GENDER, FLEXIBILITY AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis considers the use of flexible employment practices in the public sector in British Columbia. Despite attempts by successive Social Credit administrations to reduce the size of government, employment in the provincial public sector has increased since the mid 1970s. However, the number of full-time, unionised workers has declined since 1975. Increasingly, clerical positions in various Ministries have been filled by temporary agency workers, while other government jobs have been subcontracted.

In an effort to move beyond the core/periphery and numerical/functional dualisms characteristic of much of the flexibility literature, I consider the gendering of particular types of flexibility, including temporary work and subcontracting. The focus upon changes in government employment practices is also an attempt to illuminate the role of flexible working in the public sector, which has been largely overlooked in debates surrounding flexibility. The thesis draws primarily upon interview data from two case studies: one of the British Columbia Buildings Corporation, and another of clerical workers in the Ministry of Social Services.
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INTRODUCTION

The term 'flexibility' has numerous interpretations within the literature on contemporary industrial restructuring. The extent of its popularity, Martha Macdonald suggests, is comparable to that of "the ubiquitous prefix 'post.'" In fact, Macdonald continues, the two are connected:

the essence of this 'post' period -- whether postmodern, post-fordist or post-industrial -- is said to be flexibility -- flexible specialisation, flexible accumulation, flexible firm, labour market flexibility, the "Age of Flexibility."¹

This new, more 'flexible' age has been characterised as one in which production techniques and processes are more easily adjusted (generally through the use of new technologies); in which the labour process is more readily transformed; and in which working time and payment arrangements can be altered with little effort. Since the late 1960s, it is often argued, an emerging crisis within capitalism has led to a restructuring of the global economy, in which the post-war regime of Fordism has been transformed (or is in the process of being transformed) into one dominated by flexibility.

Many discussions of flexibility have examined manufacturing industry. The manufacturing emphasis has often led to a technological focus on flexible manufacturing systems. Evaluations of changes in the realm of labour and employment practices have been more limited. Geographers' discussions have tended to reproduce the emphases of other literatures: they have considered, for example, the role of changes within manufacturing

in the creation and recreation of "industrial complexes." David Harvey, drawing upon the theorising of the French regulation school, has proposed that capitalism has been newly configured into a regime of flexible accumulation. More specific debates have considered changes in the spatial organisation of production. However, discussions of flexibility within geography have not been particularly attentive to questions of gender, nor to transformations in work in the service or public sectors.

Macdonald and others have provided wide-ranging examinations of

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the flexibility literature. My thesis presents a more specific perspective: I am primarily concerned with changes in labour and employment practices within two case studies in the British Columbia public sector. Flexibility as a management strategy has been explicitly promoted by neo-conservative governments at both national and sub-national levels. New Right administrations in many western nations, including Britain and the United States, have been involved in the restructuring of their own workforces, often through the implementation of flexible working. I examine transformations both in a provincial government ministry and in a Crown corporation. In clerical work within the Ministry of Social Services, the dominant form of flexibility is the use of temporary agency workers; in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation (BCBC), subcontracting has become a central feature of the workforce.

The question which I wished the empirical studies to address was: does the use of different types of flexible work practices differ by gender? Clerical work in Social Services is done predominantly by women. In contrast, the B.C. Buildings Corporation workforce is principally male. In Veronica Beechey and Tessa Perkins’ Coventry case study, they

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found that employers had devised different methods of attaining flexibility where men were employed from those where women were employed.\(^7\)

In both manufacturing and welfare state sectors, women were employed part-time, while overtime/shift work generally was adopted to achieve flexibility in occupations dominated by men. This distinction resulted, they argue, from the direct entry of gender into the construction of part-time work.\(^8\) In the thesis, I have attempted to develop Beechey and Perkins’ argument further. Rather than looking at the gendering of just one form of flexible working, I have considered the ways in which flexibility has been enacted in both a workforce which is primarily female, and in one where men are dominant.

Although Beechey and Perkins understand that it is necessary to explicitly consider issues of gender in relation to flexible working, gender as a theoretical category is frequently neglected within writing on flexibility. In the thesis, I suggest that standard categories often used in the literature need reworking. While gender is an important component of contemporary restructuring, transformations in work have not necessarily followed gender lines. It has not always been men who have benefitted under a more flexible form of labour organisation, and it has not always been women who have been disadvantaged by it.

**CASE STUDIES: THE GENDERING OF FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES**

In the thesis, I have been concerned to consider the ways in which gender divisions are produced and reproduced within a more 'flexible'

\(^7\) Veronica Beechey and Tessa Perkins, 1987 *A matter of hours: women, part-time work and the labour market* Polity, Cambridge, p. 144.

\(^8\) The central thrust of their argument is that part-time workers, for example, are often defined by their domestic responsibilities.
workforce. One of the ways in which it seemed possible to consider the
gendering of flexible work practices was to consider how flexibility operated
in particular work contexts. Much of the theoretical discussion has taken
place at such an abstract level that it is frequently unable to deal with the
complexity of flexible working arrangements. Smith, for example, states
that

[a]bstract pronouncements on the fixed character of capitalist
social relations are inadequate, but creating theories on the
appearance of "particular configurations of hardware and social
organisation" without attention to their contradictory nature
and particularity is not a satisfactory approach to a theoretical
understanding of capitalist diversity.9

Those empirical studies which have been conducted have either
relied on large scale data sets,10 or have involved interviews with senior
management.11 A consideration of data sets is frequently problematic, for
as Beechey and Perkins have argued,

[a] focus on the employment statistics to demonstrate
 disposability ironically has the effect of concealing some of the
other ways in which restructuring has taken place.12

In the case of part-time work, for example, a reorganisation of part-time
hours might have taken place, rather than an absolute change in the
numbers of part-time workers.13 Further, interviewing management alone

9 Chris Smith, 1991 "From 1960s automation to flexible specialisation: a
David Harvey, 1982 The limits to capital University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 133.

10 Angela Dale and Claire Bamford, 1991 "Temporary workers: cause for
concern or complacency?" Work, employment and society 2 191-209; Bernard Casey, 1991

11 Laurie Hunter and John MacInnes, 1991 Employers' labour use strategies --

12 Beechey and Perkins, op. cit., p. 130.

13 Ibid.
makes it difficult to gain a perspective on the ways in which flexibility works itself out on the office or shop floor. Voices of workers -- and particularly female workers, because of their frequent exclusion from positions of power -- are rendered silent. By interviewing workers, therefore, I have attempted to shed light on employees' views of flexible working. I have been particularly interested in finding out how public sector workers' jobs have changed over time, as a result of the introduction of practices such as temporary work and subcontracting.

The research strategy was shaped in part by my contact with officials of the British Columbia Government Employees Union. They provided me with names of shop stewards in both the Ministry of Social Services and in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation who are active in the union, and with whom I conducted preliminary interviews. I encountered considerable difficulties in setting up further interviews with other workers -- I found that management personnel in both sectors were wary of a project which considered the restructuring of their workforces.\[14\] The Ministry of Social Services did eventually approve the project, but in the case of BCBC, opposition was so strong that I was required to recast the interview schedule as a questionnaire.\[15\]

Because of tensions between management and workers, confidentiality was a significant concern. I have used pseudonyms

\[14\] It should be noted that the interviews took place at a very particular time and place -- a New Democratic Party government had been elected only a month or so earlier, and thus the responses of management hired during the Social Credit regime were not perhaps surprising. There was a particular concern with my association with the BCGEU.

\[15\] Interviews and questionnaires were supplemented with membership data obtained from the B.C. Government Employees Union, with Annual Reports of the B.C. Buildings Corporation, with various government publications and with local newspaper reports.
throughout the thesis. Obtaining permission from the Ministry of Social Services to interview clerical workers (with the stipulation that they be conducted on workers' own time) was an important step, for management's approval meant workers' participation in my project would be unlikely to jeopardise their employment situation. Further, I hoped to empower workers by providing them with some of the 'results' of my interviews. A number of clerical workers had expressed an interest in finding out how people in other offices responded to my questions concerning job responsibilities, hours of work and overtime, for example, and in an effort to transform the interview process into a conversation rather than a one-way flow of information, I produced a summary of findings, which I submitted to the workers I had interviewed.

CHAPTER ORGANISATION

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the literatures out of which the project developed. It argues that discussions of flexibility must accord centrality both to the ways in which gender constructs forms of flexible working, and to processes of restructuring within the public sector. The primary aim of Chapter 3 is to provide a general historical overview of the changing political scene in British Columbia from 1975 to 1992, as a background for the more specific work contexts outlined in the case study chapters. I attempt to describe the local version of the New Right, for, as Gamble has argued,

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16 I did not inform either the employer or the B.C. Government Employees' Union about who had or had not given their consent to be interviewed.
The crisis in the regime of accumulation and the shifts in the political organisation of the world system which took place in the 1970s were the fundamental changes which made a new politics possible and necessary. But the content of this new politics was often provided by local concerns, specific to the institutions and circumstances of particular countries.\footnote{Andrew Gamble, 1988 *The free economy and the strong state: the politics of Thatcherism* Macmillan, London, p. 11. Gamble suggests that Thatcherism was "one particular national response" to the "crisis of accumulation and the crisis of social democracy." (p. 20).}

A consideration of the B.C. case is particularly appropriate because of the dominance of neo-conservative discourses in the province since the election of Bill Bennett in 1975. I also note the positioning of the case studies relative to other parts of the provincial public sector.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the case studies central to the thesis: they explore changes in the organisation of clerical work in the Ministry of Social Services, and the restructuring of the employee/employer relationship in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation respectively. The case studies were chosen initially in an attempt to examine differences between an organisation in which the majority of the employees are male, and one in which women comprise the greater number of workers. As I have indicated above, in Social Services the dominant process is temporary work; in BCBC, full-time unionised positions have increasingly been replaced by subcontractors.

In Chapter 4, I examine not only the expansion of temporary working within the Ministry of Social Services, but also a number of other ways in which the provincial government has been able to acquire flexibility in its clerical workforce. I consider the role of overtime working and the movement of full-time workers from one position to another. The final section of the chapter considers the construction of gender within temp work.
The expansion of subcontracting in the B.C. Buildings Corporation, which began with the Corporation’s formation and has continued throughout its history, has had implications for both union members and ‘non-permanent’ subcontract staff. Intersections between different groups have the effect of breaking down the seemingly rigid categories of core and periphery. Gendered differences between types of subcontracting arrangements also appear to deconstruct this dualism. In Chapter 5, I discuss changes in the organisation of work in BCBC, including changes in job categories and modifications in overtime arrangements. I also consider the gendering of subcontracting as a process. In both chapters, I argue that flexible working practices look different for men and women because they are infused with traditional notions of gendered work. Chapter 6 both considers the differences between each of the case studies, and summarises the arguments presented in the thesis.
I have attempted to address the question of flexibility by tracing through two lines of argument. In each case, my starting point is a particular silence in the literature. The first discussion begins with the 'problem' of making women visible in discussions of flexibility. Not only are women as actors largely absent within most descriptive commentaries, but also gender as a theoretical category has been neglected. A second point of entry into discussions of flexibility involves the recognition that there has been little discussion of restructuring in the service sector. As a result, changes in the organisation of work in the public sector have generally been overlooked, and links between discussions of the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and analyses of flexible work practices have not been highly developed.

**GENDER AND FLEXIBILITY**

In many discussions of flexibility, women are absent. At best, women are acknowledged as "marginal" workers, but more crucially, the theorisation of gender is typically inadequate. The central difficulty in most analyses is a general assumption that more 'flexible' workforces are increasingly divided into 'core' and 'periphery', 'standard' and 'non-standard'. There is a problem of dualism, I want to argue, which runs through almost all of the writing on flexible working. Discussions of core and periphery present a static model -- but divisions among workers are by

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1 The periphery is clearly defined as 'not-core': we do not see 'contingent and 'non-contingent', for example.
no means clear-cut, nor are they stable. Unequal relations between, for example, male and female workers, or workers and employers, are continually reproduced within the dynamic of restructuring.²

Discussions of flexibility in labour practices have been influenced primarily by two sources. The first is a body of writing by John Atkinson at the Institute of Manpower studies in Britain,³ and the second is Michael Piore and Charles Sabel's The second industrial divide, which emerged from an American context.⁴

John Atkinson has pointed to an increasing trend towards what is sometimes called "contingent" work -- that is, work which is no longer full-time and permanent, but rather part-time, temporary, and almost always without benefits. Over the last decade, many firms in the United Kingdom have been pursuing employment relations that give them greater flexibility

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³ John Atkinson, 1984 "Flexibility, uncertainty and manpower management" Institute of Manpower Studies Report No. 89 I.M.S., Brighton; John Atkinson and Denis Gregory, 1986 "A flexible future: Britain's dual labour force" Marxism Today, April, pp. 12-17; John Atkinson, 1987 "Flexibility or fragmentation? The United Kingdom labour market in the eighties" Labour and Society 12 87-105

⁴ Michael J. Piore and Charles Sabel, 1984 The second industrial divide: possibilities for prosperity Basic Books, New York. Martha Macdonald states that Piore and Sabel's text, along with Atkinson's work, were "the two works most responsible for setting the tone of discussion in the labour literature" (Martha Macdonald, 1991 "Post-Fordism and the flexibility debate" Studies in Political Economy 36, p. 179).
in their workforce. In explaining changes in the nature of work, Atkinson suggests that employers have used two different types of flexibility. The first he calls numerical flexibility: this refers to the actions which firms take in order to accommodate changes in quantity of their labour needs. Under numerical flexibility, employees are hired on a temporary or part-time basis. They may not have a direct relationship with the firm at all, being, for example, subcontracted or self-employed. Atkinson's second type is functional flexibility, which refers to the use of particular work practices, such as multi-skilling or cross-training, which enable workers to cross occupational boundaries.

Atkinson suggests each of these types of flexibility are particular to different segments of the labour market. He describes a division in the labour market between two groups, core and periphery. Workers in the core group "are full-time permanent career employees; for example managers, designers, technical sales staff, quality control staff, technicians and

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5 Anna Pollert has stressed the links between the Institute of Manpower Studies and the British government. See Anna Pollert, 1988b "The 'flexible firm': fixation or fact?" Work, Employment and Society 2 281-316, particularly the section entitled "The 'flexible firm' and government labour market and employment policy" (pp. 307ff.) While Atkinson does discuss the problems flexibility poses for labour, and also suggests potential strategies to deal with, for example, "extending union influence to the periphery" (1987, p. 101), he does argue that "the successful firm will design a manning [sic] strategy which incorporates this diversity and turns it to advantage" (1984, p. 9, emphasis mine). By 'diversity', Atkinson refers to divisions between, for example, full-time and part-time workers.

