support they once had from family. As one retired man put it “the big loss to the community is that the young people leavin’ can’t look after their own”.

Eileen and Dale have two sons and two daughters, all living ‘away’. Eileen, who has lived in Florence all her life, described to me how each child left. The first born, a daughter, went away for school in Halifax, later moving to Malaysia for her husband’s job.

The oldest son graduated from high school and, unable to get into vocational college right away, went to work in Calgary where he met a woman from New Waterford. They came back and he got a job blasting (at the now closed rock quarry), but soon after he returned to Calgary. His fiancé left her job and followed him “‘cause she knew the money was in oil”. However, they moved to Halifax when his son was ready to go to school.

The youngest daughter did not want to go to university. “She just *had* to get to Calgary.” She agreed to return after a year to take a course, but came back on vacation and said “‘you’d just be wastin’ your money.’ ...[S]o she went back – she was with the gas company – she’s still with the gas company”.

I asked them how they felt about their children having moved away:

EILEEN: It's hard, like I go to Calgary usually twice every year and see them, and like, we're goin' out for Thanksgiving – the two of us – Dale come out with me two years ago, but...

DALE: I don't – I don't like going too much.

EILEEN: He doesn't like goin'.

DALE: I don't like travelin'. I like being around the home better.

EILEEN: He's a homebody.

Their youngest son worked seasonally in Alberta for four years, driving back and forth:

EILEEN: He would say “mom, I'm not like the rest of them, I'm not goin' to Calgary.” ...[A]nd then his brother-in-law in Calgary – our daughter's husband – he owned this company called ----- and he called him and asked if he'd go out and work for him. And Tim called one day and he said “um mom I'm goin' out to Calgary” and my first answer was “and what about me?” because he was the *last* one home, you know? And I figured the *last* one is gonna leave.

He had an apartment then in Sydney Mines, and he came here one day and had supper and I said some awful things. So I called him up and you know, I said ‘Tim, that was an awful thing to say to you but if you wanna go to Calgary I'm behind ya', you know, ‘you go with my blessings’, you know? I was just being selfish. So he went to Calgary. That's where he got his B.A. So he's working for an oil company.

(Sept. 9, 2003)

Tourism and Strip Mining

The growing out-migration of individuals under thirty-five years old, combined with ‘baby boomers’ already making up the largest age category means the population is an aging one. When asked what the future held for Cape Breton the most common response I was given was “retirement community”. This term reflected a positive slant on the awareness of out-migration as well as drawing attention to the natural beauty of the area. As Leanne said, “When people come from away they see how beautiful it is here – and people are so nice to each other. It feels like home no matter where you go.”

Creating a retirement community was connected to tourism in that the ‘Northside’ of the CBRM could be sustained by seasonal visitors and summer-home owners, drawn to the area by the natural beauty. In fact this was happening all over the island with an influx of affluent Americans and Germans buying property, with some alarming consequences for local homeowners. While I was there, a story was circulating about an elderly widow in Baddeck (a major tourist draw less than an hour’s drive from Sydney Mines) whose property taxes had jumped to nine-thousand dollars per year after mansions were built on either side of her little home.

One complication in developing the CBRM as a tourist location is its recent industrial history. The area surrounding Sydney’s former steel mill is still one of the most toxic waste sites in Canada. One major issue for the Northside is that while the Trans Canada Highway ends on the mainland at the ferry terminal in North Sydney, the layout is such that it is not obvious to tourists that they can easily venture into the centres of either North Sydney or Sydney Mines. The men and women I knew who sat on community boards were concerned with changing this, and fixing up other areas to be established heritage sites, or creating camping and recreational vehicle parks. They were frustrated with the bureaucracy they encountered with the several development agencies in the area.

I interviewed a man participating in the Community Employment Innovation Project, involved in coordinating community events and encouraging tourism.

TOM: The numbers in the community have been dropping – people going away for work – I mean it always fluctuates anyway – people go, people come – that’s a given. That always happened, but now the economic development around here is nil - for jobs. I mean, it’s fine to start a grant¹² and gets Joe-Bob down the road to get some employment – which is good, you know. But make it that they can

¹² In this case a grant refers to a make-work project.

financially *keep* that job. ...[N]ow we just have to bring some industry into Sydney Mines that would make it. What that is I don't know yet.

JENNY: What happens when people have to go away, or when there isn't jobs – like on a social level – how do people...?

TOM: React?

JENNY: Yeah, and deal with each other.

TOM: Well, it gets agitated. I've been there so many times. I've been ready to chain myself to the door or the UI office. Get me a job – plain and simple – I'll work for minimum wage. I mean I've always had luck in finding jobs, but there's a lot of people out there haven't. It's really hard. I mean I don't know how many times, when I was in my early twenties, I seen people hitchhiking from here down to Toronto – that shouldn't be! I mean, not that the government should help out or anything, but we shouldn't have to move away.

Cape Breton Island should just be a tourist island in a sense. I mean there's a lot of industry that could still come here, but we should capitalize on what we got. We got the Cabot Trail, which is our biggest asset [...]. But Sydney Mines has a lot more to offer that just has to be discovered.

(Sept. 29, 2003)

Also thinking about how to develop the tourist industry in Cape Breton are members of the family that own the local strip mining business. Their argument is that after the land has been stripped of coal they will remediate it to look better than it did before. In an interview with one of the owners, he pointed to examples in Germany where lakes were made on previously stripped land and a cottage industry built around it. The major problem is that even if one or more of his ideas were to transpire it would not be before several years of stripping the land which, as well as being an eyesore, creates dust and noise pollution, can pollute the water and destroys the natural habitat for wildlife. Moreover, at the time of my research there were no local examples of an upgrade or even things being put back the way they had once been. The previously stripped areas still looked like wastelands.

Despite this, industrial Cape Breton's history has been one of overlooking health concerns and pollution in exchange for jobs, epitomized by the locally famous aphorism "no smoke, no baloney." In other words, people had little choice but to accept the toxic smoke billowing from the coke ovens because without that they would have no livelihood. With limited opportunities for employment, the debate over strip mining raises issues around the possibility for job creation forcing individuals, determined to remain in their communities, to struggle with the uncomfortable position of accepting the notion that any *local* job is a good job (a theme that presents itself again in following chapters).

The co-owner of the strip mining company suggested to me that a big project, from start to finish, could create up to 240 jobs, due to the need to contract out certain jobs to uphold some environmental standards (e.g., removing the trees rather than burying them).

BRUCE: The last three years, I bet seventy percent of, uh, all the people that worked in the mine, that were my age [mid forties] are now gone out west for – they might go for six months, eight months. That's the norm right now – so I'll see them home for maybe two weeks in the summer time and then they're gone back. But they leave their wives behind and the family – which is very hard on any, uh, uh, relationship or any family.

...Every one of my friends that have gone away [...] aren't working in the [mining] industry. When they do come home they could have everything but they say "the only thing I don't have," they say "I have everything else – but I don't have *here*."

...[W]hen you bring people back – and here's what's the benefit – when you bring people back that are forty-two and forty-five that have had to go away and come back. They say "what are you talking about?" they say "those guys got industry! I'd rather be at home than all the way out west, thank you very much" and they can actually get in controversy with families. I've got families that are uh, not fighting each other, but they're disputing with each other because they want to come home and the other families might be retired miners that don't have to go away. But the forty year old ones had to go away. And they know when they're fifty/fifty-five their jobs are gonna be exhausted as their potential to work – even

out west. So they have to make a decision “what am I going to do, uh, stay out west? Move out west? Or, home and maybe I can get welfare?”

One thing that they are not: they are not lazy, ‘cause the first thing they did was go out west! And they want to go on social assistance? No! They’re not going to do that! “But can I find a job or potentially an idea that can help me stay home?” Yeah. And when you create these sorts of thing [strip mines] then there’s a possibility because they’ve got another fifteen years before they retire.

(Aug. 19, 2003)

However, at the current site near Alder Point there were less than twenty employees, and in the proposed and highly controversial site on the access road into Sydney Mines I heard that it would create only a handful of jobs. One person suggested seven, while someone else said up to twelve people would gain employment. I was also told more than once that these jobs were not going to laid-off miners.

John and Raylene’s comments reflect scepticism about how likely workers, who are not friends of the family in charge, are to get a strip mining job. It is comments like the following that I heard most with regard to employment in strip mining.

JOHN: As I say there’s a bitta strip minin’ here. But that’s about all I see.

RAYLENE: Yeah? That you’ll never get a job with!

JENNY: Why is that?

JOHN: Well you never know... Like, out west these are just big projects and there weren’t that many people really wanting to go out there... but like anywheres around here it’s different, right? Ya know, there’s not that many jobs. But it’s usually everybody knows everybody. You know how that works? [He laughs].

Weighing the Options

In both the interview with Raylene and John and the interview with Bruce, *choosing* to work away was set in contrast to *choosing* to receive social assistance. In passing, people often complained about “folks on welfare”. There were several voiced

concerns; including what type of example they set for their children, as well as the negative image it might give to Cape Bretoners in the rest of Canada. However, for those who went away to work in order to support their families there was also resentment that they had to leave their families while others stayed home and got “money for doin’ nothin’.”

In a conversation with a woman who grew up in a neighbouring mining community and who is involved with a Sydney-based program that helps women enter the workforce, she suggested that divisions within mining communities had become clearer. She felt that people had become less tolerant of others and tended to be “more suspicious and blame people for their situations.”

