

One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices:



COURTESY OF THE UNITED CHURCH ARCHIVES

Canada's Industrial Women in the 1880's

The Royal Commissioners studying the relations between Capital and Labour searched diligently but in the end they could only find Georgina Loiselle. Since the commissioners were well aware of enquiries similar to their own in the United States and in Great Britain, they fully expected to find many cases like Georgina's.(1) But after months of roving Canada's four eastern provinces, persistently questioning workingmen and their employers, they found only the one. And even that one had occurred some five years before, in the early 1880s, when 'modern' factories were just beginning in Canada and when one might expect the accompanying tensions to burst into flagrant abuse. Still, it was too bad that only the one case could be found. The Commissioners, all of whom were political appointments(2) and most of whom shared solidly middle class values, somehow expected the

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lower orders to misbehave, particularly when those lower orders were sexually mixed in the new factories. But there was only Georgina.

Mademoiselle Georgina Loiselle was an apprentice in Fortier's cigar factory in Montreal. She was one of a number of children supporting a widowed mother. But sometimes she was cheeky, speaking back and refusing to do extra work demanded by M. Fortier. Fortier was determined to give her a lesson; when she refused to make 100 more cigars, Fortier seized her, intending to put her over his knee and

spank her. But Georgina fell to the factory floor; Fortier pinned her there and beat her with a cigar mould. When reporting the incident to the Royal Commission on Capital and Labour in 1888, neither Georgina nor Fortier seemed particularly perturbed. Georgina had left Fortier's at the end of her apprenticeship but had returned some time later and appeared quite docile; Fortier had not had to touch her again. Fortier, in fact, considered it his duty to correct the young people entrusted to his 'care' by their parents.(3) And others shared his sense of duty: the Recorder of Montreal believed young factory workers probably received the same treatment at home; moreover it was certainly better to have young people safely in factories, no matter what the treatment, than to see them running the streets. The Commissioners may well have agreed for their concern with Georgina was less the physical abuse of the young woman than the moral decency of "a man placing a girl of eighteen in that position."(4) In their investigations, the Commissioners would find other evidence to shake their sense of moral propriety but this was the only case of physical abuse to be found among the one hundred and two female witnesses before the Royal Commission on Capital and Labour.

There is, however, other information that can be discovered about women

workers in the 1880s from that Royal Commission. One can, for example, hear the voices of some of Canada's industrial women recounting the kind of work they did, describing their working and living conditions and voicing their complaints. One can also glean the views of male workers and male employers on the question of female labour. And finally one can decipher, by the very questions asked, the attitudes of the male commissioners towards Canada's industrial women. In the pages that follow these three areas will be explored.

Needless to say, the Royal Commission on Capital and Labour was not an enquiry into the nature of female labour in the 1880s. Female labour was only one of a multitude of subjects that the Commissioners were to investigate. Indeed, aside from the one hundred and two women witnesses before the commission, only another two hundred and eighteen spokesmen offered any information or opinions on the subject of female labour. The remaining witnesses (close to 1800 people testified during the year and a half of hearings in cities and towns in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) spoke of everything from factory laws to wages, from apprenticeships to rents, from arbitration to immigration and from convict labour to strikes.(5) The enquiry was in short an investigation of all aspects of that great nineteenth-century worry: Labour and its relation to Capital. Women were only

a small part of such an enquiry.

The enquiry itself was also politically inspired, and, in spite of early efforts to obtain female suffrage and even some early successes in terms of the municipal franchise, women really had very little to do with politics in the 1880s(6) and even less so, it would seem, with labour politics.(7) But because of some labour agitation in the 1880s--including radical papers, political candidates and attempts to create national trade union centrals--the aging Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, decided to establish the enquiry. Macdonald was also feeling pressure from the two central provinces. Both Ontario and Quebec, in the mid-1880s, passed factory legislation regulating hours and ages for working people. The Prime Minister had never shown the same keen interest in factory legislation; he was still counting on his political reputation as a friend of labour established back in 1872 when he accorded trade unions in Canada some legal status. However, he was not anxious to have the provinces establish an undisputed claim for sovereign jurisdiction in the area. In many ways, therefore, the Commission was as much a political manoeuvre as a labour enquiry. And, of course, women's place in that kind of activity was virtually non-existent. As an added incentive for the establishment of the Royal Commission, Macdonald had the unsettled economic conditions of the mid-1880s. The Prime Minister was

anxious to show that his National Policy of 1879 had been and could continue to be beneficial to the Canadian economy and to the Canadian working class. The Commissioners in fact took this part of their undertaking very seriously; their reports credited the industrialization of the country to the National Policy.