6 Atkinson does refer to a further category, termed financial flexibility, under which firms alter systems of payment -- one example might be the negotiation of annual hours contracts. Financial flexibility is seen to be allied to each of the other forms. For example, a payment scheme based on assessment (rather than a rate-for-the-job system) might encourage functional flexibility (Atkinson, 1987, op. cit., p. 12).
craftsmen.” Core workers are seen to possess firm-specific skills: ones which cannot easily be brought in.” The peripheral workforce is comprised of two groups. Workers in the first of these are also full-time employees, but in contrast to core employees, they "are offered a job, not a career.” Atkinson suggests that "they might have clerical supervisory, component assembly and testing occupations.” In this group, flexibility can be achieved by a high level of turnover in the workforce, due to lack of career prospects, and systematisation of job content around a narrow range of tasks, together with a recruitment strategy directed particularly at women...

In the second peripheral group, part-time working, short term contracts and job sharing are designed to “maximise flexibility while minimising commitment to the worker, job security and career development.” In addition to the two 'peripheral' categories, there exists an 'external' group which performs tasks which are not firm-specific. Atkinson provides two examples of when this might occur: if they are very specialised (e.g. systems analysis) or very mundane (e.g. office cleaning), the firm is increasingly likely to resource them outside, through the use of subcontracting, self-employed jobbers, temporary help agencies, etc.

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7 Atkinson, 1984, op. cit., p. 15. Emphasis mine: the gender of the "craft" workers is not incidental, as we shall see shortly. Atkinson’s concentric circle diagram of the 'flexible firm' workforce is reproduced in David Harvey, 1989 The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry in to the origins of cultural change Blackwell, Oxford, p. 151.

8 Atkinson, 1984, op. cit., p. 15.

9 Ibid, p. 17.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Interestingly, Atkinson notes that "privatisation in public sector agencies is perhaps the most well known aspect of this trend..." (Ibid., p. 18.)
Despite Atkinson's itemisation of several different types of "peripheral" work, the fundamental axis of distinction in the 'flexible firm' model is a core/periphery one. It is this divide which presents significant problems in thinking about gender. In the model, functional flexibility (or multi-skilling) is seen to be a feature of the core workforce, while peripheral workers provide numerical flexibility -- they are the part-time and temporary workers. One of the underlying assumptions is that core workers are white men, and peripheral workers are women and minority men, although that assumption is never fully explained in Atkinson's work.

In the same year that Atkinson constructed his model of the 'flexible firm', Michael Piore and Charles Sabel published a text that has also become influential: The second industrial divide. Piore and Sabel see flexibility as part of an option provided by what they call a 'new industrial divide' to transform both production and markets from a system based on mass production to one of 'flexible specialisation'. While the production of standardised goods relied on a semi-skilled and unskilled labour force, current changes in the production process, they argue, mean that skilled workers are needed: people with general talents who can make quick

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14 Atkinson's examples often refer to gender divisions: in the banking sector, he suggests, "a stable, career-orientated, male-dominated internal labour market coexists with a clerical labour market which is secondary in most respects..." (Ibid., p. 5).

15 Piore and Sabel's influence upon Marxist literature is perhaps surprising, given that technology and market demand, rather than relations of production within capitalism, are central forces within their discussion (Macdonald, op. cit., p. 180). Numerous criticisms of The second industrial divide have been offered -- a substantial review can be found in Karel Williams, Tony Cutler, John Williams and Colin Haslam, 1987 "The end of mass production?" Economy and Society 16 405-439. Richard Hyman's neo-Marxist critique is also of interest (Richard Hyman, 1988 "Flexible specialisation: miracle or myth?," in New technology and industrial relations. Ed. Richard Hyman and Wolfgang Streeck. Basil Blackwell, Oxford).

16 Pollert, 1991, op. cit., p. xviii
adjustments to changing markets and more differentiated tastes.\textsuperscript{17}

Piore and Sabel's perspective is an interventionist one: Julie Graham, for example, has stated that they "create a knowledge of the failings of mass production and the potential of flexible specialisation in a conscious attempt to shape the industrial development process."\textsuperscript{18} A more recent, but parallel perspective is to be found in Robert Reich's \textit{The work of nations}.\textsuperscript{19} Reich implies that a more flexible workforce will provide the solution to America's current economic problems. His vision of the future is one in which 'symbolic analysts' (highly skilled white collar workers) will be the primary creators of value, while 'routine producers' and 'in-person servers' will perform "simple and repetitive tasks."

Highlighting the role of gender within flexible employment practices is an attempt to overturn the dualistic conception of segmentation which features prominently in almost all of the writing on flexibility in work practices. While I use John Atkinson's core/periphery and

\textsuperscript{17} There is a spatial dimension to the need for skilled workers: Piore and Sabel have written about regional conglomerations of production units (op. cit., p. 265ff), which has particularly attracted the attention of Marxist geographers (for example, Michael Storper and Richard Walker, 1989 \textit{The capitalist imperative: territory, technology and industrial growth} Blackwell, Oxford). Martha Macdonald (op. cit., p. 180) notes that Piore and Sabel's suggestion that flexible specialisation will entail a return to the skilled craft worker clearly flies in the face of analyses (such as those by Braverman and Burawoy) of the struggle between capital and labour in the workplace, which emphasised the degradation of work and the deskilling of labour (Harry Braverman, 1974 \textit{Labour and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century} Monthly Review Press, New York; Michael Burawoy, 1979 \textit{Manufacturing consent} University of Chicago Press, Chicago. It is, however, important to note that Burawoy is critical of Braverman.

\textsuperscript{18} Julie Graham, 1991 "Fordism/Post-fordism, Marxism/Post-Marxism: the second cultural divide?" \textit{Rethinking Marxism} 4, p. 45. There is perhaps a question as to the extent to which Piore and Sabel, as academics, could shape industrial development, but Graham suggests that their work "articulat[es] an industrial way forward," which "stands in contrast to the more retrospective project of the Regulation School" (fn. 12).

numerical/functional distinctions as a point of reference, I do not wish to limit my critique to Atkinson’s work, as others also assume the existence of 'core' and 'periphery'.

This is an argument which Anna Pollert has developed: she suggests that the "left-reformist" writing of Piore and Sabel, and the "manpower/management studies" literature of Atkinson et al. have a "distinctive conceptual alliance." Both the 'flexible firm' and 'flexible specialisation' literatures provide a "legitimation of dualism as a dynamic and progressive force for the current period." The segmentation of the workforce into core and periphery in Atkinson’s model should be clear from the discussion above, as should be the status hierarchy constructed as part of this division. Peripheral workers are less central to the operations of the firm than are the "skilled" employees of the core: "they are important, but not part of the 'core business.'" Piore and Sabel’s discussion also sets up a core/periphery divide. While their theory does not employ the language of a core workforce, it nevertheless assumes such a development in the success of the 'flexible firm', either in the industrial district or the firm.

The perceived division of the workforce into core and periphery presents a particular problem in thinking about the position of women, as is reflected in the following extract from John Atkinson’s 1984 research paper:

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21 Ibid., p. 47. It might be argued that Piore and Sabel and Atkinson see only functional flexibility as progressive -- that it is only one side of the dualism which heralds benefits for workers. However, the close links between core and periphery do not allow for such a separation.

22 Pollert, 1988b, op. cit., p. 283.

The clear implication for employees is that one man’s pay, security and career opportunities will increasingly be secured at the expense of the employment conditions of others, often women, more of whom will find themselves permanently relegated in dead end, insecure and low paid jobs.\textsuperscript{24}

As the quotation reveals, there exists a general conception that core workers are male and peripheral workers female. Yet, as Sylvia Walby has argued, the significance of women’s appearance as part-time or temporary workers in the so-called periphery does not form part of Atkinson’s theoretical analysis.\textsuperscript{25} In the quotation, there is a slippage from "one man" to "others" and then to "women". However, it is not simply a matter of coincidence that peripheral workers are "often women": rather, gender is of fundamental importance to the ways in which work is organised. The categories of part-time and temporary work, for example, are constructed as female. At the theoretical level, Atkinson’s dualistic, core/periphery model cannot address the significance of the gender of flexible workers.

The following two subsections critique two dualisms in Atkinson’s model: the first considers a numerical/functional split, and the second addresses a core/periphery division. There is an important point to note at the outset. Atkinson’s model developed largely out of private sector manufacturing examples. Particularly in the case of functional flexibility, Atkinson discusses "multi-skilling" in the context of the movement of "craftsmen" between jobs such as "mechanical, electrical and pneumatic jobs."\textsuperscript{26} In thinking about the service sector in general, and public sector services in particular, it is necessary to be clear about how Atkinson’s model

\textsuperscript{24} Atkinson, 1984, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 25.


\textsuperscript{26} Atkinson, 1984, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.
refers to core and periphery in sectors other than manufacturing. One division might be between management and other, predominantly unskilled, workers. In the case of public sector services, the core could be constructed as unionised employees and the periphery as non-union subcontract or temporary workers. As I argue below, however, the core/periphery division is a generally unsatisfactory one which does not capture the complexities of flexible working.

**Overturning number and function**

The primary forms of flexible working visible in the two case studies addressed in this thesis are temporary work (within clerical work in the Ministry of Social Services) and subcontracting (in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation). Under the terms of Atkinson's model, these

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27 Although Atkinson provides examples taken from the service sector (e.g. banking: 1984, *op. cit.*, p. 5) as well as the public sector (1984, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 18), the 'evidence' from these sectors tends to be more anecdotal than that from manufacturing industry.

28 Wood suggests that fast-food chains such as McDonald's "tend to operate with a small administrative core and a large predominantly unskilled workforce" (*op. cit.*, p. 17). On the fast-food industry, see Ester Reiter, 1988 "The interchangeable worker and fighting back: identifying some strategic issues" *Labour/le Travail* 21 173-189. Reiter notes that 'marginal' workers are not considered to be 'real' workers: she writes that "thus we have the contradiction of an economic growth that is based on the lives of women and teenagers as non-wage workers, so that they can properly be considered a cheap and dispensable labour force" (p. 178).
practices appear to represent two different forms of numerical flexibility. According to the strict terms of the model, functional flexibility does not appear to exist in either temp work or the subcontracting of building services. To uncover further the processes by which particular relations of power are produced and reproduced, however, the functional/numerical core/periphery distinction must be reworked. As a starting point, I want to suggest that functional flexibility is actually enacted in jobs that women do, which are often defined as 'peripheral'. Such a possibility stands in direct contradiction to Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model. In the model, the notion of skill is unproblematised, and thus work generally done by women -- for example, clerical/secretarial work in BCBC and the Ministry of Social Services -- is defined as unskilled. In this case, there can be, by definition, 

29 Subcontracting remains relatively untheorised in Atkinson's model. In his 1984 paper, Atkinson provides the example of "the privatisation of local authority direct works or refuse collection departments, where the aim of externalisation is not to allow for unpredictable fluctuations in workload, but to achieve new working practices and higher productivity" (op. cit., 1984, p. 29). Atkinson thus describes this particular case of subcontracting/outsourcing as an example of functional, rather than numerical, flexibility. In a later article, he distinguishes between numerical flexibility, functional flexibility, and distancing, suggesting that "the displacement of employment contracts by commercial contracts" represented "an alternative to flexibility, rather than another form of flexibility" (Atkinson, 1987, op. cit., p. 90.) Margison has defined numerical flexibility for his purposes as the use of short-term contracts, subcontracting and outsourcing (Paul Margison, 1991. "Change and continuity in the employment structure of large companies," in Pollert, ed., 1991, op. cit). For my purposes here, it is most useful to think about a subcontract workforce as being numerically flexible. Note also in terms of the Ministry of Social Services that I focus only on one segment of the workforce: clerical workers.

30 John Holmes has suggested that subcontracting is "something of a 'chaotic conception'" (John Holmes, 1986 "The organisation and locational structure of production subcontracting," in Production, work, territory: the geographical anatomy of industrial capitalism Ed. Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper Allen and Unwin, Boston, p. 84). There are a wide range of ways in which firms have made use of subcontract work. Within the literature on the organisation of production, for example, there has been discussion of subcontracting arrangements which involve technologically sophisticated labour processes and within which functional flexibility is visible (the term "specialty subcontracting" has been used -- see Holmes, p. 86). Note, however, that the subcontracting literature frequently refers to private sector manufacturing industry, and that Atkinson most often equates functional flexibility with work processes in the core.
no multi-skilling, and therefore no functional flexibility.  

It is first necessary to examine the way in which skill appears in Atkinson's model. Atkinson has suggested that particular firms desire varying levels of skill from each of the core/periphery groups: core workers will have "firm-specific skills and experience, while peripheral workers will possess "either general, transferrable skills or no skills at all." Numerical and functional flexibility are empirically separate: the firm does not want numerical flexibility from core workers, but rather "versatility and adaptability in what such workers do and how they do it," i.e. functional flexibility. Workers in the core labour force "acquire and deploy new skills in different jobs," while peripheral workers "conduct... routine and mechanical activities." A central organising principle of the numerical/functional distinction is, therefore, classification by skill.

Atkinson has represented firms' flexibility requirements diagrammatically: I have reproduced his chart in Figure 1. The vertical axis displays increasing levels of skill, while the horizontal represents the specificity of that skill to the particular firm, from widely transferable skills on the left to those which are specific to particular, possible unique, company requirements on the right. 

Skill within this schema is described as "straightforward technical

31 Within Atkinson's framework, clerical workers in Social Services are part of the peripheral group I (see above).

32 Atkinson, 1984, p. 5.


34 Ibid.


36 Ibid., p. 91.
Figure 1
Firms' flexibility requirements

Source: Atkinson, 1987, op. cit., p. 94.
competence."  

Yet as feminists have continually asserted, skill is socially constructed. While Atkinson and others assume that distinctions between 'men's' work and 'women's' work lie in skill differentials, differences do not rest on the inherent quality of the work but almost entirely on the meaning given to it, and men and women are engaged in constructing this meaning.

An absolute definition of skill, however, is pervasive, and thus it is not surprising that social constructions continue to affect the ways in which women perceive their work. As Linda McDowell has suggested, "women themselves often have to be persuaded of the skilled nature of their work."