MARGIE: I [know] a woman whose husband lost his job in the mines and he wasn’t at the point where he could get retirement so he got a severance package so [...] he has to go and work in Alberta. He’ll go out for eight months then he’ll come home for a year, then go back. But they’re working towards retirement; they have a plan, right? And they’ll be okay. And this is a very intelligent and very sensitive woman who made the comment about her neighbour across the street being on social assistance: “and here we’re having to work so hard and she’s getting money to do nothing!”

...[T]hat’s a comment I don’t think she would’ve made three years ago. I think she would have been more understanding of that person’s situation, but I think in those communities now the divisions become clearer and people don’t work together, they don’t have that sense of community that they used to have and so you see those divisions coming up and I don’t even think people realize that it’s happening. ...[P]eople become almost insular – it’s about families trying to make it and survive, and less about the community as a whole trying to survive.

(Sept. 23, 2003)

On one of our dog-walks, Raylene told me John hated going out west. She had heard from someone else that John was upset at the thought of having to leave again. Another woman told me about a former miner she knew, who wanted to work as many hours as possible when he was out in the work camps in Fort McMurray because he was

so unhappy when he was there and felt so out of place socially to the point of feeling fearful.

In asking men about how something made them *feel*, my questions were almost always met with stoic responses such as “nothin’ I can do about that”, “that’s just the way things are I guess”, or “you just have to keep on going”. Women on the other hand, (as well as couple of the younger men) were more expressive about how they felt about friends and family moving away, and were more forthcoming with descriptions about how their husbands actually felt (when not being asked in a taped interview).

The interview with John and Raylene exemplified this gender difference in verbalizing feelings about migration and working away. Similarly in the interview with Eileen and Dale, Eileen went on at length about each child moving away. Dale, by contrast, said very little and was reluctant to elaborate, ending several of his statements with “well, that’s all we know.” Sandy’s point that migration is not a new phenomenon in response to asking how he felt about his children living “away” is also typical of the types of responses I got to direct questions. However, when I asked about issues such as out-migration more theoretically, I received responses (like Jimmy’s, near the beginning of the chapter, for example) pointing to the strains placed on families.

Through statements about how “lucky” or “blessed” one was to stay or have their children stay in the area, individuals avoided taking for granted their ability to remain in their communities. The fact that I often heard such statements suggests that out-migration was felt by the whole community, in much the same way that while someone might complain about their job, they always acknowledged, when talking to me, that they were fortunate to have work in the area.

Tony's comments on out-migration and working away show the issue is close to home for many people who are able to remain in their community. In his mid-thirties with a wife and two young children and employed at the local branch of Nova Scotia's social services, Tony told me stories of growing up in a rough part of Sydney Mines, with friends who have almost all moved away.

TONY: I'm very fortunate to be able to uh, still live in Sydney Mines and work two minutes away. I have friends that would cut their arm off to come home and do the same, right?

...Of my uncles – there's ten of them – there's five that have to go away [to work] and come back. And out of sixteen children on my mother's side there's two that ended up with university degrees. And it's not that there's a lack of intelligence but obviously with sixteen kids – how do you get them all through school right?

My father-in-law [Angus] just turned sixty [...] and he's a product of the industrial past. He worked at the heavy water plant [...] and built a house, started a family and done really well over the years, ended up working for the coal mines as a project planner, but he wasn't a unionized employee so when they shut down he got nothing. So then he's been jumping from job to job trying to bridge to the Canada Pension, and he ended up at a call centre. And he's a highly intelligent man [...] but there's nothing here for him to go to. He could probably go west and make a hundred grand a year easy, but you know, at sixty who wants to go west? He's over making \$8.50 an hour at a call centre.

(Sept. 8, 2003)

Just as many families have resisted migration by taking employment opportunities in other parts of the country for several months at a time, and living on their accumulated Employment Insurance benefits the rest of the year, many former miners had been supported by two-year severance packages that provided some temporary relief from the financial insecurity of unemployment. Their household income and financial security affected decisions on whether to work 'away' or wait to see if job prospects might improve on the island. However, November 2003 marked the two year anniversary of the closure of the last coal mine and the subsequent end of the Cape Breton Development

Corporation (Devco), thus the payments from the severance packages would be coming to an end as well. Those miners who were still contributing to their family's income up until that point have likely since had to consider options such as migration and seasonal work 'away.'

Still others were directly affected by the closing of the mines and steel mill (or laid off by companies, such as CN Rail, that had to downsize in the area), and had little or no financial support to fall back on. The insertion of call centre jobs into the region offset some of the economic crisis. Despite government rhetoric that call centres will help move Cape Breton into the global economy, most individuals I spoke to were of the opinion that they had served as a "life preserver," allowing some families to remain on the island.

Industry in Transition:

Call Centres in 'Industrial' Cape Breton

The employment that has come to replace the coal and steel industries has been inadequate both financially and in terms of the limited numbers of jobs compared to the number of displaced workers. The most prominent industry to rise up in the transitional period of the last five years or so has been in the form of call centres. Also known as telemarketing companies, they employ hundreds of workers to make sales and provide information for client companies either through outbound or inbound calling. Call centres have been around for approximately fifty years, in the form of emergency service telephone lines, operator services and customer help lines, but recently the rapid growth of these companies both in number and in number of employees has made them a significant part of the global economy. They were pitched as progressive for Cape Bretoners, steering people away from dwelling on the memories of dying industries. However, at best people saw them as a temporary solution to the employment crisis.

Regularly, during casual conversations, I would ask what people in the community found in the way of paid employment after the mines closed and what the future might hold. Call centres were pointed to as offering the most prominent job possibilities, but the tone was usually derogatory. These kinds of jobs provide little status in a place with such a strong sense of pride in its history built around coal mining. Nor do they contribute to the popular belief that the tourist industry could solve Sydney Mines' economic problems (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Despite the low status call centre employment seems to hold, *jobs* – no matter what they involve – are valued. No one complained too much in my presence about his or her work, unless it was quickly tempered with a comment such as, “at least it’s a *job*”.

SANDRA: Call centres around here are employing *a lot* of people - a lot of misplaced people - that lost jobs from the steel plant, the coal mines, the fisheries. It’s not a favourite job, but...it’s a job.

(Sept. 25, 2003)

Nonetheless, the call centres were repeatedly described as a “band-aid solution” or a “quick fix” for the local economy. It was generally accepted that it was the type of business that had little reason to remain in Cape Breton if better incentives were offered elsewhere. Only one person with whom I ever discussed the issue said, “I really don’t see them picking up and leaving – as long as we’re still able to call people.”

Other comments fell more in line with Ann’s:

I don’t think they’re gonna be here much longer than the government money stays. As long as they’re getting that, they’ll be here. When that goes, they’re gone!

(Sept. 23, 2003)

A healthcare worker involved in organizing community events aimed towards bringing the people of Sydney Mines together and in some cases to discuss their future, said:

We can’t just be arguing about, ok *you guys* got a call centre – we need *our* call centre, you know – that’s not *progress*, right? That’s not *development*, that’s just the same old thing – let’s take all our money and put it in *that* basket – and for how many years – four or five?

(Sept. 3, 2003)

The first call centre moved to the Cape Breton Regional Municipality in 1997. At the time of my research, there were three different companies in Sydney, one of which was in the process of moving to New Waterford in the fall of 2003. There was one in

Glance Bay, one in North Sydney and one in the industrial park shared by both Sydney Mines and North Sydney.

The larger companies in Sydney have more diversity in employees' ages and work histories than the smaller companies in the neighbouring towns. The majority of employees in the city are between the ages of eighteen and thirty, often working while enrolled in post-secondary education. By contrast, in North Sydney it is predominantly women in their late forties and older who are re-entering the workforce after years of unemployment from childrearing or having been laid-off when the fish plants began to downsize and close.

I interviewed two women, Sandra and Ann, at length about their experiences working in call centres, and one man, Angus, who had formerly worked as a project planner for the federally run mining company, Devco. Sandra, a single mother with two teenage boys, and fifteen years of "on and off" clerical work, was the most positive about her work experience, after a year at one of the larger companies based in Sydney. By contrast, Angus a man in his sixties, married with three grown children, had quit with a feeling of shame and disillusionment after taking a stress-related leave of absence. This reflects, in part, a commonly discussed notion among those I spoke with that this type of service sector job is more suited for women and younger men whose identities are less rooted in the pride of being an industrial labourer in Cape Breton (Strangleman 2001; Dunk 1990).

The Changing Culture of Work

In a conversation with two women in their mid twenties, both entering the workforce through a youth out-reach program, Jessica, a single mother with three children said:

I found since the coal mine shut down that a lot of the wives are out working - which is a good thing, I guess, ya know, 'cause they prob'ly feel better about themselves that they're workin'. There was a woman's re-entry program [into the workforce], and they [the government] tried to do something for the men, but the men didn't really want to do it, prob'ly 'cause a lot of them don't have their education, so they prob'ly just gave up I guess, I dunno. But the women went through it and they did really well...

Her friend, Kristy interjected, "I don't think it should be the woman out workin' though, and the man sittin' on his ass."

JESSICA: Well, he worked all his life – now it's her turn. And if she likes it..."

KRISTY: Well, I guess if they *like* it – I wouldn't personally."