But again, none of that had much to do with women. Hence the muffled quality of their voices: no one really wanted to hear from them. As witnesses before the Commission they constituted only one-fortieth of the Ontario witnesses, one-tenth of the Quebec witnesses, one-twentieth of the New Brunswick witnesses and one-thirtieth of the Nova Scotia witnesses. To understand the muffling that those figures reveal, one need only contrast them with the census figures for 1891. In the category "manufactures and mechanical industries," working women made up almost one-fifth of the labour force in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick and slightly more than one-fifth in Nova Scotia.(8) Another illustration of this muted quality is the anonymity of so many of the women witnesses. Forty-three of the one hundred and two voices had no name at all. And the women were decidedly more reticent than their male counterparts: in all seventy-three people chose to testify anonymously; only thirty of the close to 1700 male witnesses wished to hide their names,

Given the purpose of the commission and the muffling of the women witnesses, it is surprising that much at all can be gleaned about Canada's industrial women. But historians of women are becoming used to squeezing every drop of information from every kind of source and this particular source can be subjected to the same treatment. The women themselves give description; the men, attitudes.

From the one hundred and two voices there emerges clearly the type of work these women undertook. Textile workers in cotton mills constituted the largest group overall and for each of the four provinces except Ontario. Other kinds of textile workers made up the next largest group: women in woollen and knitting factories. Then there were women in shoe-making factories, in match factories, in tobacco industries and in printing offices, where the women did the folding and stitching, not the typesetting. And finally there was an odd assortment of milliners, dressmakers, rope makers and paper bag makers. One portend of the future appeared before the Commission--a telephone operator; and one caricature-before-her-time appeared in the form of a WCTU executive member who had no answers at all for the Commissioners' probing questions.

Behind the hundred and two lurked even more women workers. When male employers commented upon female labour they

often told the commissioners how many 'hands' they employed. In this way they revealed another, much larger group of women--some 5000--not merely muffled but entirely voiceless and shadowy as well. Still their occupations are clear. In descending numerical order they were tobacco workers, cotton mill operatives, shoemakers, clothing makers, match makers and woollen mill workers. The occupations are similar to those of the one hundred and two; only the order is somewhat different. But how representative were these one hundred and two voices or these 5000 shadowy 'hands'? Compared once again with the "manufactures and mechanical industries" category of the census of 1891 (where the majority of women in the labour force did not in fact appear; that majority was rather in the service and professional categories as servants and teachers), the occupational structure of the women is quite different. From the census, the occupations, in descending numerical order were dressmakers, seamstresses, tailoresses, milliners, cotton mill operatives, mill workers, boot and shoe workers and woollen mill operatives.(9) Even adding all the mill workers together would only move them to third place in the list of industrial occupations. But such a ranking might, however, put them in first place in terms of factory workers, since many dressmakers and seamstresses would work in their own home, in private homes, in very small establishments or as "outside

workers" for retail clothing shops. And it was, after all, the factory workers that most interested the Royal Commissioners. By that very fact, factory workers would be more likely to hear of the existence of the commission; hence they turned up in relatively larger numbers than their sisters in other occupations.

Nonetheless, one hundred and two voices remain a very small sample of the 57,283 women who worked in manufactures and mechanical industries in 1891.(10) And as the list of occupations given above indicates, their work was almost as limited as their numbers. But still some generalizations can be made, both about women workers and about Canada's nascent factory system. All those textile workers merely represented a transfer from home to factory of the traditional female skills and tasks. For the women, the role would be familiar; only the surroundings and perhaps the pace would differ. But the shoe workers tell us something else. They were a direct result of the factory system with its logic of breaking down attained skills into simple, repetitive and mechanical tasks. Where once the shoe trade required long apprenticeships and highly skilled men, now the factory-made shoes simply required highly attentive women to watch the machines. Women were, of course, cheaper. And finally, the matchmakers and the printing employees represented the flourishing of light industry in

certain parts of Canada. Light industries required vast numbers of unskilled and therefore cheap labour. All of the industries were, in fact, welcomed by the women involved; in a society where domestic service or school teaching were the only independent economic paths women could take, the factory system opened new areas of paid employment.