I want to move beyond simply rejecting the argument that work

37 Ibid.


40 Charles Sabel, in a book written several years prior to The second industrial divide, displays tables describing the composition of workforces in the textile and electronics industries. Each has two columns, one labeled "women" and another labelled "skilled workers." Charles Sabel, 1982 Work and politics Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. As Jane Jenson has commented, "women are confined to quite 'different' places" (op. cit., p. 143). There would appear to be links between the cultural construction of a whole set of binaries as natural: male/female, skilled/unskilled, public/private, core/periphery, etc. Cf. Joy Parr's discussion of these "galloping pairs": "fixed oppositions," she argues, "are established contrasts which distil diversity to dualism" (Joy Farr, 1990 The gender of breadwinners: women, men and change in two industrial towns 1880-1950 University of Toronto Press, Toronto, p. 9).

which women do is unskilled. If we insist on a refutation of a male notion of skill, it becomes evident that, for example, clerical work in Social Services does involve a substantial degree of skill, and as a result bears a strong similarity to the functionally flexible workforce outlined by Atkinson, as well as to the flexibly specialised workforce described by Piore and Sabel. This is not to disregard the substantial power firms have to define skills, nor to overlook the fact that firms treat workers differently based on those definitions of skills, but rather that modifying the conventional conception of functional flexibility allows us to capture particular forms of flexible working which lie beyond the bounds of the standard model, and from which firms are often able to derive benefit. I develop this point further in the case study chapters.

Interestingly, a later paper by Atkinson does mention briefly the appearance of functional flexibility within service sector jobs. In an assessment of the extent to which flexible working was making an appearance in practice, Atkinson reports that

functional flexibility has been largely restricted to manufacturing firms; in the service sector the degree of multi-skilling was either fairly trivial or customary.42

Multi-skilling in the female-dominated service sector, then, appears to be of

little importance.\textsuperscript{43} In many jobs that women do, the wide range of skills required is frequently overlooked.

In Chapter 4 and 5 I argue that rather than being discrete categories, the ideas behind 'numerical' and 'functional' flexibility are intertwined. The idea of functional flexibility is actually enacted in some women's jobs such as secretarial work. Women's work is constructed as a homogeneous category and defined as unskilled.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Re-examining core and periphery}

While it is useful to provide an analysis which reveals the variability in the employment contracts in the organisation of work, the concepts of 'core' and 'periphery' serve to obscure, rather than highlight, this perspective.\textsuperscript{45}

Certainly we must argue that people are placed in different ways within the labour force. Attempts to restructure the labour force along more flexible lines have clearly pushed some workers into positions of disadvantage. However, the central point to this section is that we should continually problematise an overriding schema which fits all people at all times and in all places.

Studies which have considered the segmentation of the labour

\textsuperscript{43} Although Atkinson does not develop this assertion in detail, there is a need to draw out some of the implications of his statement. Some authors' empirical studies of the service sector note that 'cross-training' or 'multi-skilling' practices are limited: Crompton and Sanderson report that workers in the hotel industry, for example, were given responsibility not only for undertaking chambermaid duties, but also for peeling potatoes in the kitchen (Rosemary Crompton and Kay Sanderson, 1990 \textit{Gendered jobs and social change} Unwin Hyman, London). Clearly this form of flexibility does not really develop the skills of workers, but rather simply expands the range of their job duties. This may be, as Atkinson implies, a common practice in some parts of the service sector. However, I argue that women's jobs in the public sector (and particularly in clerical positions) do require 'multi-skilled' workers, and further, that such multi-skilling is far from trivial.

\textsuperscript{44} On the homogeneity of the position of women in assembly line work in inter-war Britain, see Glucksman, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 206ff.

\textsuperscript{45} Pollert, 1988b, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 297.
market as a whole have rejected a primary/secondary division. Jean Martin and Ceridwen Roberts have argued that while their findings provide some empirical support for the view that the labour market is segmented along dual lines for women with the majority of women workers segregated in jobs with secondary characteristics... they do not support the idea that all women workers are secondary workers. Women workers... are more heterogeneous in their pay and job conditions than this simple dichotomy of the labour market implies.

There is, similarly, a difficulty with the fairly rigid dichotomy that Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model sets up.

Pollert contends that in defining a 'core', there is a danger in overlooking "segmentation in status, terms and conditions within the permanently employed." A parallel argument can also be made regarding a construction of a 'periphery'.

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46 Atkinson draws more heavily upon dual labour market theorising, rather than the later segmentation analysis, which allowed for more complex, and often intersecting, lines of division across categories of gender and race, for example. Dual labour market theory was central to Piore's earlier work. Cf. Peter Doeringer and Michael Piore, 1971 *Internal labour markets and manpower analysis*, Heath, Mass.; and S. Berger and M.J. Piore, 1980 *Dualism and discontinuity on industrial societies* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Both Jane Jenson (1989, *op. cit.*) and Anna Pollert (1988a, *op. cit.*) have noted this point.


48 So strong is the association between core/periphery and functional/numerical flexibility, that the relations between the four terms can be seen as a 2 x 2 grid. Atkinson's own diagram of the 'flexible firm' is a concentric circle, with 'core' workers, as their title would indicate, at the centre.


50 Cf. Beechey and Perkins on dual labour market theory -- they suggest that not only are 'secondary' sector workers defined negatively, as "not-A" with respect to workers in the primary sector, but also the secondary sector more generally is "poorly delineated." "Primary workers form the focal point of the analysis, and the concept of the primary worker is fleshed out much more fully than the concept of the secondary worker" (Beechey and Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 136).
differences, based on gender, in status and pay, among contract workers in BCBC. Neither is the position of temporary workers uniform within the Ministry of Social Services, as is indicated in Chapter 4. A core/periphery segmentation often makes little sense empirically.

Angela Coyle has argued that evidence from the contract cleaning industry in Britain indicates that women are at the forefront of a general dismantling of the employee/employer relationship, particularly in the public sector.\(^{51}\) Coyle suggests that "women are being used to pave the way for a significant deterioration in terms and conditions of employment."\(^{52}\) Her analysis parallels that of Stephen Pinch, who states that in the Southampton General Hospital,

the ancillary services which have so far been affected by competitive tendering have all been dominated by female workers who might be expected to be less resistant to change than some of the male-dominated services that have had a history of 'difficult' industrial relations in the past.\(^{53}\)

In both Coyle's and Pinch's analyses, the argument that it is women who first experience employment restructuring (and specifically the use of subcontracting) constructs women as a more easily exploited marginal workforce.

Yet the situation may not be as straightforward as such analyses suggest. It is not only gender divisions which affect the way in which public sector employers utilise flexible work practices. An official with the B.C. Government Employees Union commented that contracting out in the B.C.

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52 Ibid., p. 7.

public sector was facilitated, at least in part, by the ability of the private sector to provide a subcontract workforce. In the British Columbia Buildings Corporation, for example, one of the first types of work to be contracted out were male-dominated security jobs, because security firms were fairly well-established in Vancouver and Victoria. The expansion of temp agencies, such as Kelly, Olsten, Office Automation and the like, occurred somewhat later. The B.C. case studies thus appear to stand in contrast to the British analyses.

Alternatively, the particularities of the organisation of the British Columbia public sector may have played a role. The original Department of Public Works had very few cleaners. Contracting out did not originate there, but rather in BCBC, when cleaning staff were transferred into the Corporation from the Ministry of Health. The cleaning workforce in BCBC began to be subcontracted as a result of its status as a corporation, and, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Social Credit government's intent to model the Corporation on the private sector. Coyle argues that

if the subcontracting of ancillary services is successfully completed, other services will follow -- e.g. portering, ambulance and ground and building maintenance (jobs in which men predominate). However, the local organisation of the public sector in British Columbia has resulted in a situation different from that which Coyle and Pinch describe. In the B.C. public sector, male-dominated jobs were the first to be subcontracted.

To the extent that there are groups of workers who have been

54 Currently, government contracts appear to form a significant portion of temp firms' business: they have produced brochures which directly target the public sector.

55 Coyle, op. cit., p. 21.
disadvantaged by the increased use of flexible work practices, and the
disassembling of the employee/employer relationship, then, it is possible to
talk about positions of benefit and loss. Gender is of crucial importance in
the construction of such positions. Women in the British Columbia
Buildings Corporation, for example, who are employed under a
subcontracting arrangement are often placed in positions of disadvantage,
while certain of their male co-workers have benefitted from increased
subcontracting. However, it is also important to realise that a
core/periphery dichotomy is overly simplistic, and must be overcome in any
analysis of the development of flexible work practices.

The neglect of gender as a theoretical category represents a
fundamental weakness in Atkinson’s model. He does suggest that
functionally flexible core workers tend to be male, and that their position is
buttressed by numerically flexible workers in the periphery, who are often
women. But while women frequently may be positioned at the margins of
work arrangements, their situation, empirically, is often more complex than
Atkinson’s fairly inflexible statement about gender suggests. The 'flexible
firm' model does not allow a consideration of the gendering of flexibility in
other places. It is only numerical flexibility which appears gendered as
*female* -- women, for example, are effectively excluded from the particular
category of functional flexibility. In attempting to understand changes in
the organisation of work, it is essential to consider the ways in which ideas
about gender are constructed and reconstructed within work relations. Yet
the rigid nature of the 'flexible firm' model leaves little theoretical space for
thinking about gender.
Restructuring and the Public Services Sector

Debates surrounding flexibility have largely ignored the service sector. Many commentators have followed the work of Piore and Sabel and have focused on flexible specialisation, thereby reproducing both The second industrial divide’s technological emphasis, and the centrality accorded to flexible manufacturing systems within the book. Further, the use of the term “fordism” (in discussions which argue for a transition to a “postfordist” regime) often suggests a focus on manufacturing industry in general, and the automobile industry in particular. The “atavistic features of Piore and Sabel’s work,” Julie Graham has argued, has “tended to draw Marxists into the orbit of flexibility theory”:

[Piore and Sabel] centre their work on industry when others are heralding post-industrialism, on production when consumption has become a booming centre of social theory, on the economy and politics when culture has become the fashionable origin of change, and on work at the very moment when leisure is beckoning social analysis to a new frontier...

Despite the dominance -- at least in employment terms -- of the service sector in many western nations, analyses of manufacturing industry continue.

This is not to say that studies of the service sector do not exist -- but rather that these tend not to include discussions of flexibility. Many

56 Piore and Sabel, op. cit.

57 John Tomaney has argued that the automobile industry is seen in the flexible specialisation literature “as a harbinger, prefiguring changes in the wider economy” (John Tomaney, 1990 “The reality of workplace flexibility” Capital and Class 40, p. 39). A focus on male work in manufacturing itself reveals much about gendered notions of skill and work. Analyses of fordism/taylorism within clerical work have been undertaken, however. These have been prompted largely by Braverman’s arguments concerning the deskilling of clerical work (Braverman, op. cit.). See, for example, Rosemary Crompton and Stuart Reid, 1982 “The deskilling of clerical work,” in The degradation of work?: skill, deskilling and the labour process Ed. Stephen Wood Huchinson, London.

58 Graham, op. cit., p. 49.
assessments of the service industry involve attempts to define the service sector, or to map out, by type, particular subcategories of services. In endeavoring to delineate the nature of services, such studies do attempt, in part, to engage with the nature of service sector labour processes. However, discussions of flexibility have not often been central to such analyses.

Public sector services are a particular case. They have tended to be organised along traditional 'industrial' lines: they have, for example, offered relatively stable employment, particularly for women. Currently, however, it has been argued that public sectors in many western nations have seen the most dramatic changes in work organisation in recent years. Nevertheless, there has been limited interest in the expansion of flexible work practices in the public sector.

Several notable exceptions exist. One example is a West Midlands Low Pay Unit publication which argues for closer examination of flexible work practices within the British public sector. Case studies make visible

59 See Phil Blackburn, Rod Coombs and Kenneth Green, 1985 Technology, economic growth and the labour process Macmillan, London. They suggest that "a lot of ink has been spilt in attempting some embracing definition of what constitutes the service sector, much of it wasted by trying to unify to what is better left as diversity." (p. 147). A widely cited text is J. Gurshuny and I. Miles, 1983 The new service economy: the transformation of employment in industrial societies Francis Pinter, London. Two exceptions within geography are Susan Christopherson, 1989 "Flexibility in the US service economy and the emerging spatial division of labour" Transactions, Institute of British Geographers 14 131-143; and Peter Wood, 1991 "Flexible accumulation and the rise of business services" Transactions, Institute of British Geographers 16 160-172.

60 Anna Pollert was one of the first to make this point. See 1988a, op. cit.; and 1988b, op. cit. Pollert draws on the empirical work of N. Millward and M. Stephens, 1986 British workplace industrial relations, 1980-1984 Aldershot, Gower; and her argument has since been demonstrated empirically for the British case in Laurie Hunter and John MacInnes, 1991 Employers' labour use strategies -- case studies U.K. Department of Employment Research Paper No. 87. See also Eileen Phillips, 1987 "Pushing back the tide: women in the public sector" Feminist Review 27 17-21.

more flexible working arrangements -- they consider two government
departments in the West Midlands: the Department of Health and Social
Security and the Severn Trent Water Authority. In both cases, temporary
working has become widespread: temps are increasingly employed in
positions formerly filled by full-time, unionised workers. In the Severn
Trent Water Authority, Terry Potter reports, "white collar temporary staff"
grew by 47.5 per cent in 1986, while in the DHSS, 156 full time posts were
replaced by temporary workers.62

Potter notes the lack of research on the ways in which temporary
workers have been used in central and local government, and suggests that
this stems partly from difficulties in obtaining data: he argues that "the
systematic use of temporary working within government employment is not
something that the employer wants advertised."63 Additionally, Potter
states that those writing about the public sector have been constrained by
the New Right's success in shifting the terms of debate away from a
consideration of public services. He writes:

the research which has been undertaken in the private sector
has concentrated upon the strong commercial motives behind
the use of temporary workers. However, the growing emphasis
on 'value for money' in the public sector and the urge towards
privatisation has introduced such commercial factors to the
public sector without researchers in this field perceiving this
shift.64

Potter argues that temporary working has been introduced both "where
there is a need to make 'efficient' public expenditure cuts" (for example, in
the DHSS) and in parts of the public sector which are being prepared for

62 Ibid., p. 16.

63 Ibid., p. 15. This was an exceedingly familiar problem encountered during
the research for the present piece. See Chapter 3 below.