(Sept. 12, 2003)

There are several reasons why increasing numbers of women compared with men are now working in industrial Cape Breton. As the population ages, women's motivation to go out into the workforce is more than simply economic, many of them have re-entered (or are trying) after their children have grown.

When the Cape Breton Development Corporation (Devco) closed the last mine in 2001, many of the coal miners were eligible for early retirement, and those who were not were generally entitled to two-year severance packages (the last of which were due to run out in late November of 2003). Thus, former industrial workers have still had a (limited) source of income to fall back on and contribute to their households.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the demand for industrial labour in other parts of the country has encouraged many men to seek seasonal employment in Alberta. However, the desire to maintain a home in Cape Breton has kept many families from relocating. For some women, especially those with grown children, this has been quite isolating, thus the workplace provided something of a social life.

Jane Parry (2003) found that among her interviewees who retrained after the mines closed, most were women who were more concerned with what would benefit the household than fulfilling personal ambitions. However, in addition to the economic necessity, interviewees reported a boost in self-confidence and enhanced local social knowledge (2003:235). Re-trainers employed flexible conceptualizations of work, placing value in both paid and non-paid labour and occupational satisfaction was related to workplace sociability and personal fulfilment.

There are some men in Cape Breton who worked ‘in the pit’; now working in cubicles with headsets, answering phones, but it is generally deemed unsuitable work for former miners. As one man from a mining family with a strong union background put it, “This kind of work is not for [miners], like, even in the way that they behave with their co-workers or how they relate to management – it’s an entirely different thing”.

The call centres’ set-up costs were largely absorbed by Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC) and the development agency Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation. According to one informant, HRDC provides incentives for each former miner hired in an attempt to draw more of the directly displaced workers. Despite this the number of miners working in call centres is relatively low.

Two university students, whose parents worked for Devco, described the call centres this way:

DEBBIE: It's a good short term – like, it's like a band-aid I think. It's good to get people back on their feet, like back to work *but* I don't think it'll be anything like a replacement.

SCOTT: You know when I think of that it just seems – not demeaning – but like, I guess a man who's worked in the mines for twenty-five years, he can kinda like – for lack of a better word he's used to doing like a *hard* job and then come into an office with someone that's my age sittin' next to him at a computer. ...[T]here's a culture behind mining that a call centre just...

DEBBIE: It won't take that place.

(Sept. 19, 2003)

The call centres signal a shift in the culture of work in industrial Cape Breton. In contrast to the manufacturing labour traditional to the area, the service industry replacing it offers considerably lower wages and limited benefits. Job security and unity among workers is low (Parry 2003; Leach & Winson 2002; Strangleman 2001; Yarrow 1990).

I sometimes heard jokes made that working in a call centre was more stressful for former miners than working in the mines had been. As one miner's daughter described it, "in the mine you rely so much on your co-workers 'cause it's such a dangerous job and you really build that trust, and to go from that into a situation where the organization really doesn't want to promote that: [it is] such a different work culture." She also told me that initially the management in at least one call centre wanted to separate the former miners because of their strong union background.

Now in her late twenties, Ann too, was raised in a mining family. After completing a degree in Business Administration, she began working at a call centre four years ago. Currently at her third call centre job, she believes that if she left the island she would likely find work in her field, but her determination to stay drives her to remain

“working the phones.” When asked if the call centres were changing the way people think about work, Ann felt that the “work ethic” had been lost:

I think that no one really cares anymore about the job. I know myself I’ve had days where it’s just ‘whatever’. ...Especially the older women – they’re like that, it’s like a long time ago everybody actually gave a damn about what they did and how they did it, and not screwin’ off someone else, but in a call centre it’s like totally different – everyone just does their own thing, and if you don’t like it deal with it.

JENNY: And I guess it’s not really an environment that supports...I mean, there’s no union or anything right?

ANN: No! No one even mentions the word; we know if anyone mentions that word, the jobs are gone. No one says a word about unions, too scared.

JENNY: But there must be people who work there that once upon a time were unionized elsewhere...

ANN: Mm-hmm, oh yeah, big time – ‘specially the older women that have all come back [to the workforce], they’ve been at the fish plant or wherever, that are used to the unions and seniority rules, and all that stuff and you gotta go ‘look you can’t do that here.’

(Sept. 23, 2003)

The ‘Contingent Work World’ of the Call Centre

In general, call centre work is unskilled, repetitive and monotonous. Workers have little control over timing, methods and what they can say. There tends to be a low degree of task interdependence, thus, work is more individualized and few interactions with co-workers are needed to ensure service delivery. As a result, they have been criticized for being a primary cause of job-related stress (Holman 2003:120). Moreover, it is evident that this type of employment falls easily into the category of contingent work as Leach and Winson (2002) use the term (discussed in chapter one) in that in addition to the low pay, few benefits and increased number of part-time jobs, call centre employment is also dependent on the actions of capital which seeks to find the cheapest labour.

In industrial Cape Breton, job training at a call centre varies from less than one week to three weeks depending, of course, on the skills needed to perform the job, but also depending on the priorities of the company. While each addresses stress management to some degree, only one company appears to have taken steps to address this issue. It has built a soundproof room in its facility, where workers are encouraged to go and vent frustrations that may arise from dealing with abusive calls. It is not the company with the highest wages, but it seems to have the best reputation for valuing its workers.

There was general agreement among those I spoke to, that working too many hours per week at a call centre would lead to burnout and thus the need for leaves of absence due to stress. Ann, for example, had found it necessary to reduce her hours to thirty-two per week when her husband's delivery job increased his hours.

Wages vary between companies, but range from \$7.50/hour to \$9.50/hour. After Ann's company cut the number of employees, but increased the number of calls, employees were encouraged to work extra hours, yet it refused to pay over-time wages. Another company used the 'time-and-a half' pay as an incentive. It depends not only on the call centre, but also on their clients' willingness to pay more.

Sandra was convinced that there was no ceiling on the \$0.20 raise per seven-hundred hours at her company. Ann, on the other hand, had worked at three different call centres (including the one Sandra was currently at) and had never heard of wages rising above \$9.50/hour.

Jobs at the low end of the service sector tend to provide little opportunity for upward mobility. This is not a new phenomenon for the people of Sydney Mines, who

had little opportunity for social mobility in the industrial labour of the past. The difference today is that the service jobs provide lower wages and less security. Interestingly, I received quite different responses in Sandra and Ann's expectations of the availability of higher status jobs in call centres.

SANDRA: Oh, there's room to advance – if you want to be a trainer, if you want to be a coach if you want to be a supervisor, monitor...

I applied for a monitoring position, so you listen to how the others are doing their job. That for me would be helping people by showing them where they can improve on their weaknesses and commending them on their strengths. ...I applied, but I didn't get it, there were four positions but they were all there a lot longer, so I'll wait till the next one comes up.

ANN: There's *some* possibility [to move up to management], it's limited because there's not a lot of positions available, and you have a lot of people all trying to get the job and you have a lot of people who will stab you in the back to get it.

JENNY: Could you see yourself moving up into a management position in a call centre?

ANN: Oh yeah. I think I could prob'ly do it. I think I'd be good at it; I just need the *chance*.

Call centres employ traditional forms of performance monitoring such as direct observation, listening to calls, work sampling and customer surveys, as well as electronic forms including automatic and remote collection of quantitative data such as call times, wrap-up time, or number of sales. Holman points out that while it is believed to improve individual performance, there is actually little evidence to show the benefits of performance monitoring beyond improving resource allocation. He suggests that it also serves as a method to enforce adherence to organizational norms (2003:120).

JENNY: What's the relationship between the workers and management? ...Is it friendly or is there some tension there?

ANN: There's a little bit of tension there, I find myself, 'cause they basically want you to be perfect on every call and they don't get that you can't, I'm only human I'm going to make mistakes. [...] And then they'll knock you down for it, they'll go 'why did you say that, why didn't you say it that way?' And then when you do something right – we had a Monday, what was it? A couple weeks ago – where eighteen-hundred calls came in the centre - and the staff – we answered fifteen-hundred of those! Never heard boo, no one said 'great job everybody!' 'You did a wonderful... keep up the good work!' you know?

JENNY: So there's no appreciation? Does that add to the stress?

ANN: Oh yeah definitely, they just had this thing - they called it a 'appreciation night' which was a joke, down the local bar here...and they said "come on down – drinks are on us, free food". ...[T]hey gave everybody two drinks – which around here is nothing – and some old chicken wings ... [laughing]. No there's no appreciation for us on the phones whatsoever, and it's like without us you don't have a job. So it's like, why can't you see that?

In a similar story, Ann described an event put on by the company to give out awards to valued employees, in which all the awards went to employees in management positions.

While there were more of these types of stories, all three interviewees had positive comments about several of the managers, mostly in terms of their seemingly honest desire to help employees succeed. Despite Ann's response to the question, "so how do you like the job?" where without hesitation she smiled and said, "I hate it!" she too had positive things to say. She had made some lasting, close relationships at her first call centre, and in relation to skills gained, she believed it had increased her self-confidence. This also reflects Jessica's support of call centres as a benefit to women in the community.

ANN: The only good thing I can say about the call centre is it's brought me out a little bit, 'cause I'm a quiet, shy person. I'm a wallflower really. But the call centres they got me goin', they got me talking – they got *me* coming out. I got to be a little more aggressive.