The hundred and two voices also provide a glimpse of the working conditions of Canada's industrial women. The hours of work appeared to vary from west to east, with the women witnesses from Ontario working a nine-hour day, those in Quebec a ten-hour day and those in the Maritimes an eleven-hour day. Such a variation would obviously produce the Commissioners' findings of an average ten-hour day in the factories of eastern Canada,(11)but it does not reveal much more. More can be gleaned from the women's remarks about their wages. As perhaps might be expected, the wages varied with the age of the woman and her skill. For example, a fourteen year old folding in a printing plant earned \$2.00 per week; a twenty year old in a cotton factory earned \$4.00 per week; a middle-aged expert dressmaker earned \$7.00 per week and a middle-aged forewoman in a tannery earned \$10.00 per week.(12)But there were catches in those salaries. The women (as did most factory men at the time) earned their wages by piecework; they were paid by the number of

items they produced, not by the day or by the week. But in order to make the items and in order to make enough of them to earn a "living wage," (13) the workers had to be provided with the material for their work. If there was no material provided, they might hang around the factory all day waiting for non-existent work. The result would be a slimmer pay packet at the end of the week. Nor could the women count on those wages for the entire year. At a time of over-production, a factory simply stopped its machines, closed its doors and turned its workers out. Then, too, many occupations were of a seasonal nature: printing, dressmaking and millinery followed demand and fashion which determined thereby that women would not have year-round work. And women's wages were consistently lower than those paid to male workers. A final catch in the wage rates of women (and of men too) was the number of fines exacted for defective work or unseemly behaviour. A snag in a piece of cloth, a defective shoe sole, a late arrival, a chat, a giggle, a pincurl fabricated with paper from the factory 'closet' would bring the foreman's ire and financial exaction. (14) For the most part women appear to have accepted without complaint this "muffling" of their behaviour.

Perhaps the women were used to similar curtailments of their activities at home. Although very few of the hundred and two talk at all about their

living conditions, those who do admit that they could not afford to board out. The \$2.00 per week demanded by private homemakers or a higher amount demanded by boarding houses or institutions (15) would put independent living beyond the reach of all but the most skilled of women workers. They lived at home, dependent upon their families to house and feed them, just as the families were dependent on the income that the young women could bring home. Where ages were mentioned at all, the women appeared to be between sixteen and twenty-four and many of them had been working since they were twelve or fourteen. It would seem then that a working class family required the wages of its youngsters and that, from about the age of twelve, a girl would be expected to contribute to the family income. Employers could count on this kind of interdependency; they were assured of a constant supply of willing workers and, because of those workers' living arrangements, they could also pay them low wages. (16)

Although the one hundred and two women were relatively open and forthright when describing their work and their working and living conditions, when the time came to voice complaints, their voices fell silent. The women were very reticent, even with the sympathetic probing of some of the Commissioners. Only when women gave their testimony anonymously would they

dare to utter a word of complaint. In effect, only when they muffled their own voices, would they speak out. And they spoke of badly ventilated work-rooms; they were either too hot; or too cold, or too dusty; "We have all got frightful colds; it is not good for the health, I assure you." They complained of extra time added to the work day without any financial compensation. They argued that they did not receive enough pay for the work they did. One woman even carried a personal feud into the hearing of the Commissioners: she claimed she worked much harder than the previous witness but she received the same pay. Other women complained that, on leaving a job, they did not receive the pay owing to them. Still others had to have the tiniest of complaints put into their mouths by the Commissioners:

Q. Wouldn't a half-day holiday on Saturday be a boon?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you think that you would not wish for anything more?