64 Ibid.
privatisation (the Severn Trent Water Authority).

Potter's research is clearly interventionist -- he argues that public sector unions have "failed to develop a workplace strategy to deal with the problems that temporary workers bring" and in presenting a public sector case study, he hopes to contribute to the building "of a policy that will help to produce a viable response to the challenge of flexible working." This is an impressive aim. However, a difficulty with Potter's piece is that he unproblematically accepts a division of workers into 'core' and 'periphery,' and in so doing, reproduces a dualistic conception of the ways in which flexible work practices have transformed the workforce. In the case studies, temporary workers are described as consisting of "an insecure poorly paid 'periphery'", while the government retains "a smaller established 'core' of skilled workers." Despite Potter's scare quotes, the language constructs a conceptual separation between the two groups, and his study avoids any detailed discussion of the ways in which increases in temp working may have affected the whole of the public sector workforce.

Instead of focusing on the economic imperatives lying behind flexible work practices, Peter Fairbrother highlights the importance of flexibility for labour control. His examination of the changing class position of state workers considers transformations in the nature of state employment, including both the numerical expansion of, and the rise of trade unionism.

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65 Potter, op. cit., p. 6, 56. For another interventionist statement (although emerging from the trade unions in the private sector), see CAITS, 1986 Flexibility: who needs it? Management want more flexible working. Why? What are their real aims? How can trade unions respond? CAITS, Polytechnic of North London, London.

66 Potter, op. cit., p. 5.
within, the public sector. Fairbrother argues that in large part due to the restructuring of the state, state workers have become increasingly militant: they have "increasingly displayed a capacity to organise and act in ways that indicate a recognition... of their subordination as waged workers." Fairbrother sees flexible work practices in the public sector as a reaction to this.

[Restructuring] involves a general pattern of change and reorganisation aimed at transforming the relations between labour and capital to achieve a controlled and malleable workforce.

Fairbrother observed increases in temporary working similar to those in Potter's study: casual labour was frequently used to deal with backlogs in the office. Further, he documented changes to offices' budgeting systems. Remuneration for overtime working began to be taken out of a budget separate from that used to pay for full-time staff. This arrangement, not surprisingly, altered the allocation of overtime substantially. Rather than adding full-time positions to the staff complement, management would utilise overtime hours to cope with increases in workload.

A further point developed by Fairbrother is the possibility that flexible work practices in the public sector are open to transformation by the local actions of workers and management. It was central government's intention in establishing a "Financial Management Initiative" in Inland

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68 Ibid.


70 Ibid., p. 69.
Revenue offices to decentralise management control. Local managers, it was believed, would "act to create 'efficient and effective' workforces." However, the result was often a shift to a more rigid arrangement, because workers refused to cooperate with management's requests concerning the day-to-day workings of the office. Workers resisted "aggressive management practices." Paradoxically, managers, on occasion, exercised their newly acquired discretion to underwrite inflexibility and to generate staff hostility. The outcome of flexible work practices, therefore, is affected by particular intersections between centralised decision making and local work circumstances.

While the previous studies consider the appearance of flexible working in the public sector as a phenomenon, they do not make explicit links between discussions of welfare state restructuring and flexible work practices. Stephen Pinch argues that a focus on flexibility is essential to understand fully changes in the welfare state. Changes in the welfare state are more complex than the notion of privatisation suggests, and Pinch contends that while writing on the welfare state has considered the ways in which the state has been organised and reorganised to meet the needs of capitalism, the concept of restructuring as employed in the context of analyses of manufacturing industry to mean a reordering of capitalist relations at local, regional and global levels has been generally ignored by

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71 Ibid., p. 80.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Pinch, op. cit.
those writing on the public sector. The use of ideas and concepts developed in the study of industrial restructuring to consider changes in the nature of the welfare state, Pinch argues, would reveal more clearly the extensive transformations in welfare systems which have taken place in recent years, such as the increased use of private contractors to provide services.

Apart from the previously-cited exceptions, the flexibility debate has largely bypassed the public sector. This is a paradoxical situation, given that, as Anna Pollert has argued, it is in the public sector "that the government as employer can make its neo-classical employment policies most directly felt." Thus one of the aims of this thesis is not only to address the omission of the public sector in discussions of flexible working, but also to construct links between the literature on flexible and contingent work and that on changes in the provision of state services. Although such connections are crucial for an understanding of the way in which economic regimes are shaped by political practices, this is by no means a straightforward task.

Difficulties arise because of the way in which changes in the welfare state have been theorised. In capitalism, it has been argued, the state fulfills both accumulation and legitimation functions. Accumulation was guaranteed under fordism in part through the transfer of social costs to public agencies. Legitimation of the social order was maintained by, among

75 Ibid., p. 906.

76 Ibid., p. 924. In outlining various components of the restructuring process, Pinch draws heavily on Doreen Massey’s arguments in Spatial divisions of labour (Doreen Massey, 1984 Spatial divisions of labour: social structures and the geography of production Macmillan, London), and more generally, upon British "localities" studies.

other things, "providing material concessions to subordinate classes."\(^{78}\)

An accumulation/legitimation analysis tends to focus on the output of the state, in terms of goods, services and regulatory structures -- as they affect different capitalist firms -- but tends to ignore the labour process within government. As a consequence, discussions of recent changes in the welfare state tend to highlight the withdrawal of public services and goods.

Because of the focus on the 'withdrawal of the state', theorising about transformations in the welfare state has primarily revolved around 'privatisation'.\(^{79}\) The restructuring of the public sector is seen as a withdrawal of programs/services.\(^{80}\) This is not necessarily helpful, first, because it obscures processes and changes in the parts of the public sector which continue to exist (i.e. have not been privatised), and second, because the term 'privatisation' assumes a coherent boundary between public and private. Both difficulties are related, and we can avoid them if we examine closely changes in the organisation of work in the public sector. Processes such as subcontracting and temporary work act to blur public/private

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\(^{78}\) Bob Jessop, 1990 *State theory: putting capitalist states in their place* Cambridge, Polity, p. 87. The accumulation/legitimation distinction is found primarily in the work of J. O'Connor, 1973 *The fiscal crisis of the state* St. Martin's Press, New York. See also Bob Jessop, 1982 *The capitalist state: Marxist theories and methods* New York University Press, New York. My discussion passes over the more complex ways in which the state acts to 'ensure' the profitability of capital. A point emphasised by Jessop is perhaps instructive here: he argues that "[i]t cannot be stressed too often that the role of the state is not to promote the narrow, economic interests of particular capitals but to secure the social conditions in which market forces can operate to maximize capital accumulation in the long-term" (1990, p. 185).


boundaries. The contracting out of services, for example, has been seen as privatisation, although, crucially, control remains in the hands of the government.

The New Right, which I discuss further in Chapter 3, has often asserted the need to "downsize" the public sector. Their policies are not limited to "privatisation", however, but rather, neo-conservative ideas are made visible in the form of the reorganisation of labour within the public sector. New Right governments in British Columbia and elsewhere use the rhetoric of "rolling back the state" when they have actually restructured government employment practices.81

In suggesting that we consider state labour, I am arguing for a recognition that state workers are positioned differently than workers in the private sector (leaving aside problems of this dividing line for the moment). There is a tendency to neglect this point, even among those who study public sector workers. Rosemary Crompton and Stuart Reid, in their analysis of the deskilling of clerical work, consider the example of clerical work in a local authority treasurer's department.82 They maintain that despite the location of work within the public sector, their focus is on the labour/capital relation. One footnote is worth quoting at length:

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81 Further, attempts at state "rollback" have not meant a more limited state. A point made frequently in the literature is that while 'the state' as welfare state has been partially withdrawn, planning and regulatory capacities are maintained. Cf. Gamble, op. cit.; and Graeme Duncan, 1989 "Endpiece: a defense of the welfare state," in Democracy and the capitalist state. Ed. Graeme Duncan Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 299, in which Duncan sets out a taxonomy of the "planning and regulatory state," the "owning state" and the "welfare state."

82 Crompton and Reid, op. cit.
Although we have spoken so far of labour and capital, the case material is drawn not from the private sector but concerns a public organisation. For two reasons we feel this is less problematic than it may at first seem. First, the example focuses on changes in the labour process which illustrate Braverman's thesis of the separation of conception and execution, irrespective of the organisation of the institution. Second, the rigid financial constraints on the public sector produce accounting procedures, management techniques and a concern for productivity comparable in many respects with those of the business firm.  

Their second point avoids a critical assessment of the attempt by the public sector to emulate private industry, and as a result, (most likely unintentionally) reproduces New Right ideas that the public sector should model itself on the private.

Yet, as Fairbrother has argued, state workers are in a particular position -- one, indeed, which is contradictory. They not only sell their labour power for wages, but are also employed:

\[
\text{in contexts where the 'immediate purpose' of their labour is to produce use values -- knowledge, health, shelter -- or to provide the means for participating in exchange relationships, through income maintenance.} \]

The state, Fairbrother argues, has a complex internal organisation which merits consideration. There is a need to examine "the systematic tensions between subordination to capital and the provision of needs, between work as waged labour and work as service." I discuss differences between the implementation of flexible work practices in the public and private sectors further in Chapter 4.

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83 Ibid., p. 208.


85 Ibid., p. 209.

86 Ibid., p. 209-210
If theorists of the state have tended to ignore the existence of labour within the state's employ, then it is also true that accounts of public sector labour relations have paid little attention to the nature of the state. Ferner writes:

public enterprise is part of the state; its logic of action and hence the functioning of industrial relations, must be understood in terms of the place that it occupies within the state.

If the state is considered at all, however, it is done so "only in the most descriptive terms."

The chapter has described the lines of argument out of which the thesis emerged. In a discussion of gender and flexibility, I have considered the possibility of dismantling a standard model -- particularly the numerical/functional and core/periphery divisions of the 'flexible firm'. In the section on restructuring and the public services sector, I have argued for an examination of changes in the public sector within a context of a shift to more flexible forms of working.

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88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.; Anthony Ferner, 1985 "Political constraints and management strategies: the case of working practices in British Rail" British Journal of Industrial Relations 23 47-70. The introductory chapter to a more recent edited collection goes some way to address state theory, however the point is not fully developed in the papers which form the remainder of the book (R. Mailly, S.J. Dimmock and A.S. Sethi, 1989 "The politics of industrial relations in the public services," in Industrial relations in the public services Ed. R. Mailly, S.J. Dimmock and A.S. Sethi Routledge, London).
THE STATE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR
BRITISH COLUMBIA 1975-1992

In this chapter, I present an overview of the recent political history of British Columbia and delineate the main features of recent public sector restructuring in order to situate the case studies. Between 1952 and 1991 — apart from the brief three year period (1972-75) when the New Democratic Party held office — the Social Credit (or "Socred") party has formed the government of B.C. As I have argued above, many considerations of changes in the welfare state have foregrounded the withdrawal of services provided by the state. Yet changes in employment structures of the public sector have also been significant. Although the Socreds have argued for a "rolling back" of the state, their efforts in British Columbia can be seen as a restructuring of employment relations within the provincial public sector.¹ Neo-conservative ideas concerning economic policy have been incorporated within the labour practices of the state itself.

Angela Coyle has suggested that the dismantling of the employee/employer wage relation has formed a significant part of the New Right's economic strategies.

¹ Gamble has noted that in Britain, government intervention occurred "to reorganise and restructure institutions and programs," which "produced some important changes in the way the public sector was organised, but the overall size of the public sector had not been reduced by 1987" (Andrew Gamble, 1988 The free economy and the strong state: the politics of Thatcherism Macmillan, London, p. 123).
Subcontract work, plus abolition of all legislation which controls and protects minimum pay and employment conditions have been key strategies in the Thatcher Government's policy of enabling 'market forces' to regulate wage levels and of enabling the lowest wage threshold to be found.

A substantial thrust of neo-conservative policy, as Coyle indicates, has been a general deregulation of labour markets in the economy as a whole. Further, however, I argue that governments have sought to reorganise public sector institutions within their own control. The central intent of this reorganisation, which has been evident in Britain and is also most visible in British Columbia, is a shift away from full-time, generally unionised work in the public sector, and a transformation in the conditions of employment. Neo-conservative ideologies concerning an economy 'free' from rigidities are manifest in the workplaces of the state -- the public sector -- as a move towards the 'flexible' practices of subcontracting and temporary work.

I begin by charting the organisation of the British Columbia public sector. Here the intent is not to provide an exhaustive plan of the entire public sector, but rather to reveal the contexts of the two subsections -- the B.C. Buildings Corporation and clerical work in the Ministry of Social Services -- that the thesis highlights in the form of case studies. Further, I examine how New Right ideas have been put into practice in British Columbia: I consider the development of flexible work practices as an

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3 In Britain, there have been direct links between the Institute of Manpower Studies and the British government. In British Columbia, the language of Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model has not been used explicitly. Core and periphery, functional and numerical flexibility have not been common parlance within provincial legislatures or ministries. However, in the Socreds attempt to redraw the boundaries of the state, flexible work practices are themselves apparent. This is not to say that Socred governments have not had their own local neo-conservative theorising upon which to draw. I discuss the Fraser Institute in further detail below.
outcome of a "local version" of the New Right. The main portion of the chapter discusses Social Credit policy from the election of William R. Bennett in 1975 to the defeat of the Social Credit party in October 1991.

**THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

The use of 'public sector' is immediately problematic, because it assumes a public/private divide. Clark and Dear, in their discussion of the state apparatus, argue that rather than attempting to define limits to state intervention, a "spectrum of state intervention" should be considered,

along which there exists a set of apparatus which, to a greater or lesser extent, are state controlled. At one end of this spectrum, representing total state control of an apparatus, we observe such institutions as the armed forces and the professional civil service. At the other end... we have the private organisation of civil society such as service clubs.

An important point to emerge from my empirical study of the B.C. 'public sector' is that Social Credit policies appear to have blurred boundaries between 'public' and 'private'. In both the British Columbia Buildings Corporation, as well as in the Ministry of Social Services, 'private' subcontract and temporary workers are employed alongside unionised workers who might be said to comprise the public sector workforce. Despite possible problems with the term, however, I use 'public sector' to refer,

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broadly, to all institutions of government.\textsuperscript{6}

Figure 2 depicts a limited diagram of the British Columbia public sector. At the centre of the chart is the Cabinet, which controls both Crown corporations and the various provincial ministries. It has been common practice among Social Credit administrations to rename and reshuffle departments and ministries. However, notwithstanding internal reorganisations, ministries as a whole remain the most 'direct' form of government employment.\textsuperscript{7} Prospective employees are hired at the Ministry level, to work in the Ministry of Forests, or Highways, for example.\textsuperscript{8} Clerical workers in the Ministry of Social Services, who form the object of inquiry in Chapter 4, can be located within the 'Ministries' category.