From Devco to Call Centre: Angus' Story

My interview with Angus, which had focused on his work history at Devco, took a tense turn when we reached the topic of his most recent job. Already soft spoken, his voice grew shaky and quieter. When I had first contacted him for an interview he was working six days a week at a call centre. He explained that while he was willing to meet with me, he did not see how he would have the time. At the interview itself, however, he shed further light on his reluctance to speak to me:

I was off on stress leave for the last two weeks, and this is why I really wasn't upta talkin' about this - about anything really - 'cause I have too much on my mind, and uh, anyway I been to my doctor and everything, and talked about it, and just figured at this stage of my life, ya know, I don't really think that that's the job for me. I just find it too stressful [...] I can be here in the evenin' just relaxed - everything great, but when I get in bed I won't let myself sleep cause I'm thinkin' that I gotta be waitin' for this next call to come through, ya know? And uh... that kinda gets to you.

He had previously worked on a year contract with another call centre. After being laid off he decided that he was finished with that type of work, but a few years later following a devastating financial loss on a business investment, he found himself applying at another company.

ANGUS: It seemed like they had a pretty good reputation and everything so I thought I'd give it a try. I had my pension income, started doing some contract work.... But your pension is just not enough to keep you going, and you just can't run an entire household and keep things running to par on a pension so I figured I'd give it a try at the call centre which I did and it was great for the money part of it, but it's a high price to pay.

While I was conducting my research in Sydney Mines, the company Angus worked for was receiving regular local media coverage for two reasons. First, it was a company that had suffered after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and had

apparently filed for bankruptcy in the United States where it was originally located.

Secondly, the local branch had been housed in a temporary location for the past year or so while an appropriate location was being set up in New Waterford, where it was anticipated that four-hundred additional jobs would be created.

ANGUS: [the company owned a bank] that had folded, and we had to bear the brunt of all that through the phone calls. And then a whole bunch of things that were related to all that - sales quotas you have to meet, and if you don't meet those, well, then you go in corrective action [a series of sanctions, up to and including termination], and I was on my last final notice for termination, and they offered to put me into the retraining, and I'd already been in the corrective training three or four times so I didn't want to go back into that.

...So I've been down that road, 'cause I don't know [his voice begins to shake a little] 'cause other people are probably more inclined than I am toward sales, right? [...] I'm not trying to make an excuse, but through all this fallout with the credit card, people not wanting to buy things - ya know, and you're going through all this scripting for why they can't use their credit card and then you're going through all this scripting for why they should have a *new* credit card, and if they don't want to have a credit card, you have to give a rebuttal to that, to try to talk them into it. You know, it's a lot of bull, eh?

...I was doin' ok, met my quotas even when things were goin' bad with the credit card, and so forth, then they dropped the average handling time [per call] as a performance measuring tool, but they upped the DPO [dollars per order] sales from \$2.50 to \$3.50. And that was a giant leap for me to have to try and meet, and you know it just put that much stress on me tryin' to do that, and it started to wear me down.

JENNY: I could see how that could wear anyone down, but it would seem especially frustrating, to me, to have been in the workforce for so many years...

ANGUS: Oh yeah! That's right, and that's my last job really, ya know, I've been in the workforce since I was a kid, ya know [quiet again and voice shaky, he laughs nervously] I've done everything you can imagine, pretty well. I was just figurin' out the other day I've worked for fifteen different companies over, over...forty-four years.

(Sept. 25, 2003)

Work Related Stress

In each interview, there were similarities in the complaints made about the high stress levels associated with the job. First, there was the sheer intensity of the job in terms of number of calls. Secondly, they expressed feeling stress at having to run through a sales pitch before a few sales have been made, as limited information is provided on the screens so if asked a question, they likely cannot answer it. The third and most discussed area of stress came from 'abusive calls'. However Ann, Sandra and Angus were quick to say that many people were very pleasant to speak with.

ANN: I'd say it's half and half...but a rotten person can totally ruin a day. Like yesterday, I had a really good day up until I finished off at seven in the evening and at 6:30 I took a call and that call totally ruined the rest of my night, and I couldn't get it out of my head. It's just ugh! I needed to go for a walk or something... just to get over it [...] they can say what they want to us, but if you say something back to them, you're out the door. And that's always in the back of your mind.

SANDRA: I don't mind [outbound calling], depends on what mood yer in, eh? And how many crappy calls ya get... but on average they're pretty good people, it's just they're fed up because they've been telemarketed to death.

In addition to the stress related to working for an almost bankrupt company attempting to rebuild itself, specific to Angus' work environment was the added stress of a temporary facility.

ANGUS: There's a little room [...] that you go in to have yer performance appraisal, *but* there's no *ceiling* on it, and the person who's sittin' right outside the door on a call - they're listenin' to everything that's goin' on! Ya know, where's the confidentiality there?

Finally, there was the concern of what might happen if one worked too much.

ANN: I actually sit next to a lady who had to get medication from her doctor 'cause she started having anxiety attacks about goin' to work. Like, *just to get her to come in the door she has to take a pill!* That's when it's time to say 'goodbye'. When I get to that point that's when I'll be like 'ok - it's not worth it anymore'.

One of the striking aspects of the interview with Angus was his strong belief that other people found the job easier, in terms of making sales, and were less affected by the intensity and the number of abusive calls, than he was. It may be a more difficult work environment for men who have had a certain degree of respect and pride associated with their jobs, who have never encountered a work environment in which scolding from young managers and 'corrective action' letters were a threat, compared with someone with less expectations carried over from previous work experience (Strangleman 2001).

The strong union history suggests that both men and women have expectations about workers' rights that are not met by the service sector in general, let alone at the call centres. Younger employees and women with little or no previous work experience may adjust more quickly to this type of work environment, but the complaints of high stress levels, as well as the concerns of over-working, suggest that Angus is not alone in his feelings of inadequacy and dislike for the job. Ann's own experience, as well as her stories of the stress felt by other women, suggests that the stress of the job affects a wide range of employees. I heard it said on a few occasions that the call centres were contributing to more people than ever applying for Employment Insurance specifically on the grounds of needing to take stress-leave.

Despite the expansion of the call centre industry on the island, it pales in comparison to the industries that it has replaced. Even with the urgency to find jobs many people have shied away from that type of work all together, or like Angus have tried it (more than once) and decided it is not for them. A young man in Sydney Mines made this comment:

They brought in the call centres to replace [the steel and mining jobs] but there's so many people, they left school very early to go work, and they worked there so many

years – to go to a call centre – they don't know how to use a computer or nothin', eh? [...] I wouldn't be able to work at a call centre – I'd hate it ...can't sit that long.
(Sept. 26, 2003)

There have been a variety of retraining programs offered to men and women in the past decade to help people become more employable in fields that are not traditional to the area, particularly within the service industry. High levels of illiteracy have intensified the barriers felt by older Cape Bretoners, thus many find themselves living for long stretches on Employment Insurance benefits from seasonal manual labour jobs or resorting to collecting social assistance. Several federal and provincial programs have aimed to move transfer-dependent people into the job market. The subject of the next chapter; the Community Employment Innovation Project, is the latest in these endeavours.

Unemployment & the CEIP: an end to the Pogey?

The labour market in the former industrial Cape Breton, with its high unemployment rate and reliance on seasonal jobs in both the manual and service sectors, contributed to this location being targeted by Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC) to attempt an alternative form of income support for transfer-dependent people. Concerned with cutting costs in the federally funded Employment Insurance (EI) program, HRDC commissioned the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (from here on referred to as SRDC) to design, implement and evaluate an experiment that would move the unemployed into the workforce. As the project commenced, the Nova Scotia provincial government joined as project sponsors so that social-assistance recipients might also take part in the employment experiment.

In 1999, randomly selected employment-insurance recipients and social-assistance recipients in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM) were offered an opportunity to participate in what was locally referred to as the “Cape Breton Experiment,” and officially called the Community Employment Innovation Project, or CEIP. One-thousand-and-six Employment Insurance (EI) and 516 social assistance recipients were enrolled. Approximately one half were then randomly assigned to a program group and were eligible for CEIP. They agreed to forgo their benefits in exchange for three years of work, at slightly increased income, though still below the poverty line. The remaining enrollees were assigned to a control group and were not eligible to participate. The volunteers’ gradual enrolment began in 2000 and concluded

in 2002. Thus, the last participants to join will conclude their CEIP work participation in the summer of 2005.

The Community Employment Innovation Project has two main objectives: to build community capital in order to foster job creation and enhance the employability of the unemployed. The SRDC website claims that “CEIP grew out of the belief that new government initiatives to improve the economic circumstances of individuals in struggling regions or communities must support local endeavours aimed at creating a sustainable economy” (www.srdc.org/english/projects/CEIP.htm; *retrieved on December 10, 2004*). Thus the strategy was to have local communities define their own needs and then develop projects to meet those needs. SRDC anticipates that more participants in the CEIP will be employed following their participation than those in the control group.

Five of the six communities within the CBRM originally selected to form democratic community boards, agreed to take part. Glace Bay, New Waterford, North Sydney, Sydney Mines and Whitney Pier each set up democratic community boards. Dominion began the process but did not follow through.