A. I think we would wish for a great many more things that we do not get.(17)

Where the women were willing to identify themselves, either their remarks were of a different nature or they themselves were different. For example, two factory workers in Ontario freely gave their names but when the time came to voice complaints, they stated that everything was fine in

their factory. Another young factory worker and her mother gladly furnished their names, but the younger woman, it turned out, had been dismissed from her job: indeed the two complained that the daughter had lost her job because of testimony she had given at a court investigation of a workman's injuries. She had refused to be silenced but she had paid for that refusal. And finally there were the skilled dressmaker and milliner, employers of other women. They too were quite willing to give their names and to use the occasion to voice their complaints about the shoddy workers they were obliged to hire. The school system, they contended, simply had not prepared young girls for needlework jobs. Moreover, the girls were more interested in getting married than in being trained for a steady job.(18) Thus complaints from women workers only reached the ears of the Commissioners in indirect ways. Only those women who were removed from the immediate work at hand, by anonymity, by dismissal or by status would dare say anything critical. Even Georgina Loiselle did not complain about the treatment she had received at the hands of cigar manufacturer Fortier. But then Fortier was present during her testimony. It can only be concluded that the women were afraid and so muffled their own voices.

From the hundred and two themselves, there is little more to be heard. Fortunately the Commissioners pursued

the question of female labour with both male workers and male employers. Again one must remember that the enquiry was not primarily about female labour; indeed the question was by no means the major concern of either the commissioners or the male witnesses.

Only 218 witnesses out of the 1800 spoke of female labour at all. Often there was a one word or at most a one sentence reply to a question about female labour and a quick passing on to a totally different subject. For example, one male witness all in one



COURTESY OF THE UNITED CHURCH ARCHIVES

breath agreed that women teachers should receive the same salary for the same work as men teachers and then launched into a lengthy discussion of the drainage and sewers in London, Ontario.(19) In spite of these handicaps to a clear picture of industrial women in the 1880s, there are a number of things that can be wrenched from the comments, first of the male workers, and then of the male employers.

Men factory workers were decidedly ambiguous about the question of female labour. They had, it would seem, not yet come to terms with it. Where, for example, one cigar worker readily admitted that women could do the same work as well as men and that, therefore, they should receive the same wages, others, in printing, tailoring and cigar making, would justify the lower salaries paid to women by the contention that the women, did an inferior job. Still other men, working in dry goods shops or tailoring establishments, recognized that the lower salaries paid to women encouraged employers to hire them rather than men; these men were fully aware that the wage difference was a means both of cutting into job opportunities for men and of depressing their wage rates. But the men had no ready solution to the vexing problem; they voiced only their personal concern. Other workers pointed out that there was a sexual division of labour in

many factories: men and women worked at different tasks. There could be, therefore, neither comparison nor competition between the two and the women were paid less.(20) In short the factory system itself was another highly effective means of muting the voices of such women.

Some of the male workers were more direct. They believed, for example, that young girls should not be working in the large mills because there they would hear "immoral words" and thus become immoral. And they suggested that women, if they were working in factories, should leave their workplace at a different time from the men. In that way they would not hear the "bad words" uttered as the hands left the factories.(21) In both these cases the male workers voiced an opinion that was much more pronounced among the Commissioners: morally corruptible women had to be protected from the ill effects of words. Perhaps this moral concern on the part of the male workers was one way of covering their bewilderment at the economic competition they were suddenly facing from women factory workers. Certainly it suggested an effective way of controlling the women. But other male workers were even more blunt: one simply need not listen to the women. There was no need, remarked one man, to pay any attention to women factory workers complaining about dust in a work-room, because they were always "grumbling about

something or other all the time."(22) The men warned the Commissioners thereby that they should not take the few complaints they heard from women workers too seriously. Women were always complaining. Short of muffling them directly by removing them from the factories, the men should do so indirectly, simply by not listening.

In fact, there were almost as many opinions about female labour as there were workingmen witnesses. This very diversity of opinion suggests that the male factory workers were unsure of just what female labour meant to them. As household heads they knew perfectly well that the wife's or daughter's wages were necessary to the family's survival. As union men they also recognized the necessity of equal pay for equal work.(23) As members of the working class they had always known that women worked. And yet. . . whether their backgrounds were rural or urban, these men also knew that women's work was different from theirs. Now the existence of factories implied--although did not always ensure--that women's work could be the same as men's, might even be better and usually was cheaper. Female labour did not augur well for men. Their uneasiness about it rings through their testimony.