The second case study, the British Columbia Building Corporation, can be placed on the left side of Figure 2, in the sector labelled Crown corporations/government enterprises. Although cabinet ministers frequently sit on Crown corporations' Boards of Governors, corporations are distinct

\textsuperscript{6} For the purposes of data collection, Statistics Canada employs a particular definition of government. Government consists of both provincial and federal governments, "together with all bodies created by them, including territorial governments, municipalities, other legal entities with the power to levy taxes, and all other entities created or acquired by those governments or owned by them." A distinction is made between general government and government enterprises. General government is defined as "the central core of ministries and departments together with their special funds. This includes all boards, agencies, commissions and similar bodies created or acquired and owned by governments to provide services different in character, funding and/or cost from those provided by other sectors of the economy" (Emphasis mine). Government enterprise comprises "organisations created or acquired and owned by the government to sell goods and services on the open market and whose principal revenues derive from such sales" (Government of Canada 1986 Provincial and territorial government employment, catalogue 72-007, April-June 1986, p. 6).

\textsuperscript{7} See Province of British Columbia, 1988 Restructuring of the Government of British Columbia Queen's Printer, Victoria, for an example of ministry shuffling under William Vander Zalm.

\textsuperscript{8} Job mobility between ministries appears to be limited -- workers most often move from position to position within a particular ministry.
Figure 2
The public sector

CABINET

GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISES/
CROWN CORPORATIONS
(e.g. BCBC, BC Ferry Corp.)

MINISTRIES
(e.g. Health, Social Services)

GOVERNMENT SERVICES
- HEALTH/WELFARE
- EDUCATION
(e.g. hospitals, schools)
entities both legally and in terms of management by the government, and their location on the diagram reflects this 'arms-length' relationship.\(^9\) I have referred to both corporations and enterprises to reflect the range of terms used to describe the organisations other than government ministries which are under the control of the government, and can be seen as "instruments of public policy."\(^{10}\)

I have located a category entitled 'government services' on the right side of the diagram. I use the term to refer to activities carried out in places such as hospitals and schools which are not merely 'branch offices' of central ministries, but rather institutions in their own right. A distinction between ministries and 'government services' allows a conceptual separation between the provision of a particular service and its administration; for example between the Woodlands' "special care" facility and district offices of the Ministry of Social Services.\(^{11}\) I have made a distinction, therefore, between a teacher employed by a particular school, and a direct employee of

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\(^9\) Crown corporations are discussed in more detail below, and in Chapter 5.

\(^{10}\) Peat Marwick Stevenson and Kellogg/Peat Marwick Thorne, 1992 *British Columbia Financial Review, Project Report 12: The issue of Crown agency accountability*, pp. 2-3. The report states that "the term 'Crown agencies' is widely used within and outside the government to describe... government entities, which include corporations, boards, societies, authorities, councils, commissions and foundations. There appears to be no commonly agreed definition of some of these entities, including 'Crown corporations', a term which has gained widespread but sometimes inaccurate use." The Peat Marwick report itself is described further below.

\(^{11}\) The term "special care" is taken from a Statistics Canada classification of "public institutions" (Government of Canada, 1987 *Provincial and territorial government employment*, Catalogue 72-007, October-December, p. 45).
the Ministry of Education, such as a clerical worker.12

THE LOCAL VERSION

Developments in British Columbia can be seen within the context of a more general discussion of the expansion, through the last several decades, of neo-conservatism in many western nations.13 Many analyses have considered the impact of 'Reaganomics' in the United States, and of

12 This is certainly the distinction made in Statistics Canada data. The Statistics Canada classification of 'government employment' includes only direct government employment in ministries and government agencies. The B.C. Ministry of Labour and Consumer Services, alternatively, distinguishes between employment in public administration (includes workers in federal, provincial and municipal government offices) and employment in public services (includes all workers in education, health and welfare sectors). (Government of British Columbia, 1990 B.C. Labour Directory Ministry of Labour and Consumer Services).

13 I use 'the New Right' and 'neo-conservatism' relatively interchangeably throughout the thesis. Other writers have also equated the terms: Resnick, for example, argues that "the prescriptions of neo-conservative theorists had become the policies of new right governments such as Thatcher's and Reagan's..." (Philip Resnick, 1987 "Neo-conservatism on the periphery: the lessons from B.C. B.C Studies 75, p. 5). In fact, a distinction between neo-conservative and neo-liberal views should perhaps be made. Thompson has suggested, for example, that the New Right is characterised by neo-conservative ideas concerning a "strong state". The neo-conservative position "sees the market as a source of discipline rather than freedom -- individual freedom and liberty stand here subject to the authority of the established government and not as the source of that authority" (Grahame Thompson, 1990 The political economy of the New Right Pinter, London, p. 3. Emphasis in original). Neo-conservatism has not been, however, central to New Right economic policy. Rather, Thompson argues, it is the neo-liberal wing (Friedrich Hayek's writing has been influential) which has dominated matters.
'Thatcherism' in Britain. Governments in both countries presented their policies as a response to the economic crisis of the 1970s: as a 'solution' or a 'cure' to the first significant period of recession since the 1930s. Both a "rigorous celebration of the market", as well as an explicit opposition to the policies of Keynesianism (and in particular the Keynesian welfare state) can be seen as central features of neo-conservative thought.

An important component of New Right thinking has involved an anti-feminist stance, which has celebrated women's role within the heterosexual family. Ten Tusscher suggests that Thatcherism, for example, "embraced the twin goals of restoring class forces in favour of capital and of restoring gender relations in favour of men." Feminists have suggested that one neo-conservative policy has been to withdraw state services

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15 Whitaker considers "neoconservative political hegemony" in both America and Britain (Reg Whitaker, 1987 "Neoconservatism and the state," in The socialist register Ed. Ralph Milliband, Leo Panitch and John Saville The Merlin Press, London).

formerly provided for women. Further, however, the movement towards increased temporary and part-time working in the public sector (where many women are employed) can be seen as an attempt to achieve a further New Right aim -- to reduce women's formal participation in the workforce and to enact their return to the family.

Despite similarities between countries, the New Right perspective should be represented neither as coherent nor as unitary. Power, for example, suggests that in the United States, the Reagan administration should not be equated with the American New Right: she argues that Reagan's corporatist perspective differed significantly from the New Right's "vision of a restructured America." Discussions of the Canadian welfare state have suggested that while monetarist strategies, for example, have played a role in federal policy, explicit anti-welfare state rhetoric has been absent in Canada. The impact of the New Right, therefore, has varied


18 Power, op. cit., p. 34.

19 Ernie Lightman and Allan Irving, 1991 "Restructuring Canada's welfare state" Journal of Social Policy 20 65-86. Jane Jenson has argued that "there has been less of an ideological attack on the welfare state and organised labour that has obviously characterised the most vicious forms of neoconservatism such as Thatcherism and Reaganism..." (Jane Jenson, 1989 "'different' but not 'exceptional': Canada's permeable fordist" Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 26, p. 76. Emphasis in original). See also Whitaker, op. cit. Current attitudes expressed by the federal Conservatives, such as those concerning the restructuring of unemployment insurance benefits, might be seen in a more radical light than I have presented here. Even the most recently-published discussions of the Canadian welfare state may be somewhat out of date. However, I would argue that neoconservatism has been more powerful -- and certainly has been influential for a longer period of time -- at a provincial level.
from nation to nation.

Further, the situation within Canada itself is more nuanced than a consideration of the nation as a whole would suggest. In British Columbia, the ideology of neo-conservatism has been highly visible in the policies of a successive series of Social Credit governments.\textsuperscript{20} A substantial restructuring of the B.C. public sector has been possible, in part, because of the divisions of responsibility between federal and provincial levels of government in Canada. The history of the development of the welfare state in Canada, with jurisdictional authority over social services given to provinces in the BNA Act,\textsuperscript{21} has allowed provinces considerable autonomy in their decisions on how to structure the public sector. Provincial governments in Canada lacked significant control over monetary policy: they could not, for example, implement tax cuts beneficial to higher-income earners as did the federal governments of Thatcher and Reagan.\textsuperscript{22} It has been primarily provincial governments in British Columbia, as well as in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who have been able not only to withdraw state services, but also to reorganise the provincial welfare state.

Beyond the issue of provincial autonomy, it is also possible to argue that the New Right in British Columbia has developed within a particular set of local circumstances. Gamble suggests that while the crisis in the regime of accumulation which "made a new politics possible and necessary" was a global one,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{20} Neo-conservative governments have also been elected in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. On the Saskatchewan case, see James Pitsula and Kenneth Rasmussen, 1990 \textit{Privatising a province: the new right in Saskatchewan} New Star Books, Vancouver.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} Lightman and Irving, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{22} Resnick, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 15.}
the content of this new politics was often provided by local concerns, specific to the institutions and circumstances of particular countries.\(^\text{23}\)

The peculiarities of the B.C. case, I argue, make it an excellent study of the impact of the New Right.\(^\text{24}\) The political history of the province is one in which left and right have long been polarised.\(^\text{25}\) As a result, the New Right in B.C. could position their policies in direct opposition to those of the New Democratic Party. Jenson notes that the withdrawal of state services in B.C. "has taken place in an atmosphere of ideological war."\(^\text{26}\)

Of both the United States and indeed Canada as a whole, neo-conservatism in British Columbia is perhaps most comparable to the British New Right. Certainly, Social Credit governments in B.C. have modelled themselves, both explicitly and implicitly, on the British case. For this

\(^{23}\) Gamble, op. cit., p. 11. Gamble's point is equally applicable, I would argue, at the provincial scale: provincial circumstances are also important. Thus we can see the B.C. New Right as being situated not only in relation to other provinces in Canada, but also with respect to New Right governments in other countries. Cf. William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, 1989 "Social democracy, neo-conservatism and hegemonic crisis in British Columbia" Critical Sociology 16 29-53, which utilises a Gramscian framework, and suggests that the neo-conservative project in B.C. has "strong resonances with Thatcherism (p. 29).

\(^{24}\) At a more general level, Jill Rubery argues for the situation of discussions of flexibility within particular contexts. "The importance of country-specific characteristics has not been fully recognised, because of the persistence of the general and ahistorical neoclassical model of the labour market as the implicit basis for comparison between an 'actual' labour market and an 'ideal' flexible labour market" (Jill Rubery, 1989 "Labour market flexibility in Britain," in The restructuring of the U.K. economy Ed. Francis Green Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, pp. 156-7

\(^{25}\) Resnick, op. cit., p. 17. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conflict developed between militant and radical workers and their employers in British Columbia's primary industries; more recently white collar, public sector unions such as the B.C. Government Employees' Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Hospital Employees' Union have been "at the forefront of labour relations activity" (Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, 1988 "The rise of non-manual work in British Columbia," in Workers, capital and the state in B.C.: selected papers Ed. Rennie Warburton and David Coburn University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, p. 221). Party-political divisions between supporters of the NDP and followers of Social Credit has been in part a function of class polarisation.

\(^{26}\) Jenson, op. cit., fn. 16.
reason, the discussion of the New Right in B.C. below refers primarily to events in the United Kingdom.

British Columbia is home to the right-wing Fraser Institute, a self-described 'think-tank' headed by a former monetarist with the Bank of Canada, Michael Walker. Anthony Fisher, who had been involved in the formation of the Adam Smith Institute of Economic Affairs in London, also assisted Walker with the establishment of a 'think tank' in British Columbia. Like its British counterpart, the Fraser Institute has been influential in Socred policy. The Institute's formation in 1974, stemmed primarily from the victory of the New Democratic Party in the provincial elections the previous year: their declared goal was "to redirect attention to the use of competitive markets as the best mechanism for providing for the well-being of Canadians." Rather than representing a "far-right fringe" group, the Fraser Institute represented (and continues to represent) a particular set of corporate interests. In 1982,

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27 Jon Steeves, 1992 "The money machine: how chickens, a board game and Milton Friedman made the Fraser Institute what it is today" The Vancouver Review Spring 20-24.

28 Numerous commentators on the political scene in British Columbia have drawn attention to the Fraser Institute's explicit opposition to the NDP. See Allan Garr, 1985 Tough guy: Bill Bennett and the taking of British Columbia Key Porter Books, Toronto, pp. 90-3.

29 Announcement at the Fraser Institute's first press conference, 5 February 1975. Cited in Steeves, op. cit. In the interview with Michael Walker central to the article, Steeves asked about the financial involvement of MacMillan Bloedel in the Fraser Institute. Walker responded: "well, Mac-Blo gives money to all kinds of things. But, at that time, they were faced with what they regarded as a very difficult government climate in B.C..." (p. 21).
Institute directors between them held more than 230
directorships with many of the largest financial, manufacturing
and resource-based corporations in Canada.30

THE NEW RIGHT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

From the outset the Thatcher Government intended to be
different. "Our country's decline is not inevitable," proclaimed
the 1979 manifesto. "We in the Conservative party think we
can reverse it."31

Andrew Gamble, The free economy and the strong state

Bennett went from town to town assailing the economy. "Let's
get B.C. moving again," he told the 800 people who had piled
into New Caledonia Senior Secondary in Terrace, or the 200
who ate Socred sandwiches at a Prince Rupert lunch-time rally.32

Stan Persky, Son of Socred

The governments of both Thatcher and Bennett presented
themselves as a 'solution' to the economic crises of the 1970s. Neo-
conservatism developed not only in Britain, but also in British Columbia as
the "unparalleled prosperity" of the postwar period came to an end.33 As

Patricia Marchak has argued, a consideration of the New Right in B.C.

30 John Malcomson, 1984 "The hidden agenda of 'Restraint'," in Magnusson
et al., op. cit., p. 85. The Fraser Institute has been sharply critical of, among other things,
public sector trade unionism. Cf. Sandra Christiansen, 1980 Unions and the public
interest Fraser Institute, Vancouver.