The role of the boards is to promote the free labour available through CEIP within each community and to review proposals for employment projects sponsored by groups of residents or by organizations. Any local not-for-profit organization could develop a proposal for a CEIP project. If the local community board approved the proposal, CEIP participants were sent to work on the project. Although the core of the offer to communities is the free labour supply of CEIP workers for their local projects, in order for community boards to carry out their primary responsibilities, they are also provided with a \$25,000 - \$30,000 grant to help with planning and community mobilization.

Most of the community projects in the five test sites have been sponsored by existing community groups that are regularly in need of funding. Thus, they applied for CEIP positions that would provide administrative support functions, such as office assistants, administrative assistants and coordinators. These jobs require 'skilled' workers. Community development corporations, community centres and a range of non-profit organizations (e.g., the Knights of Columbus; Adopt-A-Highway; or the Salvation Army) applied for CEIP skilled and unskilled maintenance labour for both their infrastructures and within the community (from roofing to house cleaning).

In evaluating the success of the CEIP, SRDC is interested in how the communities respond to the challenge of organizing a community board and its ability to promote, review and assess sponsored projects. They are also interested in whether sponsored local projects make a measurable difference in the physical, economic and social well being of the community. As well, there is a comparative aspect to see if residents of communities in CEIP indicate a higher level of social cohesiveness than non-participating communities.

The Cape Breton Regional Municipality was chosen as the test site for the CEIP as a location with high unemployment, in dire need of job creation, but also as a place with a strong history of community activism (in terms of the co-operative movement and powerful unions of the past and later in the form of community economic development) that the SRDC had hoped would spur the community-oriented side of the CEIP. In an interview with a researcher at SRDC, he explained it this way:

[Cape Breton has] a strong history of social action [...]. So one would presuppose that if you're going to come in with a community based initiative which is going to try and provide meaningful social economy jobs – [...] a place that's got a history

of that already would be a bit more able to, you know, really get going quicker and do more.

(Sept. 17, 2003)

However, my SRDC informant expressed disappointment at the type of people who had come forth to create the local boards. Several active community members that the SRDC had envisioned as building the CEIP in each test site, who could have been “great leaders in mobilizing the masses” were highly critical or suspicious of Human Resources and Development Canada’s agenda. On the one hand, some were concerned by the implications of a project informed by neoliberal ideology and reminiscent of the workfare model (a system in which the unemployed are required to work in exchange for their benefits). On the other hand, those believing that the history of government involvement in the region had fostered an unhealthy dependence were eager to avoid perpetuating an image of Cape Bretoners as looking for hand-outs.

The Underlying Issues

From the onset of my investigation into the experience of participating in the CEIP, I wondered how the experiment could reasonably test its hypotheses in an area trying to recover from the devastating effects of deindustrialization. Put simply, in such a suffering labour market, where would the jobs come from when the approximately 750 participants finished their terms in the non-profit sector? Even if they were more employable and had built larger social networks, there would still be a finite number of paid jobs. The onus was being placed on the unemployed to improve their situation, with little acknowledgment of whether this would be possible for reasons beyond their control.

Constance deRoche, a local anthropologist, has taken issue with the rhetoric that the CEIP was established in Cape Breton due to the region's history of community development (see deRoche 2002 and 2001). In her critique of the CEIP, she argues that Cape Breton was given this project because the steel mill and coal mines were closing and thus a substitute was necessary. However, since there has been a shift in political policy away from the welfare system, the project had to be described in neoliberal terms that would distance it from a government giveaway, such as a make-work project, and rationalize it as a money-saving strategy.

I would also suggest that with the number of people choosing to work 'away' as opposed to migrate permanently, Cape Breton posed a concern for the federal government looking to reform the Employment Insurance system. The CEIP would serve as an experiment to see if there was a cost-benefit to this alternative to transfer payments to the unemployed, while ideally enhancing employability in the service sector.

The resentment felt by those who were working, toward those who appeared to be simply collecting money was replicated by some of the unemployed as well. On several occasions during my field research, both in formal interviews and in casual conversations, social assistance recipients expressed their personal desire to work, but explained that most people in the community did not share this desire. Regularly recounted anecdotes about community members who were collecting "medical welfare" long after an injury had healed simply because they could, supported and perpetuated this belief. For the long-term unemployed, the CEIP represented a chance to prove one's desire to work, however they were often unable to escape the stigma attached to unemployment. In project placements where CEIP workers and regularly employed staff

worked side by side, CEIP workers sometimes reported conflicts and having been mistreated (*personal communications*; see also Greenwood *et al.* 2003:141).

At the academic level a debate stirred over whether or not the CEIP is reminiscent of workfare and part of a neoliberal policy which blames the poor for their predicament or whether this project was really helpful and well intended. Newspaper editorials attacked deRoche for her criticism of the CEIP, arguing that it was easy for her to criticize when she was not in dire need of a job herself.

During my fieldwork, local public perception of the CEIP fell into two camps; those who felt it was a “good program” and saw the benefits playing out in the lives of individuals in terms of increased self confidence and perhaps other skills, and those who were “not too fussy about it.” The men and women I spoke with who criticized the program for allowing individuals with a “poor work ethic to get away with not working” were people who had some financial security and thus had been somewhat cushioned from the effects of deindustrialization. For this group, the jobless could not escape the stigma of unemployment by taking part in the CEIP.

The individuals who have chosen to participate in the CEIP program are caught in a double-bind in which the responsibility falls on their shoulders for improving their situations and their communities. Yet, the project is designed in such a way (with limited training and an underlying interest in migration) that it is unlikely to succeed. The participants are caught between fundamental contradictions in the aims of the CEIP. The project is designed to help develop Cape Breton, but as it stands, in order for Cape Breton to be sustainable without more permanent and well-paying industry it would require further out-migration. Taking part in the CEIP may foster an individual’s ability to take

part in their community, but when it does not lead to paid employment in the future they will not have succeeded by CEIP terms. On the other hand, if they abandon their community and migrate to an area with more employment opportunities, they will not succeed in maintaining the community capital side of the CEIP.

In a conversation with one of the local academics who criticized the agenda of the CEIP, she suggested that the CEIP had not been popular with community members but with the suffering economy, they had felt as though they had little choice.

BERNADETTE: ... [A]t the end of the [preliminary meeting to promote the CEIP] I attended, people were saying 'well I'm desperate I have no choice, I have to vote for this – I'd rather have a job paying [minimum wage] than you know, being on welfare.

...[Y]ou wouldn't be much better off, if at all – *financially* – than being on welfare. There might be other advantages, but the inflated claims they were making were frightening and I fear that Cape Bretoners will get 'a black eye' for having taken this money and not solved all their problems as a consequence.

(Sept. 19, 2003)

The Participant Experience

Eighty-eight CEIP participants were working on community projects in the Sydney Mines area. The administrative assistant for the local board (a CEIP worker), showed me a list of the currently open positions in the area that people looking to change jobs could choose from. On that day in September of 2003 there were several open projects including two maintenance-repair positions, two bartending jobs, one bookkeeper and 'Crime-stoppers' was looking for fundraisers (to sell tickets at a booth in the mall).

Participants must be available to take part in approved CEIP job placements for thirty-five hours each week. They cannot return to social assistance or Employment Insurance within the three-year eligibility period, however, they can switch back and

forth between CEIP projects and other activities, such as non-CEIP paid employment at any time.

For each participant the project began with an orientation session. Initially just one week, focusing on an initial employment assessment, by the second year, a second week had been added to include some basic job-readiness training where needed and short courses in transferable skills. To help make the transition to market employment, participants also have access to portfolio building and seven hours per week of paid job search time in their final weeks as a CEIP employee.

Participants currently receive \$325 per week (an increase from \$280 when the project commenced), for up to three years. They are taxed, pay into EI and the Canada Pension Plan and are entitled to fifteen “personal days,” which can be taken as paid vacation or sick days.

Despite the increased revenue compared with transfer-payments, participants with no other income remain below the poverty line. Those who could receive the greatest income increases would be single adults on social assistance, with no dependents. However, with no provision for transportation, work necessities (e.g., proper attire), or child-care it is unlikely the income provided by the CEIP results in much increase in disposable income for the majority of participants.

For three of the participants I spoke with who came from the social assistance caseload, this income provided enough of a financial incentive to be the main reason to take part. For those on EI, three years of regular income was an incentive even if the pay was lower than to what they were accustomed. Still others had seen the CEIP as a potential stepping-stone and an opportunity to do something productive with their time.

Tom recalled that his initial interest in the CEIP was in part because his Employment Insurance benefits would run out in approximately six weeks, but was also due to how he had interpreted the recruitment letter:

Honestly when I first read it, the way it was worded was along the lines of ‘learn how to start your own business’ almost, and that’s what intrigued me about the CEIP, and uh three years of employment! It was almost like a job lottery honestly, there was a fifty-fifty chance that you’d get a job outta that. ...I mean, it’s not a great paying job ... but it does allow me to stay home¹³ with my boy.
(Sept. 29, 2003)

Building Skills and Employability

One of the key points used in the promotion of CEIP participation was that one could learn new skills. When I asked participants what skills, if any, they had acquired through the CEIP they all pointed to the short courses they had taken during their orientation period, such as First Aid and workplace safety. However, with no provision made for skills upgrading, participants seemed to be assigned to jobs for which they were already qualified, thus, it was the luck of the draw if they had the chance to improve those skills through their project environment.