Male employers, however, were quite direct and forthright. None of the worries of the male workers appeared. The employers liked female labour because it was "more profitable to us or

we would not employ them."(24) And yet that very profitability was based on certain expectations about the nature of women workers. The employers expected the women to be docile, clean, quick, cheap and sober.(25) As long as women maintained those characteristics, traits which rendered them superior to male employees, they would be sure of jobs. The employers had very effective means of ensuring that women workers did maintain those qualities. Should the women protest any of their working conditions, should they in effect, cease to be docile, clean, quick, cheap or sober, they could be "muffled" very easily. There was always another group of women with the appropriate behaviour ready to replace the protesters. This tactic worked well in the Stormont Cotton Mills in Cornwall when striking women, protesting the foreman's demand that they be quiet and orderly during the dinner hour, returned docilely to work under threat of being replaced.(26) And, as happened in another case, the employer simply moved his factory away from the offending women.(27) Muffling could take many forms, all equally effective.

Employers expressed still other expectations of women workers. They fully expected their female employees to be temporary workers;(28) the women would work a few years before marriage and then would vanish, to be replaced by another group of young women. This continual turnover not only enabled

the employers to keep the wages of women low but also permitted them to dub the women unreliable, uninterested in learning a trade or in applying themselves seriously to it. That characterization, while perhaps applicable to the women, effectively concealed the fact that the women's positions were steady, unchanging and profitable. The employers reaped the benefits but justified them by muffling the women in terms of male expectations. Sometimes too the employers justified those benefits by claiming a paternal interest in their women workers. Fortier believed he was replacing Georgina Loïselle's dead father when he admonished her physically for disobedience.(29) And a master baker believed that the women working in his new, modern bakery would be better wives and mothers for their experience.(30) Women workers were so beneficial to male employers that the employers had to believe that they too were of benefit to the workers.

Finally, the employers counted on the women being less skilled than men. Such an expectation enabled the employers to justify the lower wages they paid their female hands. Some employers even enforced this particular characteristic of their women employees. Certain factories maintained a strict sexual division of labour, with the women assigned to the least skilled tasks. Other workshops main-

tained a sexual division of wages by which, for example, a male tailor would be paid by the week and a woman tailor by the piece.(31) The piece-work rate ensured that the woman would work constantly and quickly, in order to produce enough garments to fill a pay packet. She may have succeeded in that task but the comment from the employer was that the man's work was finer. She could not win; nor was she intended to.

Male employers were quite clear in expressing, and often in enforcing, their economic interest in a certain type of female labour. Noticeably absent from their calculations was the moral interest which some workingmen had shown. Where that moral interest found full expression was in the Commissioners themselves. Just what that moral concern meant is, however, another matter. The workers' interest in protecting the morality of their female co-workers probably reflected their uneasiness at the prospect of economic competition from women. But obviously the middle class Commissioners had no such worries. Were they vaguely aware that the factory system was undermining their sense of family and of propriety? Were they afraid? Was something "catching" going on in the factories?(32) Or were the Commissioners simply revealing their middle class notions of the time: that women were both the guardians of morality and the most easily corruptible and that

the poor were poor because of some flaw, usually a moral one, in their character? What then of poor working women? They truly were a scandal.

Certainly the Commissioners were not interested in the women as workers. Even when women constituted the majority in a given factory, the Commissioners' questions concerned the male employees.(33) And when the women witnesses were factory hands, their voices were effectively muffled by perfunctory questioning. The Commissioners asked about hours of work, about wages, about language and about closets. And that was all. But if the women witnesses happened to be employers of women, they had free rein to express their opinions on a wide variety of subjects, notably one dear perhaps to the hearts of the wives of the Commissioners: why young girls were unwilling to go into domestic service.(34) Women as workers were not the primary concern of the Commissioners.