31 Gamble, op. cit., p. 208.

32 Stan Persky, 1979 Son of Socred: has Bill Bennett's government got B.C.

33 Neil A. Swainson, 1983 "The public service," in The reins of power:
governing British Columbia Ed. J. Terence Morely et al. Douglas and McIntyre, Toronto,
p. 121. There is evidence of fascinating links between the New Right in Britain and B.C.
At the invitation of the Fraser Institute, a key adviser to the Thatcher government,
Maiden Pirie, was flown to B.C. to advise the Social Credit government. Stephen Rogers,
a former "Minister of Privatisation" under Vander Zalm, travelled to Britain to see
Thatcher's policies in action and to bring back ideas for the government to implement in
British Columbia (Ed Finn, 1989 "Privatisation: the British experience" The Facts,
Canadian Union of Public Employees 11, p. 28). Interestingly, Alan Garr notes that during
negotiations with the BCGEU in 1982, Bennett protested: "John Fryer [the union's
British-born chief negotiator] brings a whole bag of tricks from Britain on how to deal with
industrial relations that I am just not equipped to deal with" (op. cit., p. 66).
must move beyond an explanation asserting that the actions of Social Credit governments in the province were based on an autonomous ideological position.\textsuperscript{34} "[T]here is considerable evidence that similar actions, if not similar legislation, are occurring elsewhere."\textsuperscript{35} The withdrawal of the welfare state in B.C., then, can be seen as part of a global turn to the right: a development which Guy Standing has described as "the emergence of the supply-side politico-economic agenda that has dominated policy making in most of the world in the 1980s."\textsuperscript{36}

Although there has not been an explicit continuity within Socred policy since 1975, there are commonalities among various Social Credit

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{34} Patricia Marchak, 1984 "The rise and fall of the peripheral state" Paper presented at The structure of the Canadian capitalist class conference, November 1983. Revised for publication (in Regionalism in Canada, ed. R.J. Brym), January 1984, p. 2. Marchak also rejects what she describes as "the government's explanation": the argument that a purely fiscal crisis was created by global scale recession, affecting the government's "ability to pay" for formerly provided services (p. 3).


\textsuperscript{36} Guy Standing, 1989 "Global feminisation through flexible labour" World Development 17, p. 1077.
\end{footnotesize}
administrations throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. The discourse of neo-conservatism was dominant in the province throughout this period. Social Credit governments may not have pursued precisely the same strategies throughout the 1975-91 period; however, their policies generally involved an attack on organised labour along with a reduction in public expenditure, and a withdrawal of services. It should be noted that the impact of government economic policy has not been uniform across all regions of the province. At the same time that the Socreds reduced funding of social services, they also undertook substantial highways construction projects in the interior of the province. While an extensive consideration of

37 Much of the writing on the restructuring of the welfare state dates the emergence of public sector 'rollback' from the early 1980s. On the rise to power of both Thatcher and Reagan, see Martin Loney, 1986. The politics of greed: the New Right and the welfare state. London: Pluto Press, esp. chapter 2.) In both Britain and America, it has been argued, the "neo-conservative political hegemony," characterised by "laissez-faire attacks on the state," developed in the 1980s. (Whitaker, op. cit., p. 1.) Similarly, many discussions of the ascendency of New Right ideology in British Columbia have focused on a particular period in the early 1980s, when William R. Bennett announced and implemented a policy of 'Restraint'. See, for example, Magnusson et al., op. cit.; John Shields, 1989 British Columbia's new reality: the politics of neoconservatism and defensive defiance. PhD thesis, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia; and Patricia Marchak, 1986 "The rise and fall of the peripheral state: the case of British Columbia," in Regionalism in Canada Ed. Robert Brym Irwin, Toronto. Resnick provides a brief overview of the political events prior to 1975, although his primary focus is upon "the neo-conservative experiment to which British Columbia was subjected in the three year period between 1983 and 1986" (op. cit., p. 3). In contrast to Shields, Marchak and Resnick, Howlett and Brownsey have argued for a continuity of government policy in British Columbia through 1941 to 1987 (Michael Howlett and Keith Brownsey, 1988 "The Old Reality and the New Reality: party politics and public policy in British Columbia 1941-1987" Studies in Political Economy 25 141-176). Shields takes issue with Howlett and Brownsey's analysis, stating that they "are correct in that we can perceive some of the roots of 1983 within past Socred policies, they overlook the fact that those policies did not challenge the fundamental philosophy behind B.C.'s welfare state or Labour Code. The values of consensus and balance were not breached. Social Credit policy did not seek to deconstruct social legislation, although it incrementally whittled away at aspects of it, while leaving others untouched" (Shields, op. cit., p. 24).

the particular pattern of Social Credit governments' investments -- and indeed of their electoral support -- must remain in the background of my account, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the sub-regional political geography.

There are a number of specific examples suggestive of the development of neo-conservative thinking prior to 1983 and the implementation of Bill Bennett’s 'Restraint' program, including the transformation of the Department of Public Works into the British Columbia Buildings Corporation in 1977; the formation of a Ministry of Deregulation -- to review government legislation and regulation in order to ensure that it "serve a useful public purpose" in 1978; the sale of shares in the British Columbia Resources Investment Corporation in 1979; and an announcement of wage restraint in the provincial public sector in February 1982.

At a global scale, Thompson has argued that the mid-1970s can be seen "as a watershed in the state's involvement in the economy." A serious recession, he asserts,

disrupted established practices and mechanisms of economic organisation. In turn, this interrupted and produced a reaction against what was seen as something of a secular feature of the post-Second World War period, namely growing state and governmental intervention in and regulation of domestic economies.


41 Thompson, 1984a, op. cit., p. 77.
Thompson’s discussion is also helpful in thinking about British Columbia. Here, change can be seen to stem from the recession in the B.C. economy in the 1970s, and the reaction of the newly-elected Social Credit party. Part of this reaction, as we shall see later, involved an attempt to restructure the public sector labour force.

A particular series of events led to the Social Credit victory in the provincial election of 11 December 1975. Resnick suggests that in order to understand “the renewed ideological commitment of the right” in British Columbia in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, several factors are important. First, the role of the preceding Social Credit regime, headed by W.A.C. Bennett, was significant. Bennett, a former Conservative, held office from 1952 to 1972.

The political culture of the right which he helped crystallize was one in which mega-projects characterized the state’s role in the economic arena and frugality its social and cultural functions.

The construction of roads, railways and electricity projects in British Columbia were all funded with provincial capital: through “state-fostered infrastructural development,” Bennett played a fairly interventionist role in

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43 Resnick, op. cit., p. 9.

44 For an extensive discussion of the origins of “social credit” in the writings of Major Clifford Douglas in 1919 Britain and the subsequent emergence of the Social Credit party in Alberta during the 1930s, see J.S. Osbourne and J.T. Osbourne, 1986 Social Credit for beginners: an armchair guide Pulp Press, Vancouver. Also cf. Garr, op. cit., pp. 8-10.

45 Ibid., p. 8. The involvement of the state in mega-projects was continued during the 1980s, with the construction of a large interior highway, the Coquihalla (announced in the 1985 Budget) and with Expo ’86.
the B.C. economy.\textsuperscript{46} Despite the fact that Bennett’s vision of the state was not strictly \textit{laissez-faire}, he did hold that government policy should be "harnessed to the maximization of individualistic and profit making ventures."\textsuperscript{47} While W.A.C. Bennett’s conservative policies involved a celebration of the market, they were not completely antithetical to the idea of a Keynesian welfare state.

Secondly, the resurgence of right wing political attitudes must also be seen within the context of the brief period (1972-75) when the New Democratic Party held office. The NDP government was committed to expanding levels of funding in health, education, and social assistance, and while B.C. experienced a boom period in the early 1970s which allowed them to finance such schemes, by the middle of the decade, the worldwide economic downturn had forced the government into deficit financing.\textsuperscript{48} During the election campaign in 1975, the Social Credit party portrayed the NDP as "spending-prone, regulation-happy, and inefficient," and suggested that the New Democrats had very nearly bankrupted the province.\textsuperscript{49} Yet even the right-leaning George Froelich, business editor of the \textit{Vancouver Sun}, stated that "it would appear that the Barrett government has left the

\textsuperscript{46} Intervention in the economy coincided with "the solitary management of the provincial enterprise by the premier": W.A.C. Bennett had an extremely small office staff and did not employ an executive assistant (Walter D. Young and J. Terence Morely, 1983 "The premier and the cabinet," in \textit{The reins of power: governing British Columbia} Ed. J. Terence Morely \textit{et al.} Douglas and MacIntyre, Toronto, p. 63).

\textsuperscript{47} Resnick, op. cit., p. 8.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 9. The 1976 Budget sharply criticises "the 'free-wheeling' spending budgets of the short-lived previous administration" (British Columbia, Ministry of Finance, 1976 \textit{British Columbia Budget 1976} Queen's Printer, Victoria, p. 17).
province in good shape." The Socreds, however, estimated the 1975-76 budgetary deficit as $541 million, although the public accounts later revealed an actual cash deficit of $261 million. This was a strategy, Ruff suggests, which "laid the ground for a policy of severe restraint in spending."

It was W.A.C. Bennett's son, William, who became leader of the Social Credit party in 1973 and who took office as premier in 1975. Bill Bennett's election victory, it has been argued, stemmed from his success in consolidating opposition to the NDP into a single party. Seventeen of the fifty-five Social Credit nominees for the legislature were well-known former supporters of either the Liberal or the Conservative parties, yet had been convinced to switch allegiances during the campaign. The coalition went beyond the political parties, however; large capital played a significant role too, as noted above, in the context of the formation of the Fraser Institute.

Given such an alliance, it has been argued that Bennett's main concern in the early years was to build loyalties amongst different groups.

"The anti-NDP sentiment that had provided much of the impetus for the new version of Social Credit now limited the scope of the government's initiatives and the premier's room for manoeuvre."

50 Cited in Persky, 1979, op. cit., pp. 77-78.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid. Included amongst this group were Pat McGeer and Bill Vander Zalm.
55 Young and Morely, op. cit., p. 58. Again, although detailing the political geography of Socred support is beyond the scope of my discussion here, the spatial dimensions of their coalition-building could be usefully mapped out.
Bob Jessop has argued that a similar situation existed for Thatcher following her first election victory: during the 1979-82 period Thatcher’s "main concern was to consolidate political power." Despite the apparent strains within the first Social Credit cabinet, however, the rightward shift in policy-making was clearly evident. The origins of the 'Restraint' program, for example, can be found in this early period.

In 1976, Bill Bennett’s Minister of Finance, Evan Wolfe, announced a 'recovery' budget. The Socreds’ construction of the "illusion of the provincial deficit" allowed them to argue the need for 'recovery'. Numerous passages in the budget are worthy of comment, for the sentiments contained within them are echoed in many Social Credit budgets to follow. In his introduction, Wolfe stated that

government, like people, cannot go on spending more than it makes. What comes in must balance what goes out. If balance is not achieved, then governments must borrow to pay the bills.

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56 Bob Jessop, 1991b "Thatcherism and flexibility: the white heat of a post-fordist revolution," in The politics of flexibility: restructuring state and industry in Britain, Germany and Scandinavia Ed. Bob Jessop, Klaus Nielsen, Hans Kastendiek, Ove Pedersen Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Hants., p. 143. Jessop’s full periodisation is interesting here: stage 1 (1968-79) he describes as Thatcherism’s "rise as a social movement", stage 3 (1982-1986) was the period during which "the first real steps were taken to pursue a coherent post-Fordist course,” and 1986 to the present Jessop terms "radical Thatcherism," when "a general reorganisation of social relations going well beyond the economic sphere" was/is being attempted (Ibid).

57 Howlett and Brownsey (op. cit., p. 162) suggest that "the specific measures found in the 1983 budget date from the formation and electoral success of the second Social Credit coalition in 1975." Note that they refer to the W.A.C. Bennett regime as the first coalition. They continue: "many of the policies in the budget had been formulated by the government in 1976-77, and had been publicly enunciated as early as 1978 in major federal-provincial forums; the administrative agencies required to put these plans into effect had been established between 1977 and 1982” (Ibid).

58 The phrase is taken from a chapter title in Magnusson et al., op. cit.: Gideon Rosenbluth and William Schworm, 1984 "The illusion of the provincial deficit”.

Note here the way in which the budget is personalised: an analogy is made to a household budget. It is also interesting to note that the term 'restraint' -- generally associated with the 1983 Budget -- was used by the Socreds as early as 1976. Wolfe announced that "[i]n this period of restraint, it is important that restraining measures be widely employed and accepted." The measure to which Wolfe was referring was a ten per cent reduction in salary for provincial Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly. Cuts were also made in the salaries of the Premier's office staff. Clearly a cutback in ministerial salaries was not such a harsh measure as the curtailment of public sector wages that was to come in 1983; however the language used was the same.

Wolfe's conclusion to the 1976 Budget speech is also revealing. "Mr. Speaker," he asserted,

the parties that expound [the] irresponsible use of public funds are on the skids everywhere in the world. The people have thrown the socialists out in Australia. They have been thrown out in New Zealand. They are hanging on the ropes in Britain and their leader has quit. And they have been thrown out here.

Thus not only do critics of the New Right in B.C. draw comparisons with Reagan and Thatcher, for example, but also the Social Credit party began in 1976 to self-consciously identify itself with a global change in thinking about

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60 See Patricia Marchak, 1984. "The new economic reality: substance and rhetoric," in Magnusson et al., op. cit. Marchak notes that Bennett's notion of 'restraint' involved not only the use of the household budget analogy, but also implied "discipline and the curbing of excesses": a particularly Victorian connotation which has parallels with a current of thinking in Thatcherism. Cf. Linda McDowell, 1989 "Women in Thatcher's Britain," in Mohan, op. cit., pp. 172-186. Note also Andrew Gamble's assessment, however: he argues that the New Right is more forward looking than a simple 'return to Victorian values' representation would suggest. (Gamble, op. cit., p. 37).