Participants had a range of opinions on this point. One side of the spectrum included comments such as “I already *know* how to clean”, or “I don’t do nothin’ anyone couldn’t learn in a day.” These participants also recognized their limitations in terms of CEIP projects. They had assessed their options and made conscious decisions to stay at their current projects even if they were somewhat unsatisfied. On the other end, there were those who felt their placement had improved “people skills” or “honed computer skills,” and one woman, Marcy, insisted in answer to more than one inquiry “You get out

¹³ In this instance ‘home’ refers to Sydney Mines, as opposed to having to go ‘away’ to work.

what of it what you put into it! The chance is there to do well.” For her one of the most important aspects of her participation was the increased self-confidence she received from having the opportunity to put the skills she had learned in her formal education to work.

The new skills described in the CEIP pamphlet and website seems to refer to learning good work habits and hopefully enhancing some of the skills one already holds. There was a general recognition by both critics and promoters of the CEIP that some people would have very rewarding experiences in their job placements that would also provide an opportunity to develop skills. But with no formal training involved, there was disagreement, over whether CEIP could be credited with providing an opportunity to gain skills or whether it was really just due to chance. Among the participants I interviewed, the four participants doing manual labour in Florence were less satisfied and felt less rewarded than the two administrative assistants and the coordinator. One major difference was that these three had a wider range of marketable skills upon entering the CEIP than at least three of the four maintenance workers. One woman in her late forties, with a grade seven education, felt that one of the project’s shortcomings was that placements were found based on the experience one already had.

WILMA: I worked in a fish plant for seventeen years so what kinda experience do I have? I know everything about fish, but don’t put me in a bar and tell me to make somethin’!

(Sept. 25, 2003)

Enhanced employability of the unemployed is one of the main goals of the CEIP, yet the project is set up in a way that provides very little, if any, training. An SRDC researcher explained to me that HRDC was not interested in a “test of training.” People

receiving Employment Insurance already had a range of training programs accessible to them. However, he explained the objective using a hypothetical example:

...If someone's been on [social assistance] for twenty years and they haven't been going to work, haven't been getting up – aren't used to all the work-a-day things that we have to do to hold a job – the very fact that they make it to work at *any* job for a period of three years is gonna solve, or help them address some of those issues.

(Sept. 17, 2003)

In other words, job experience in and of itself will enhance employability in the future. However, in the case of Employment-Insurance recipients (who would have been recently employed and, who make up two-thirds of the study) one must ask whether *job experience* is something that they need *most* in order to be more employable. Furthermore, according to the SRDC's own data, the vast majority of the participants have at least ten years of paid employment behind them (see Greenwood *et al.* 2003: Appendix G). The picture painted of the long-term social-assistance recipient reflects the stereotype of the unemployed as long-term public dependents. Constance deRoche has pointed out that not only is this a bias that is unfounded in the data, but this approach, seen in welfare-to-work projects in general, emphasizes personal deficiencies rather than the deficiencies of economic structures (2002:3). Unemployment is blamed on an individual's lack of skills, poor work habits and poor attitudes, downplaying the lack of available jobs. Yet this approach is being applied within the context of a region that has experienced a recent labour market collapse, where the official unemployment rate (as of 2003) is at approximately sixteen percent¹⁴.

¹⁴ This is up from fifteen percent the year before according to the Labour Market Review 2004 – Cape Breton, <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>: retrieved July 31, 2005.

Marie's Experience

I first heard about the Community Employment Innovation Project from the woman I lived with, Marie, as she discussed her recent work experience and her struggles to make ends meet as a single mother on social assistance. She had begun her participation in CEIP as a housecleaner for the elderly. She stressed to me that despite there being little economic motivation to sign-up she wanted to work rather than stay at home on social assistance. She complained that there was little prospect to improve skills, stating "I already know how to clean." However, she felt that she was performing an important service not only physically but socially.

Her timing in joining the project was unfortunate however, as controversy over whether CEIP workers were being sent to do non-approved work caused the project to be terminated. Marie suspected that it was due to wealthy community members wanting their "high-falutin' friends" to have "free maids" through the CEIP service. I later heard that one of the project sponsors was using CEIP public labour for private use.

Temporarily without a project, Marie was placed in a transitional job at the CEIP's resource centre where she painted tin cans and made birdfeeders and purses out of recycled goods. She said that for some people this was fine but she stormed in to her participant manager's office and exclaimed that to do this work was "an insult to [her] intelligence." She demanded they place her elsewhere. Marie was sent to hand out flyers door-to-door in the neighbouring towns of New Waterford and Glace Bay. She described this work in detail expressing her bewilderment at why the company did not simply advertise in the newspaper. Finally, she was offered a fundraising position at 'Crime Stoppers' which she anticipated would be exciting, but it consisted of sitting each day at a

booth in the North Sydney mall selling tickets. Quickly deciding that that type of work was not for her, she called in one day to say she was not coming back and looked to the CEIP office to find her another placement. A tour-guide position in the Sydney Mines museum opened up and Marie was told that she could have that job on one condition. Due to her abruptness in leaving the Crime Stoppers project she would have to return to the resource centre. This was interpreted as a sanction and, refusing to go back, she was able to acquire a doctor's note to say that she could not remain in the CEIP and should be put back on social assistance.

It seems likely that her abrupt leaving made them unsure of her job-readiness, and thus the resource centre could be used as a testing ground to ensure that she would not quit hastily at each project. Yet according to the Sydney Mines CEIP board administrative assistant, the more monotonous jobs – particularly those that involve sitting for long hours – have had trouble keeping workers, hence Marie was not alone in her desire to quit.

Marie was confused and suspicious of the project's agenda, which later intensified as word had gotten back to her that someone involved in the CEIP had told her caseworker that they were very disappointed in Marie. She had a limited understanding about how or why the project was being run and who was in charge. From her perspective (with the exception of her specific CEIP participant manager) she found people condescending or “uppity-up” and she interpreted it as people with money looking out for each other at the expense of the participants.

Tom's Experience

In contrast to Marie, three participants I interviewed had very positive experiences as CEIP participants. Tom was one such participant. After the initial orientation, Tom was briefly placed at a recycling company, which he explained was “where people went if they didn’t have a project on the go for them in particular.” Within a few days he was transferred to a job which involved cleaning up the highway. He described it as “brain-numbing,” and felt there was little point in doing it when within two weeks it looked just as it had before the clean up. From there he went to his first of three jobs as a ‘coordinator’. The first two projects had not been designed to last three years, but he had been successful in strengthening his social network and the project for his current job had been proposed with him in mind.

He was so enthusiastic about his current project and his chance to actively organize events in his community that he intended to volunteer his time if his project sponsor could not immediately create a real job placement for him, following his CEIP term. In fact, he had been offered another job at a much better salary, but was debating whether to accept, as he felt so committed to his current endeavour:

I really want to see the project get done and I want Sydney Mines to develop more. I’m not about to just walk away from something like this.

(Sept. 29, 2003)

According to the CEIP’s first report, one of the concerns was that participants might miss real employment opportunities while working in CEIP community projects (2003:13). Yet, if this participant were to pass up the opportunity to switch to secure employment, it would not be due to an inability to job search. His dilemma over whether to stay at his current position or take a much higher paying job was not based particularly

on economic logic, but rather on the intangible rewards that he attained through his CEIP project.

Networking

One of the common answers I received in asking how things had changed since the mines closed was that people did not get together anymore. Since people no longer tended to work together, they had less opportunity to socialize (Strangleman 2001). Many families had moved away; less people went to church; there were no more union organized social events; there were fewer 'kitchen parties' as fewer people learned and played music together; and before the summer of 2003 (when Tom helped coordinate the first annual Johnny Miles festival), it had been years since Sydney Mines had had a festival.

Promoting the CEIP as a networking tool had an appeal as a way to broaden one's opportunities to find paid employment. However, this rhetoric could also be used to appeal to people's sense of loss of community.

BETTY: what got me was that Unemployment [EI] is a set term, this is three years. Also, the idea that you could network and meet people. I don't know a lot of people in Sydney Mines, and the people that I do know I've met since I've been in this program. [...] And though I am involved in volunteer capacity in other areas, like Girl Guides and through my church, it's still a select group of people that I meet. And so I've met more community involved people through the CEIP, more – I don't know whether they'd approve of being called - 'movers and shakers'.

(Sept. 29, 2003)

In Tom's case his project placements were temporary but had really allowed him to network. As a CEIP worker, he had been given the opportunity to move in a

different direction with employment, away from manual labour to coordinating people and greater involvement in his community.

On the other hand, many manual labour jobs gave little opportunity to network. In the focus group interview with the maintenance workers, when I asked about the possibility to network, one woman responded, “I don’t see how.” The one man in the group, Kenny, clarified, saying “it depends on the program you’re in – a place like this – we never see anyone, but in an office you would meet more people.” Their situation was further complicated by well-paid union workers on site threatened by the free labour offered through CEIP.

Migration

The SRDC website states an interest in the project’s impact on migration. There is a hope that making participants more employable will encourage some to look for work elsewhere. As my interview with an SRDC researcher came to a close and became more of a dialogue, he asked what I had found in terms of people’s feelings about out-migration. He was not surprised when I replied that it seemed to be viewed negatively in terms of the larger social impact, but was quite mixed when it came to individuals’ desires to stay or move. He explained his interest this way:

If we showed [the federal government] that this sort of community approach as an alternative to EI or welfare actually made people more employable and that they were more apt to leave - if we find that there’s a migration impact - from the point of view of planners at HRDC that would be a positive thing because it’s one way to address the labour supply.