Instead they searched diligently for what they most expected from working class women--scandal. Assuming that immoral behaviour was a necessary consequence of the mingling of the sexes in the factories, the Commissioners painstakingly hunted down every instance of immorality. They found it, they thought, in the language women heard. Immorality, it seems, was some kind of disease spread through lan-

guage and particularly catching for women. Women should not therefore hear, much less use, violent language. But the working women obviously had a different set of values. While one Commissioner fretted over the kind of language a certain woman might hear in her factory, the witness in question took it all very casually. She must have shrugged as she replied offhandedly that the language was not violent--"just cursing; that is all."(35)

Undeterred, the Commissioners continued to track down instances of, or occasions for, immorality. They found them, they thought, in the "conveniences" that the working people had to use. Hence their recurring question: were there separate "closets" for the male and female workers? Here, immorality, at least in the minds of the Commissioners, seems to have something to do with toilets. The state of factory toilets amounted to a virtual obsession. "Did you ever see the men try to get into the females' closets when the females were in there?" "What is the height of the water closets separating the men from the women?"(36) Etc. etc. The concern probably reveals more about the strange inner workings of middle class Victorian minds than it does about the state of working conditions in Canadian factories but any investigation of that will have to await the flowering of psycho-history in this country. Certainly the Commissioners did find a

sufficient number of "combined conveniences" to cluck about. But what the connection was with the morality of women workers remains unexplained.

Still they pressed on. How, they wanted to know, did the foremen and the factory owners behave toward the female employees? Was their behaviour "gentlemanly." (37) The lower orders were, it seems, expected to misbehave and the men in particular were expected to take advantage of women in subordinate economic positions. The Commissioners' self-appointed role of moral watch-dog for the factory women may have been truly a part of their own gentlemanly protective impulse or it may have been an unwitting revelation of middle class behaviour. In the Canada of the 1880s there were far more women working as domestic servants than as factory workers and the domestics were far more susceptible to male (and middle class) aggressions. Indeed, studies of the period indicate that most prostitutes began their careers as servants. (38) The Commissioners may thus have revealed more of their own class attitudes to women than of the class reality of factory women. In any case, just as for their other questions, they were never able to find sufficient evidence to support their worries. There was only M. Fortier smacking Georgina while she lay on the factory floor.

And yet the Commissioners would not give up. They persisted in enquiring about the presence of "persons not married, in such a condition as they ought not to have been in"--a round-about Victorian way of looking for unwed mothers. And when they finally did discover a few such women, they referred to them as "the guilty party." (39) Only one of the Commissioners indicated any economic awareness of the problem when he asked whether a witness believed that low wages drove women into prostitution. But even that searching question was to be deflected, this time by the solidly middle class witness. Mayor Howland of Toronto restored the questioning to its proper level by remarking icily: "A good woman will die first." (40)

Finally the Commissioners were able to find one factory in Montreal that did confirm many of their preconceptions. At the St Anne's Cotton Factory they discovered men and women throwing water at each other over the partition in the closets; "pretty free" conduct on the part of men and women workers, "tough acts" by the manager and superintendent, and "young unmarried persons. . . in such a state that it was not fitting they should associate with others." (41) But even in this case, the workers were not willing to have the Commissioners confirm their preconceived notions. One of the women witnesses complained to the Commission that the local press had

exaggerated the "goings-on" at the mill.(42)

Perhaps the Commissioners took the complaint to heart. Or perhaps they convinced themselves by their own scrupulous investigation. Certainly they left no stone unturned in their quest for misbehaviour. But in the end, when they made their reports, they had to conclude--albeit somewhat reluctantly one suspects--that there were no signs of "serious immorality" in Canadian factories. Indeed, in a grand gesture, they even conceded that the moral character of Canadian working women was "as high as that of other classes." (43) No one had asked them to inquire into the moral state of Canadian women but they had done so anyway and in the process had managed to muffle not only the women themselves but also the crucial economic and social questions raised by the factory system and by women's place in it. Given their moral concern they could not help reiterating the notion that women constituted a helpless class, that they needed both moral and physical protection from the dangers of the work world. In that, of course, the Commissioners were no different from their contemporaries who were passing factory legislation and demanding female factory inspectors. Protecting women from the world was a common concern in the 1880s.