Continuing demand for British Columbia's natural resources -- coal, lumber and gas -- in the world market during the latter part of the 1970s resulted in high levels of provincial economic growth. Markets remained strong until 1981, which enabled the Social Credit party to "pursue pro-business policies without the need to prune expenditures for education, health or social assistance."63 This was a different situation from that in the United Kingdom, or even eastern Canada, where economic 'slowdown' could be dated from the mid 1970s (the oil price shocks of 1973 and 1978/9 are frequently cited).64 Despite boom times in B.C., however, there were, before the decade was out, indications that Bill Bennett and the Social Credit party aimed to significantly restructure the province.65

Chapter 5 presents a case study of changes in the organisation of work in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation. For the moment, however, I want to suggest that the creation of Crown corporations, including BCBC, can be seen as an early attempt by the Social Credit government to transform the public sector.66 In the case of both BCBC and the B.C. Systems Corporation, services formerly generated within

63 Resnick, op. cit., p. 10.

64 On the Canadian situation as a whole, see Jane Jenson's discussion of 'permeable fordism' (op. cit.), and cf. Jessop, 1991b, op. cit., who suggests that Canada filled 'non-Fordist niches' (small batch capital goods, luxury consumer goods, agricultural goods and/or raw materials).

65 Resnick, op. cit., p. 10.

66 Six major Crown corporations were established between 1975 and 1980 (Swainson, op. cit., p. 151). The Peat Marwick report states that there were 41 government-owned organisations and enterprises listed in the 1990/91 public accounts. Thirteen of these entities are clearly identified as Crown corporations, however the remainder function in a similar manner -- they have a comparable "arms-length" relationship with the government (Project Report 12, op. cit.)
government departments were turned over to Crown corporation provision. Swainson suggests that the use of the Crown corporation as instrument stemmed from

their legal distinctiveness; their freedom (often) from the financial and personnel controls imposed on departments; their general managerial flexibility, and their adaptiveness to the entrepreneurial environment.

Swainson notes that although the arms-length position of Crown corporations from the cabinet might present difficulties of control, in British Columbia, the placement of at least one minister on Boards of Directors alleviates such a problem. A further observation concerns the employees of Crown corporations: Swainson writes

the vast majority of these bodies are free to develop their own personnel policies since few of their employees are covered by the Public Service Act.

Thus the provincial government obtains executive control via the Board of Directors, but is "freed" from the legislation (labour and otherwise) that governs ministries.

Several months prior to the 1979 election -- and, interestingly, predating Thatcher's sale of the assets of the National Enterprise Board in June of the same year -- the Socred government announced that it would give, to every resident of the province, five free shares in the newly formed British Columbia Resources Investment Corporation (BCRIC; colloquially

67 Swainson, op. cit., p. 151.

68 Ibid., p. 150.

69 However, as was revealed in the recently released Peat Marwick report, there was "clear evidence of insufficient coordination between Crown agencies and the government. In a number of cases examined, Cabinet appeared unaware that it had the capacity to influence the strategic decisions of these agencies." (Peat Marwick, Project Report 12, op. cit., p. i.).

70 Ibid., p. 152.
known as 'brick').\textsuperscript{71} The Corporation was created from a collection of resource companies which had been purchased by the NDP, to be collectively owned by the people of British Columbia. Bill Bennett declared: "what the B.C.R.I.C. has is assets that belong to the people, assets that they will now have in individual ownership."\textsuperscript{72} Opposition leader Dave Barrett, however, queried Bennett's reasoning:

Only a government dominated by used car dealers could come up with something like this. People are being given the opportunity to sell off to themselves something they already own. Only used car dealers can figure out a way to sell you something you already own.\textsuperscript{73}

In fact, widespread "democratic ownership" was interrupted by a provision in the BCRIC legislation which prevented individuals from owning more than 1 per cent of the shares in the Corporation.\textsuperscript{74}

Under the NDP, the collective value of holdings was relatively high.

Partly through unsuspected business skills, and partly due to a fortunate upturn in the market, the government-owned acquisitions turned a tidy profit, and perhaps more important, retained jobs that might have otherwise been lost.\textsuperscript{75}

However, as the BCRIC, the assets were essentially transformed into a

\textsuperscript{71} See Stan Persky, 1983 Bennett II: the decline and stumbling of Social Credit government in British Columbia 1979-83 New Star Books, Vancouver, esp. Chapter 4, "Cast the first BCRIC." The denationalisation of the NEB was Thatcher's "first move to reduce public holdings" (Gamble, op. cit., pp. 104-5). Later sales involved, among others, British Petroleum and British Aerospace. Gamble suggests that although the "receipts from these early measures... were modest... their success created a momentum for further sales which was to be carried much further in future years" (Ibid). British Telecom provides a more recent example. Michael Walker has acknowledged that "the privatisation thing, BCRIC, back in 1979, came out of a Fraser Institute book" (Steeves, op. cit., p. 22).

\textsuperscript{72} Cited in Resnick, op. cit., p. 10 (B.C., Hansard, 32nd Parliament, 1st session, 14 June 1979, 134).


\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 109.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 108.
holding company, and the value of the shares declined rapidly in the 1980s (so quickly, in fact, that the Corporation was soon withdrawn altogether from the Vancouver Stock Exchange listings). Despite the apparent failure of the Corporation, however, the idea of individual ownership as manifest in the sale of BCRIC shares appeared to have met with some success, and, in Resnick's words, was "an indication of a neo-conservative crusade to follow against the statist dragon."76

In the opening years of the 1980s, the British Columbia economy plunged into recession once again. The unemployment rate increased from 6.5 per cent in 1980 to 12.1 per cent in 1982.77 In the 1982 Budget, Finance Minister Hugh Curtis announced the Compensation Stabilization Program. In the words of the Minister of Finance, the program was designed to meet several objectives, the most important of which is the need for an equitable sharing of the burden of restraint imposed upon British Columbians by the world economic situation.78

Employees in the private sector, Curtis suggested, were 'restrained' by the marketplace. Private sector workers had to face the 'realities' of layoffs and unemployment, with which those in the public sector were not confronted, "particularly if governments are willing simply to borrow and tax to pay an

76 Resnick, op. cit., p. 10.

77 Ibid. Note that these are province-wide rates, and that in many resource-based towns in the B.C. interior, levels of unemployment were well over twenty per cent. Significantly affected were male workers in the forest industry, for example. For a consideration of the effects of such economic changes on women, see Suzanne Mackenzie, 1986 "Women's response to economic restructuring: changing gender, changing space," in The politics of diversity Ed. Roberta Hamilton and Michele Barrett Verso, London, pp. 81-100.

ever increasing wage bill."\textsuperscript{79}

The Social Credit government positioned itself in strict opposition to the tenets of the Keynesian welfare state. The Socreds asserted that government spending had "put costs out of balance" and that 'restraint', both in terms of spending on services and on public sector wages, was needed. Bennett, for example, argued that

government... has clearly taken more out of the economy and left less for the private sector to build the industry to develop the economy and to create jobs. Obviously the government, rather than being a saviour, is one of the villains of the piece in the Canadian economic problems of today.\textsuperscript{80}

The private sector is constructed as the 'leading edge', an example to which the public sector should conform. Such a construction is crucial to arguments about the implementation of flexible working practices in the public sector, Pollert has suggested, for the government can argue that it is emulating private sector trends.\textsuperscript{81}

The Compensation Stabilization Program was the first explicit attack on the public sector. It enabled the provincial government to restrict wage settlements to a level at or below the level of inflation. There were parallels at a federal level: in June 1982, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced what become known as the "6 and 5" wage control program. Yet the provincial initiative predated the federal one.\textsuperscript{82} Rolling back public sector wages, or eliminating jobs altogether, was to form a primary part of

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{81} Anna Pollert, 1988b "The flexible firm: fixation or fact?" Work, Employment and Society 2 281-316

\textsuperscript{82} Carroll and Ratner, op. cit., p. 36; Persky, 1979, op. cit., p. 120.
many Social Credit budgets to follow. While many discussions of the restructuring of the welfare state focus upon cutbacks to programs, it is also important to highlight the ways in which workers were affected.

A bill introduced in 1982 went further to curtail spending on public services: it declared that teachers would no longer be paid for professional days, when they did not actually teach.\textsuperscript{83} For Bill Vander Zalm, then Minister of Education, "the neo-conservative moment had already arrived."\textsuperscript{84} Vander Zalm asked:

How much can we demand of the taxpayers in B.C.?... We should not lose sight of the fact that in the private sector... when the money isn't there... there is a loss of jobs; people have to work-share... But in the public sector, unfortunately there are those who still believe -- the socialists are certainly among these -- that somehow... you can keep digging deeper and deeper into the taxpayer's pocket.\textsuperscript{85}

The comment about work-sharing suggests that ideas about flexibility had crept into Socred policy, although there is no explicit link with the 'flexible firm' model.

The announcement of Bennett's 'Restraint' policy in 1983, shortly after the provincial election in May of that year, represented an even more significant assault on government spending. Some have described the budget and the accompanying series of bills as "a program of roll-back in governmental activity the likes of which post-war Canada had never

\textsuperscript{83} Resnick, 1987, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 11.

known.” I do not wish to discuss in detail the specific measures which were introduced: this has been thoroughly documented elsewhere. Suffice it to say that labour legislation was passed which severely curtailed the power of unions in both the public and the private sectors, and expenditures on social services were dramatically reduced.

The program of restraint continued in the following years. In Bill Bennett’s 1984 Budget speech, he declared that “employees must continue to be flexible, seeking wages and working conditions that reflect their shared interest in productive and competitive enterprises.” Again, this is an unspecified 'flexibility', but the implication is certainly an erosion of labour regulations.

In response to Bennett’s policies, a broadly based Solidarity Coalition emerged, which included feminist groups, trade unionists, tenants’ organisations, teachers and community groups. "Under the banner of Operation Solidarity, public sector workers engaged in a series of strikes and

86 Resnick, op. cit., p. 12. It appears that a paper written by David Young, discussing the importance of the private sector as "the ultimate disciplining force", was influential in Bennett’s thinking. (David A. Young, 1979 "An essay on bureaucracy" Natural Resource Institute, The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Mimeo). My thanks to Janet Patterson for providing me with a copy of Young’s essay, which has been reprinted by the National Union of Public Employees, along with a preface entitled "A blueprint to destroy effective unionism in the provincial public sector". One particular episode which seems to have been drawn from Young’s arguments involved a rapid reduction in staff (through layoffs) along with an equivalent reduction in office space. To retain empty space, Young argued, "would only encourage the belief that the bureaucracy would soon be allowed to grow back to its former size" (op. cit., p. 43). A clerical worker in the Ministry of Social Services described the swift "staff reduction": "they cut every single service in that building," Sandi said. Shields (op. cit., p. 256ff) provides further discussion of Young’s essay.


lockouts throughout 1984.”

The coalition made explicit reference to Polish Solidarnosc, and sought to challenge the emergence of New Right thinking in British Columbia. While some commentators have suggested the Solidarity movement was ultimately a failure, Resnick argues that it had a significant impact on the government.

The rallies, marches and partial public-sector strike... brought home to the government the fact that its neo-conservative measures could not be introduced with impunity...

The Social Credit government was anxious that outside investment in British Columbia not be jeopardised by the development of a reputation for labour unrest and political instability in the province.

Faced with a sharp drop in opinion polls, and attracted by more financially lucrative opportunities in the private sector, Bill Bennett submitted his resignation in 1986. The Social Credit party elected a new leader, Bill Vander Zalm, at a convention held at the Whistler Resort in July of the same year. Vander Zalm was well known for his extreme political views, particularly an anti-labour and anti-feminist position, but had resigned from the legislature prior to the 1983 provincial election, thus


90 Resnick, op. cit., p. 18; cf. also Kube et al., op. cit.

91 Here Resnick refers to Bryan Palmer’s account (op. cit.).

92 Resnick, op. cit., p. 20.

93 Ibid.
distancing himself from the 'Restraint' measures of Bill Bennett.\textsuperscript{94} The election which vaulted Vander Zalm to power came just days after the closing of Expo '86 in October. Although the "World's Fair" sustained substantial financial losses, many British Columbians viewed Expo as a success.\textsuperscript{95} Further, voters were eager to put the events of the early 1980s behind them, and Vander Zalm was successfully able to co-opt the NDP's "fresh start" slogan.\textsuperscript{96}

Vander Zalm's 1987 budget contained no measures which directly attacked the labour movement: it was primarily concerned with changes to the taxation system. Confrontation between the government and public sector workers, however, came later that year. Bill 19 (the Industrial Relations Reform Act) sought to weaken the power of organised labour generally, while Bill 20 (the Teaching Profession Act) was directed solely at the B.C. Teacher's Federation.\textsuperscript{97} This legislation provoked

\textsuperscript{94} Carroll and Ratner, op. cit., p. 41. A moral element was particularly apparent within Vander Zalm's rhetoric. Through the later 1980s, he publicly espoused an anti-choice position: a March 1988 \textit{Vancouver Sun} article quoted Vander Zalm's statement that "the senseless termination of human life at the slightest whim or notion of women is simply removing yet another stone from the wall of an already crumbling society" (Cited in Stephen Osborne and Mary Schendlinger, 1988 \textit{Quotations from Chairman Zalm} Pulp Press, Vancouver, p. 21).

\textsuperscript{95} See Charles Blackorby, Glen Donaldson, Robert Picard and Margaret Slade, 1986. Expo 86: an economic impact analysis. In Allen and Rosenbluth, op. cit. (written four months before the opening of the fair); and David Ley and Kris Olds, 1988 "Landscape as spectacle: world's fairs and the culture of consumption" \textit{Environment and Planning D: Society and Space} 6 191-212. Resnick describes Expo as a "combination of trade fair, civic boosterism and circuses" and suggests that although the Socreds espoused an ideology of restraint, they were willing to "fund infrastructural and economic functions of [their] own choosing" (op. cit., p. 15). However, Resnick argues, cuts to spending on social programs are most significant to a discussion of neo-conservatism in British Columbia. Further, I would suggest that the restructuring of the public sector is also a "crucial variable" (Resnick, p. 16).

\textsuperscript{96} Carroll and Ratner, op. cit., p. 41.