(Sept. 17, 2003)

While he recognized that this was not necessarily the perspective that local residents would take, with their strong pride in, and attachment to community, he raised the issue

that Cape Breton would be economically sustainable if the population were to continue to shrink. This statement also suggests that despite the stated concern over building community capacity, the more dominant concern is really to enhance employability. Similarly, in reviewing SRDC's prior track record of involvement with the Self-Sufficiency Project in New Brunswick and British Columbia and the Earnings Supplement Project in Alberta, as well as the focus of the oral presentations within the communities to launch the CEIP, deRoche suggests that their track record has had far less to do with community building than increasing employability. Given the severity of unemployment in the region, she views it as unsurprising that job provision has been a major selling point (2001:328).

I asked each participant whom I interviewed (just as I had in most other interviews) whether he or she would consider leaving Cape Breton. The response was mixed, but for those who expressed a desire to leave, their decisions to stay always revolved around family commitments (either to elderly parents, or school-aged children). Hence, their choices were often not - or only partially - economically driven.

Yet, to develop an experiment that claims to build community capital, while hoping to encourage out-migration seems to be an oxymoron. Rhetoric around building community capital – like enhancing social networks - appeals to a general feeling of loss that members of the community have less opportunity for social interaction since the industrial decline. Furthermore, this rhetoric serves to distance the CEIP from the image of a 'make-work' project. Perhaps the difficulties in building community capital – albeit a tendency to blame a lack of leadership amongst community board members – are

actually a result of the project's own priorities in enhancing employability and out-migration.

It seems unlikely that the CEIP will increase out-migration. As the majority of job placements involve few opportunities to build formal skills, it is unlikely to make participants especially marketable elsewhere (deRoche 2001:328). Furthermore, the project does not offer tangible incentives or supports for migration, and the CEIP income provides little if any opportunity to save for long-term plans.

Just a “Glorified” Grant?

In the absence of training, many CEIP work placements are reminiscent of the familiar ‘make-work’ projects in the past, locally referred to as “grants”. While participants and others who approved of the CEIP told me that no place was more deserving of job-creation projects, even if it was only in the short-term, others were uncomfortable with the project on the basis that it might foster a stereotype of Cape Bretoners as looking for hand-outs and do little to actually help the economy.

To counter the image of the CEIP as just another government grant or ‘hand-out’, workers have been encouraged to refer to it as a ‘research project’. Among the participants with whom I spoke, the idea of researching employability was interpreted in varying ways. I asked participants how they understood what CEIP was doing. In addition to answers such as, “to try to get us a job,” and to “break the cycle of welfare,” there were more cynical answers such as these two: “Well they keep on reminding me anyway, that it is a research project. We’re little rats in a maze, right?” and “we’re paid by social researchers! Treatin’ us like a bunch of monkeys, ya know – they’re doin’

experiments on us to see how we're gettin' along." There was also some scepticism around SRDC's stated agenda, for example Tom said:

Honestly, when things go wrong, I believe that's part of their research project... When they change the rules, what's our reaction to it? I believe that's how they're running the project...they're trying to screw us up and see how people react.

(Sept. 29, 2003)

The notion of experimenting on people was met with fierce criticism from some local academics and community activists. One man expressed his objection to the idea of a control group as having a "tint of immorality in it." On the other hand, others recognize that using a scientific model appears more rational in the neo-liberal political context, than previous make-work projects (which locally fell into the category of 'grants'). CEIP is consistent with the contemporary 'active' approach to social-welfare policy, whereas make-work conjures images of spending to maintain rather than to alleviate state obligations to provide jobs (deRoche 2001:327).

The term "glorified grant" was used to describe the CEIP repeatedly by several non-participants in the community, including some active community members on the local board in Sydney Mines. Most of the time, this phrase reflected the recognition that though the CEIP has been helpful for the time-being, it would do little good for the community in the long-run. There was doubt (from participants as well) that anyone would be better off financially after the project was finished. It was expected that the unemployment rate would slowly rise again following the end of the project.

TOM: ...[W]hen [the CEIP] is said and done, what are these [non-profit organizations] gonna do then? It's not gonna be very good economically. When they give their reports up in Ottawa of the rate is down on UI, this is *why* – they've got these people employed. It is gonna be a gradual thing and we're gonna see unemployment going back up again!

Participants reported being encouraged by their SRDC participant managers to make themselves so “valuable” at their job placement that when the term was over the organization would have to find a way to hire them. Only Tom saw this as a genuine possibility (though he also thought it might be a while before the funding could be located for his position), the rest saw their placements as short-term, regardless of how important their work was to the organization simply because they understood that when the offer of free labour from the CEIP came to an end, there would be no money to keep these temporary staff positions. This notion that one should try to work as hard as possible is perhaps a veiled attempt to instil a greater work ethic in participants deemed to be long-term public dependents, but it is also interesting because it reflects the previously mentioned onus on the individual to find work, regardless of the actual labour market situation.

A second way in which the term “glorified grant” was used was as a derogatory statement to sum up a local stereotype of CEIP workers as lazy and untrustworthy. In this case, the CEIP was understood as perpetuating dependency in the unemployed, by giving more money to people who had a poor work ethic. For example, a retired banker and politician was particularly critical of the screening process, believing that participants with criminal records were working with the elderly. Furthermore, he firmly disagreed with the idea that the project would make people more employable, saying they were “being given the wrong expectations about a job.” He felt that participants were “just going through the motions” and that if he were to hire someone it would be a strike against them to have participated in such a project. This is important because this is perhaps representative of the attitudes of people in a position to hire in the private sector

– on which participants will likely be reliant following the termination of their CEIP enrolment.

A retired nun volunteering with the youth outreach program (mentioned in chapter four) explained her perspective:

I think the CEIP program is a great program. It works well for us - we've got a janitor up there [at the community centre]. ... Now I think a lot of good things come out of it and people grow, but I know of some people who are hired and they don't do what they're supposed to do and...it's a program that's good but the *employer* has to know what they want and they have to be honest with CEIP uh if it's not workin' out – 'this one's lazy' this one's not showin' up... But the program itself I think is good.

(Sept. 26, 2003)

She considered the CEIP a “good attempt” but wished that there could be more dialogue between various government and non-government agencies involved in funding community projects in general. She suggested that the desire for one agency or another to gain recognition outweighs the desire to pool their resources and do something that works in the long run.

At the community centre they had had to request a new CEIP worker because the one they had been assigned was not doing his job. Their experience with CEIP workers had been very positive since then. However the nun complained that comments had been made by passers-by, that CEIP workers there got “paid to sit around and goof off” because they had been seen playing basketball – during designated breaks - in front of the community centre.

But we always want [others] to be more honourable than ourselves ya know, if you're poor you shouldn't have a six pack of beer. I said God, if there's anybody needs a six pack of beer it's the poor! Or a big screen TV - like they shouldn't have anything, and that mentality. Well if you need it and I need it, why shouldn't they need it?

(Sept. 26, 2003)

Participants were sensitive about the negative image they had received in the community. They had stories of people not doing the work that was expected and they were bitter that a few people had made everyone look bad. Betty, an administrative assistant, said that in some of her social circles she was reluctant to admit she was employed by the CEIP. In a focus group interview with four maintenance workers, a heated discussion broke out over whether CEIP workers deserved the bad reputation. It was settled when they agreed that, being social assistance recipients, the workers were already stigmatized and thus it only took one or two people who did not do their job to impact negatively on the entire group.

However, Tom placed the onus on both the project employers and the CEIP researchers themselves in letting some workers slack on their jobs:

TOM: I forget which individual it was over at the CEIP office, but it wasn't a very good thing to say to anybody: 'you'd have to kill somebody, to get kicked outta this project' – you don't *tell* anybody that! It's just not right! It's like, 'ok, I can do anything I want.' They started off saying that to me, and then jeepers, it was run very loosely at first and then they started buckling down, and they changed the rules as they went along, without telling a lot of people. It wasn't very good like that.

JENNY: What kind of rules?

TOM: ... [H]ow we filled out our time sheets; protocol for coming and going. They just changed the rules. I've heard of people losing like a week's pay because they filled out their time-sheets the wrong way. I mean, you don't do that to people – they need their money, especially in Cape Breton. They go into this project some people deserve this project and they needed to work, and some people got into this project and [...] they were allowed to go get second jobs, and then they were allowed to go back to CEIP and say 'ok well can we work around my other job now?'

Then on the other hand, they'd come and go as they pleased at some projects. They were allowed to leave at uh, you know 12:00 in the afternoon. [...] It gives the project a bad name. They started this project in the right area, but they started it off the wrong way, in my eyes. I mean, I'm no perfect individual myself, but when you get a job you work, you don't just sign your pay sheet and take off for the rest of the day.

CEIP will question me putting in forty hours [...] that I'm doing more hours, than somebody that's putting in thirty hours, say. They won't question them, they'll question me! [...] I love my job. Honestly, I've worked fifty/sixty hours a week and not put in for it 'cause I didn't want them to question me.

...They are not easy people to deal with. I don't know who they answer to, but they seem to just give people who want to do a good job, a hard time. It's really frustrating!