The four groups of people discussed above seem to have been living in four different worlds. Working women, working men, male employers and male Commissioners constituted so many voices speaking in the dark. The women tried to speak of the reality of their working days but they did so in muffled tones. The working men hid their confusion about female labour in a flurry of contradictory opinions. The male employers spoke clearly: women were an economic asset in a factory as long as they fulfilled certain requirements. And the male Commissioners deliberately confused the entire question of female labour by treating it as synonymous with morality. The only characteristic that the four groups had in common was the muffling itself. And that muffling was omnipresent in the women's anonymity, in the male workers' ambiguity, in the employers' economic interest and in the Commissioners' moral interest. Perhaps one has here an aspect of "female culture," (44) the silence that is both imposed upon and accepted by women. That silence may be both cause and consequence of the economic dependency of women in the family and in the factory. Certainly the injunction to be silent accompanied young women as they eagerly sought the variety of jobs the factory system offered. The trick for the historian remains however: how to crack that silence.

NOTES

1. The Canadian Royal Commission on the Relations between Capital and Labour, named in December 1886, had been drawn up by the Justice Minister J.S. Thompson. To do so he studied similar enquiries in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey and Kansas. PAC, Macdonald Papers, Thompson to Macdonald, 2 Sept. 1886. The Commission reported in 1889 with a single volume containing a majority and a minority report and five volumes of testimony.
2. See for example PAC, Macdonald Papers, T. Stewart to Macdonald, 21 Sept. 1887; A.T. Freed to Macdonald, 22 Sept. 1886; A.H. Blackeby to Macdonald, 26 Jan. 1837. Blackeby, the secretary of the Commission wanted to receive a salary before the Commission had begun its work, not for himself but to assist the local Conservative candidate, Cowan, in his campaign!
3. Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations between Capital and Labour (hereafter cited as RCCL), Quebec testimony, pp. 91-2; pp. 125-6.
4. Ibid., p. 126.
5. For a complete list of the subjects of interest to the Commission, most of which were also of interest to the trade union movement at the time, see RCCL, Report, pp. 5-6.
6. See Catherine Cleverdon, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada (Toronto, 1974), pp. 19-26, 105-111 and Carol Bacchi, "Liberation Deferred: the Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 1976, ch. 2.
7. One of the many aims of the Knights of Labour was equal pay for equal work but not many women have shown up in Knights of Labour Assemblies. The radical Palladium of Labour insisted on female suffrage as part of its Labour Reform platform for the Ontario election of 1886 (PL, 7 Dec. 1886) and it had the occasional article from a working woman but the Palladium was far from being a mass paper. The Trades and Labour Congress also endorsed the suffrage at its convention in 1886 but the trade unions, based as they were on skilled trades, also had few women members. See Jean Scott, Conditions of Female Labour (Toronto, 1892), p. 27.
8. Calculated from Census of Canada, 1891, vol. II, p. 152-5, 158-60, 164-7, 175-9.

	Women	Men	Total	% women
Ontario	30,757	128,074	158,831	19.4
Quebec	17,792	75,414	93,206	19.1
New Brunswick	3,648	15,059	18,707	19.5
Nova Scotia	5,086	17,425	22,511	22.6
TOTAL	57,283	235,792	293,255	19.5

For some reason the Quebec women witnesses seem to have been less easily muffled than their sisters in the other provinces!
9. Ibid., Dressmakers: 22,054; seamstresses: 10,083; tailoresses: 7,731; milliners: 3,141; cotton mill operatives: 2,954; mill operatives: 11,811; boot and shoe workers: 1,720; woollen mill operatives: 1,671. For purposes of comparison, there were 73,652 domestic servants and 14,787 teachers recorded in the same census.
10. As in note 8 above. The total is only for the four provinces visited by the Royal Commission.
11. RCCL, Report, pp. 37, 99, 135-95.
12. RCCL, Ontario evidence, p. 1163; Quebec evidence, p. 484; Ontario evidence, p. 347; Quebec evidence, p. 1311.
13. Somehow more significant than the "Living Profit" that businessmen in the same period have tried to make us believe was their just dessert. M. B. Bliss, A Living Profit (Toronto, 1974). As Terry Copp makes clear in his Anatomy of Poverty (Toronto, 1974), no one, except the poor themselves, worried too much about their inability to earn a living wage.
14. RCCL, Quebec evidence, pp. 482, 987, 1146, 1147, 273.
15. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 358; Quebec evidence, pp. 989, 1147, 1284, 818-19, 1350-51; New Brunswick evidence, pp. 192, 196, 146; Nova Scotia evidence, pp. 201, 203.
16. One workman, a weaver in charge of a woollen factory in Sherbrooke, believed however that those who boarded worked harder, since they had to earn more in order to pay their keep. Ibid., Quebec evidence, p. 1192. The piece-rate would then be an incentive.
17. RCCL, Quebec evidence, pp. 984, 988, 1145, 1148, 1120, 1296-7, 1294, 1282-3, 1284-5; Ontario evidence, p. 1173.
18. Ibid., Ontario evidence, pp. 1086, 1087; Quebec evidence, pp. 639-40, 641; Ontario evidence, pp. 358, 347, 348.
19. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 662.
20. Ibid., p. 919; Quebec evidence, p. 356, Ontario evidence, p. 810; Ontario evidence, pp. 41, 48, 627; New Brunswick evidence, pp. 73, 74, 211; Quebec evidence, p. 1072; Ontario evidence, p. 350; Nova Scotia evidence, p. 73.
21. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 665; Quebec evidence, p. 320.
22. Ibid., Nova Scotia evidence, p. 210.
23. Printers' unions insisted upon equal pay; they had however few female members. Ibid., Ontario evidence, pp. 44, 48, 108, 596.
24. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 617.
25. Ibid., p. 621.
26. Ibid., pp. 1074-5.
27. Ibid., p. 288.
28. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 289; New Brunswick evidence, p. 4.
29. Ibid., Quebec evidence, p. 126.
30. Ibid., p. 598.
31. Ibid., Ontario evidence, pp. 693, 628, 1164; Quebec evidence, p. 854; New Brunswick evidence, pp. 117, 339.
32. This sense of something dubious spreading from the lower orders to infect those above is something that Ned Shorter has turned on its head to posit a revolution in romance and sentiment spreading with industrialization from the working to the middle class. Edward Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family (New York, 1976). The book has been subjected to severe, and convincing, criticism in part on the grounds that the author has used middle class evidence to reveal peasant and working class reality. E.g. Joan Scott's review in Signs II, 3 (spring 1977), pp. 692-96. I hope I have avoided that particular trap in this discussion. There certainly is no denying the uneasiness the middle class Commissioners felt in the face of female labour but whether that uneasiness was based on any working class female reality is quite another question.
33. E.g. RCCL, Quebec evidence, p. 1157.
34. E.g. Ibid., Ontario evidence, pp. 358-9; 1009. The question of the declining number of domestic servants bothered all middle class reformers throughout the last third of the 19th century and first quarter of the 20th. See National Council of Women, Yearbooks and G. Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada 1880-1920," in J. Acton et al., eds. Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930 (Toronto, 1974), pp. 71-117.
35. RCCL, Ontario evidence, p. 1162.
36. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 1079; Quebec evidence, p. 476.
37. Ibid., New Brunswick evidence, p. 193.
38. L. Rotenberg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century," in J. Acton et al., eds., Women at Work, pp. 33-63.
39. RCCL, Quebec evidence, pp. 476, 483.

40. Ibid., Ontario evidence, p. 168. A.T. Freed was the curious commissioner.
41. Ibid., Quebec evidence, p. 481.
42. Ibid., p. 485.
43. Ibid., Report I, p. 9; Report II, p. 79. Historians have begun to spill a lot of ink over the fact that the Commissioners divided among themselves and produced two reports. See B. Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour in the 1880s," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science XXVII, 2 (May 1961), pp. 150-3; G. Kealey, introduction to his one volume edited version of the Royal Commission, Canada Investigates Industrialism (Toronto, 1973); F. Harvey, "Une enquête ouvrière au XIXe siècle: la Commission du travail, 1886-1889," in Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française 30, 1 (juin 1976), pp. 35-53 and G. Vallières, "La Commission royale sur les relations du travail avec le capital au Canada 1886-89," unpublished M.A. thesis (history), University of Ottawa, 1973. The two reports are in fact quite similar although there does seem to be slightly more sympathy for the workers displayed in the second report whose signators were more closely connected with workers' associations. But on the question of female labour, the two reports differ only in wording.
44. Berit Ås, "On Female Culture," Acta Sociologica 18, 2-3, pp. 142-61.