(Sept. 29, 2003)

The Success of CEIP

Of the eight people discussed in this chapter who had taken part in CEIP, three were really enjoying their experience and recognized personal gains, though their identity as CEIP participants in their relationship to the community was more problematic due to the stigma of being unemployed and participating in what was perceived to be a glorified grant. The other four participants and Marie, who had left the program, had found the whole process far less rewarding. They had various reasons for taking part and ultimately they may individually gain skills and build confidence to use the CEIP as a “stepping stone.”

Each participant volunteered suggestions for how the program could have been improved, though at least three of them tempered their statements by acknowledging that SRDC researchers were “learning as they went.” One important point in terms of the potential for future employment among participants was raised by Kenny. He had been in the program for two years and had had three different participant managers. The role of the participant manager is to oversee up to 120 CEIP participants through their entire three year term. Checking in every three months by phone and visiting the participant's work site every six months, the manager would be able to keep each participant's files up-to-date to aid them in finding the right placements and, ultimately, in building their

portfolio. Kenny felt that it was a significant disadvantage to change managers so many times, as newer managers were unable to adequately match one's skills to one's placement.

Marcy felt that the CEIP's effort to "give a boost to the community" had already been a success and, while she viewed the CEIP as a "stepping stone", she pointed out that the years she had spent on social assistance had also been a stepping stone to "get [her] kids raised and get an education". By arguing that participants "get out of it what [they] put in" to the program, she expressed her agency in participating in the CEIP. At the same time she implicitly accepted the notion that remaining at an unfulfilling placement displayed lack of initiative (see Dunk 1990). Yet, the focus group interview shows that these unskilled workers have made calculated decisions to remain at their project placements even when they do not feel that those placements live up to the claims made by the CEIP that participation will improve skills and social networks and hence their employability.

Tom and Marcy, both involved directly in developing local activities, recognized the importance of working in the non-profit sector. For others, the CEIP projects simply translated into a dead-end job with a limited life span. As many CEIP job placements provide few opportunities to network and may also be tinged with the stigma of participating in the project, it remains to be seen how much success CEIP will have in building community capital that lasts.

Some people voiced concern for the community as a whole in the coming years once the project was gone, as Betty said:

I know that some of the project sponsors are really appreciative of the work, but I sometimes think some of them have become very dependent on us, and within the

next year and a half/ two years, they're going to have to pull their volunteer base back up to what it might have been in the beginning.

(Sept. 29, 2003)

While the positive impact on the local community should not be down-played, thus far it seems that the CEIP merely offers an alternative means by which community groups can access short-term labour (deRoche 2001:320). While the CEIP may turn out to have lasted long enough for local organizations to plant seeds that will aid in turning the economy around, community members appear to be unconvinced.

Conclusion

It is clear that the socio-economic environment in Cape Breton is still in a transitional state. By the summer of 2003, almost two years after the last mine closed, most of the men and women I spoke with were looking towards a future in which it was hoped that industrial Cape Breton could start to enhance the natural beauty for which the island is known, in order to create a greater tourist draw. Despite regular funding setbacks, many community members remained optimistic that this region of Cape Breton could capitalize on the industry on which other parts of the island already rely.

Despite the number of jobs that the call centre industry can boast in industrial Cape Breton, a closer look immediately shows the contingent nature of this employment, in the way the Leach and Winson (2002) have described. Beyond being low-paying, with few benefits or intrinsic rewards, they are also insecure in another important way. To borrow the expression used by the researcher at SRDC in describing the call centres, they are like “a house of cards waiting for the next global wind.” Call centres have few roots in the communities in which they are situated. With no opposition from unions to contend with and relatively few set-up costs, a call centre can pick up and move to areas with cheaper labour much faster than a manufacturing plant.

For the quotidian experience of call centre workers with more immediate concerns about getting by, the culture of call centre employment is a far stretch from the legacy of manual labour in Cape Breton. The pride in craftsmanship and the camaraderie among workers that an older generation of miners considered to be lost as a result of

technological advances pales in comparison to how these social aspects of work are transformed by the new service economy.

For manual labourers the prevailing option of late has been to head west, often to Alberta, leaving family and community, to work and save money, returning with enough *stamps* for the *pogey* so that they can spend time at home until it is necessary to go out to work again. While the younger generation may relocate more permanently, this is not considered desirable from a social or economic standpoint for many older and more settled workers and their families. Louise Lamphere's (1985) argument that anthropologists should work towards uniting industrial studies and family studies so as to reduce the discipline's dichotomy between work and home, is apt in understanding the motivation behind the economic decisions made by Cape Bretoners.

From an anthropological standpoint the lived experience of labour migration – of *coming* and *going* – and the reconstructing of communities across spatial boundaries calls for the perspective put forth by Karen Fog Olwig. She draws on James Clifford's notion "that 'travel' should be brought to the forefront in ethnographic analysis and 'cultures' be viewed as 'sites of dwelling *and* travel'" (1992:103 in Olwig 1997:18). With this in mind, labour migration and out-migration in Cape Breton must also include an understanding of how the current political climate plays out in relation to this lived reality of dwelling and travel.

From the perspective of neoliberal ideology, and certainly reflected in much of the local discourse, this lived experience is viewed as including an unhealthy dependence on the Employment Insurance system. This is seen as being more than an individual problem, it is rooted in the Keynesian welfare state and specifically, Devco is blamed for

pumping over a billion dollars into the coal mining industry, while workers became accustomed to regular layoffs (i.e., EI benefits).

In both the cases of Employment-Insurance recipients and social-assistance recipients, recent neoliberal policy initiatives have focused on building 'workforce attachment' and encouraging 'self-reliance' among the unemployed. The rhetoric of the Community Employment Innovation Project falls in line with this ideology and involves an attempt to shift local knowledge of the labour market to meet neoliberal ends. Regardless of the outcome of the CEIP, it is reasonable to assume that the Canadian federal and provincial governments will continue to look for ways to restructure the welfare state in accordance with neoliberal ideology, restricting access to services like Employment Insurance and social assistance.

From another perspective the reshaping of local knowledge could move industrial labourers in other directions that still involved manual labour such as developing environmentally friendlier sources of power. The pollution problem that developed out of the coal and steel industries could be used to reasonably argue for the deindustrialization of the area as an inevitable and in fact, *necessary* process. As Canadians become more environmentally conscious coal becomes an increasingly outdated fuel source (though it is still used by Nova Scotia Power). In one of my early interviews I spoke with two community economic developers in New Waterford who were thinking about alternative power sources such as solar energy and wind power. Their complaint (which I heard again in other interviews) was that politicians were afraid to 'think outside the box' when it came to creating jobs. There is security in call centres to the degree that they produce hundreds of jobs in the short-term, whereas, an attempt to

develop an industry that was not guaranteed to get off the ground could mean political death in the following municipal or provincial election. Yet to develop an industry that was environmentally progressive (while still involving an identity shift away from coal mining) could provide quality manual labour jobs and help to solve some of the socio-economic problems of the region.

A project like the CEIP shows that the unemployment problem in Cape Breton is being approached from an angle in which the problem is not seen as one of not enough jobs, but one of too many transfer-payment recipients. Yet, as Evans rightly points out “all the efforts to make people work, and to make work pay, will have little effect if there are no jobs available” (1995:93). Moreover, people who live in environments where the economy has not recovered after deindustrialization will continue to struggle as energy is spent on building up urban centres (e.g., Halifax, the capital of Nova Scotia), rather than on making rural areas sustainable. The strategies that people generate in order to make do with what they are left will be undermined by efforts to decrease ‘dependency’ on the state.

Another aspect of the economic reality in Cape Breton that has received little attention in this text but would complement an understanding of the strategies used by women and men to get by would be further exploration into the underground economy. The underground economy existed in the daily lives of members of the community. Immediate examples that jump to mind include the mechanic who fixed cars from his backyard; the woman who picked berries and sold them; the woman who did not declare the child support she received from her ex-husband, so as not to have it deducted from her social assistance; the local marijuana dealer; or the woman who posed as a single

mother in order to live in government subsidized housing though her partner was actually living with her part-time and working in Fort MacMurray, Alberta; and of course the payments for room and board that I supplied to my host. Within this economy of undeclared income, the moral discourse drew lines between who was “doin’ what [they] need to, to survive” and who was “scamming” or “exploiting the system,” based largely on how someone was seen as spending, rather than on how they acquired the money.

The contested discourses within Cape Breton around issues of workforce participation and unemployment and their implications for the future, shed light on a double bind in which community members find themselves caught. The people of Sydney Mines and Florence, who are not yet at retirement age, are both encouraged to help develop their communities and condemned by the rhetoric for staying in those communities rather than making the seemingly economically rational decision to migrate in search of work. This dilemma is most apparent with respect to the participants in the CEIP who are directly involved in building community capital but also bear the brunt of the stigma of unemployment.

The pride in being from Cape Breton is intertwined with a history of surviving adverse conditions brought on by varying factors, but which include global forces beyond the control of community members. The ways in which individuals interpret these conditions, as well as their expectations for the future, are shaped in part by the hegemonic discourse of global capitalism. Yet individuals display agency in their determination to maintain ties to their community through different strategies whether it involves labour migration, choosing to work in a call centre in order to remain on the island, or through (unpaid or temporarily paid by the CEIP) volunteer work. While

community members struggle with the defeating images of laziness and poor work ethic that suppress the reality of the economic environment in which Cape Bretoners are situated, it may be the pride and attachment to place which triumphs and leads to long-term solutions.

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