\textsuperscript{97} For more a detailed discussion of each Bill, see Carroll and Ratner, op. cit., pp. 42-3.
in response a one day work stoppage by the teachers in early May and a province-wide one day general strike on 1 June 1987.98

Clearly, Vander Zalm's administration was not to be a conciliatory one: a number of commentators have noted the similarities between the events of 1983 and of 1987. Resnick, for example, describes Vander Zalm's government as "Round 2 of the neo-conservative counter-revolution inaugurated by Bill Bennett"; Shields argues that the legislation constituted another "fundamental redrawing of the industrial relations structure."99

By 1988, the British Columbia economy had regained strength following the recession earlier in the decade. Despite this 'recovery,' however, the Social Credit government continued to express concern over financing public sector wage increases. In the 1988 Budget, Finance Minister Mel Couvelier declared that the government would continue to "take a responsible approach to collective bargaining."100 The public sector still needed to be disciplined, particularly "as an example to the private sector."101 Couvelier asserted that

98 Resnick, op. cit., p. 23.


101 See Norman Ruff, 1984. "Social Credit as employer" In Magnusson et al., eds., op. cit., pp. 153ff. This language reproduces that expressed by Bennett governments, and is indicative of a particular way of thinking derived from Hayek: the idea, for example, that "trade unions should submit to the same principles of law as everybody else..." (Georgina Waylen, 1986 "Women and neo-liberalism," in Feminism and political theory Ed. Judith Evans et al. Sage, London, p. 100).
Almost two thirds of provincial government spending is for wages of government employees or employees of agencies funded by the government. There are clear limits on what taxpayers can afford... The government recognizes that public sector wage settlements can create a domino effect and trigger excessive demands in the private sector.102

There could be no "fresh start," Couvelier argued, if the government continued "an addiction to spending beyond [its] means."103

The focus on public sector workers in many ways paralleled the British experience, where Thatcher

would have nothing to do with an incomes policy for the private sector, but successfully imposed pay curbs on the public, and tried to dismantle or weaken collective bargaining arrangements.104

Clashes with unionised workers in the mid 1980s, it seems, represented a demonstration of power to the private sector. In B.C., certainly, this was the case.

Much of the government's difficulty in balancing the budget and eradicating the provincial deficit (both of which were goals declared not only by the Bennett government following the period in which the NDP held office, but also by Vander Zalm's government following the 1986 election) stemmed from the fact that spending on health, education, and social services continued to grow. Despite the cutbacks of the Bennett era, by 1988, Ministry of Health expenditure comprised almost one-third of the total provincial budget.105 One of the 'solutions' involved a redrawing of boundaries between public and private could be redrawn to shift services out of the public sector and into the private "community." Frequently, social


103 Ibid., p. 5.

104 Gamble, op. cit., p. 127.

services were transferred to voluntary or for-profit organisations.\textsuperscript{106}

Another type of solution could be found in 'privatisation.' Social Credit governments, under both Bennett and Vander Zalm, have frequently drawn upon an neo-conservative ideological position which argues that public sector investment 'crowds out' that of the private sector. Under the Vander Zalm government, however, a policy explicitly described as privatisation was enthusiastically announced. The term began to appear in the texts of the provincial Budgets in 1987. There was a more explicit discussion the following year:

experience shows that when programs are privatized, costs fall and service improves. Private firms find better ways to do business and they expand and create jobs.\textsuperscript{107}

By 1989, it was announced that privatization had been a "major success."\textsuperscript{108} The Finance Minister asserted: "we will continue to examine other facets of the government's activities to identify functions more appropriately located in the private sector"\textsuperscript{109} By 1989, the B.C. Steamship Company had been sold outright, while large portions of the Ministry of Highways were privatised through the contracting out of road and bridge maintenance. The provincial government suggested that the B.C. Gas distribution network would be next.

Vander Zalm's turn to a strategy of privatisation in the latter part of the 1980s represented a continuation of past Social Credit policies.

\textsuperscript{106} See Marilyn Callahan, 1984 "The human costs of restraint," in Magnusson \textit{et al.}, eds., \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{108} British Columbia, Ministry of Finance, 1989 \textit{British Columbia Budget 1989} Queen's Printer, Victoria, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}
Throughout the last fifteen years, the Socreds' declared aim has been a dismantling of the provincial welfare state -- or, at least, the welfare state manifest as an expanding public sector. For at the same time, the New Right in British Columbia wished to utilize the state to promote large capital.\textsuperscript{110} They solved this "seemingly contradictory position," Howlett and Brownsey argue, through,

a shift in policy instruments to achieve the latter aim -- from "labour intensive" government service delivery, to "capital intensive" government involvement by way of subsidies, tax incentives, and regulation... \textsuperscript{111}

Changes in legislation and, as we will see in the case studies to follow, in the organisation of work in the public sector, have not resulted in a wholesale withdrawal of the state. What has occurred, however, is a blurring of state boundaries. Bob Jessop has argued that

[i]n the 1980s, the Thatcher regime was busy reorganising the boundaries of the British state, its internal structures and its forms of intervention in the hope that this would encourage entrepreneurialism and flexibility in the economy itself.\textsuperscript{112}

In British Columbia, this reorganisation has been particularly evident in the government's use of agency temporary workers, and in the contracting out of services.

Bill Vander Zalm resigned in April 1991, after the release of a report by conflict-of-interest Commissioner Edward Hughes which declared that Vander Zalm, in the sale of his Fantasy Gardens property, had

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Howlett and Brownsey, op. cit., pp. 165-66.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid. They continue: "this tendency towards choosing policy instruments that avoided direct public-sector employment was apparent long before the 1983 budget, although that budget may represent its apotheosis."
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Bob Jessop, 1990 State theory: putting capitalist states in their place Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 46.
\end{itemize}
breached his own guidelines concerning conflict-of-interest. Deputy Premier Rita Johnston then held office as Premier until her defeat in the October 1991 provincial election. Following the election, the incoming NDP government commissioned a review of the province's finances, to be conducted by the accounting firm of Peat Marwick. Much of the final report, released in March 1992, was concerned with the accounts of the previous financial year. The comprehensive review was not, as some critics claimed, primarily intended to reveal the gross financial mismanagement of Bennett, Vander Zalm and Johnston (although it certainly did do this), but rather to enable Finance Minister Glen Clark to prepare budgets in upcoming years. Under Socred governments, for example, more than 150 different accounting systems were used, and budgets released during the 1980s often bore "little resemblance to reality." A central finding concerned the size of the provincial public sector, which, the Peat Marwick suggested, was consistently underestimated in Socred budgets.

Data collection for the report involved both the distribution of questionnaires to ministries and Crown agencies and the examination of operating files within each of these bodies. Senior executives were also


114 Note that in reviewing the findings of the report, it is not my intention to draw comparisons between the policies of the Social Credit party and those of the present NDP government. Such a comparison is beyond a scope of the thesis -- further, the corresponding time scales are, I believe, too imbalanced to make such a contrast possible.


consulted. Based on such data, Peat Marwick concluded that there were approximately 2,200 more staff working for the provincial, government than there were in 1984, despite the claims of 'downsizing' made by Bennett and Vander Zalm.

Peat Marwick took the financial year 1983/4 as a starting point because this was the year in which the Socreds setup a budgeting system based on full-time equivalents, or "FTEs." The FTE system was established initially in an attempt to deliver more 'accountability' in government, by transferring authority for personnel decisions to Deputy Ministers. Ministries were allocated a particular number of FTEs, and it was up to the individual Deputy Minister "how they manoeuvred the positions." Although strict limits continued to be imposed on FTE allocations throughout the 1980s, ministries were able to increase staff beyond FTE limits by hiring personnel on a different basis. The Peat Marwick report documented three types of exceptions to the FTE count: exempt FTEs, D-manuals and personal service contracts (PSCs).

Essentially, individual ministers could define particular positions as 'exempt.' The Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Government Personnel Services Division of the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations would approve individual requests. As the Peat Marwick report

118 PR15, p. i, 4.
119 Peter Burton, personal communication, 8 April 1992. A similar situation, in the British public sector, is discussed by Hunter and MacInnes. In Britain, "manpower budgets seem typically to be defined in terms of full-time established posts, with an element of discretion as to how these are filled being left to local management. Thus the concept of flexibility may be sanctioned from above, but the practice is left to largely ad hoc decisions at the local level" (Laurie Hunter and John MacInnes, 1991 Employers' labour use strategies—case studies Department of Employment (U.K.) Research Paper No. 87, p. 34).
notes, the Socreds "made very extensive use of these provisions." Further, as "D-Manuals", some employees were paid through a manual payroll system separate from the regular system. These existed

where lead times for obtaining a paycheque are not appropriate, or for on-call/standby employees where the automated payroll system cannot provide the eight-day turnaround required to pay these employees.

A final means by which Socred governments circumvented imposed FTE limits was through the use of contractors. Once a particular "Standard Object of Expenditure" was included as a budget item, ministries could utilize contractors, if not to an unlimited extent, then at least beyond regular limits imposed by the budget. Types of service which had specific STOB numbers included administrative/clerical; professional/legal; data and word processing maintenance, consulting and support; advertising/promotion; publications; and computer system development and enhancement. As we shall see in Chapter 4, temporary workers have been used extensively in clerical positions of the government, under STOB 15, the administrative/clerical item.

Figure 3 presents changing levels of public sector employment as documented in the Peat Marwick report. In addition to the exceptions to the FTE system described above, the graph includes numbers of "privatised FTEs." This set of figures, it should be noted, primarily represents numbers of former employees of the Ministry of Highways, who were removed from the public sector (strictly defined) as a result of contracting out.

The Peat Marwick report identifies a number of quite substantial

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120 PR15, p. 4.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., p. 5.
Figure 3: Historical summary of government employment (Ministries)

Source: Peat Marwick report
problems encountered in the collection of data. They note that in the data from which Figure 3 is constructed, "there is significant missing information on D-Manuals prior to 1989/90 and on personal service contracts prior to 1991/92." Reporting methods also varied from ministry to ministry, resulting in "...inconsistent data collection and timing..." Further, the report stated,

"[s]ome ministries do not keep central registries of contractual staff and are consequently unable to report fully accurate figures on this category." In fact, I would argue that contracting out within the government is far more extensive than the Peat Marwick report indicates. For example, their "terms of reference did not include a detailed examination of employment trends in the Crown corporations and agencies." Indications from workers in the B.C. Buildings Corporation (see Chapter 5) suggest extensive contracting out in this part of the public service.

In contrast with the first graph, Figure 4 displays changes in the public service bargaining unit between 1975 and 1991, as revealed by British Columbia Government Employees Union membership data. As contracting out increased over the period 1983 to the present (as displayed in Figure 3), there was a corresponding decline in full-time, unionised employment in the public sector. Although the sharpest decrease has

123 PR15, p. 11.
124 Ibid., p. 8.
125 Ibid., p. 5. Apart from the problem identified by Potter concerning governments' reluctance to release reports on contracting out, then, both my own research and that of Peat Marwick was also hindered by the inadequacy of the Socreds records (Terry Potter, 1987 A temporary phenomenon: flexible labour, temporary workers and the trade union response West Midlands Low Pay Unit, Birmingham).
126 Ibid., p. 13.
Figure 4: Public service bargaining unit 1975–1991

Thousands

Source: BCGEU membership data
occurred since 1982, an overall drop in unionised employment since 1975 is also evident.127

In an editorial written the day following the release of the first portion of the Peat Marwick report, Vancouver Sun columnist Vaughn Palmer argued that the news of "hidden" employees was a finding of no consequence.

There is no need to get carried away with indignation. The jobs uncovered by the auditor were not really hidden, they were (for the most part) on the government payroll all along, and their "discovery" simply means a change in the system of counting.128 Yet this misses the crucial point. The fact that workers who were "on the government payroll all along" were not strictly defined by the Socreds as "government employees" reveals that the definition of what constitutes the public sector is an entirely arbitrary one.129

The particularities of the New Right in British Columbia make the province an interesting study. Since the mid-1970s, a discourse of neo-conservatism has been dominant in B.C. Successive Social Credit administrations have pursued policies which have attempted to withdraw services and to reduce public expenditure. Further, Socred government policy has involved an assault on labour through the restructuring of employment practices in the public sector. The case studies which follow document the ways in which work has changed in two segments of the

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127 The two tables should not, in fact, be taken to be directly comparable, as FTE equivalent figures include both union and non-union staff.


129 This is not to say that the dividing line between public and private sector constructed by the Socreds made no difference for workers, as we will see in the following chapters. The issue here is that the Social Credit government had the power to define particular boundaries.
public sector: within clerical work in the Ministry of Social Services and within the British Columbia Buildings Corporation.
FLEXIBILITY IN THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SERVICES

BACKGROUND

The increasing use of employment agency workers in positions normally staffed by full-time, union employees has become noticeable in many provincial government Ministries. The practice is particularly prevalent within the Ministry of Social Services, and on the recommendation of B.C. Government Employees Union officials, I chose to centre my first case study around changes in the organisation of clerical work within this Ministry.1 Clerical workers represent the largest component within the BCGEU -- approximately 28 per cent of their members work in the "Administrative Services" classification -- and the Ministry of Social Services is the largest employer of clerical workers.2

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1 Peter Burton, Janet Patterson and Cliff Andstein commented that the substantial increase in temporary agency employment since the mid-1980s had presented difficulties for government workers. Janet Patterson also suggested that the gender-segregated workforce in Social Services would provide a strong contrast with a case study of the B.C. Buildings Corporation.

2 Employees of the Administrative Services component are generally known as "admin" staff -- a title which acts to occlude their position as clerical workers. Callahan and McNiven, in the context of a discussion of privatisation, have noted that few studies document changes in social services in British Columbia. They write: "Those that do exist focus on the voluntary sector, while the transformation of the public sector has been recorded mainly in the media as well as annual reports of government, professional associations and union reports." Marilyn Callahan and Chris McNiven, 1988 "British Columbia," in Privatisation and provincial social services in Canada: policy administration and service delivery. Ed. Jacqueline S. Ismael and Yves Vaillancourt. University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, p. 26.
Women, not unexpectedly, comprise the majority of the clerical workforce. There are numerous types of offices within the Ministry. A first line of division is by region; a second by function (see Figure 5). The Lower Mainland area is comprised of four regions: A, B, C, and D. Region A is Vancouver/Richmond/Delta, Region B includes downtown Vancouver and the North Shore along with Howe Sound, and Regions C and D are Fraser North and Fraser South respectively (Figure 6). I conducted twenty face-to-face interviews with clerical workers, beginning with two shop stewards in Region B who are active in the union. All interviews were conducted in Regions A and B, primarily because these nearby regions were more easily accessible to the interviewer.

Social Services offices are organised at regional, area and district levels, and both the nature of clerical work along with the general office atmosphere varies across these different types of offices. In the larger regional and area offices, admin positions are constructed along secretarial lines: typing and word processing comprise a more significant portion of the job than in district offices and often, a boss/secretary relationship is evident.

3 Further, few men are employed as social workers or financial assistance workers: gender segregation within the Ministry is highly visible to workers. When I mentioned to Elaine that I was also considering changes in the British Columbia Buildings Corporation, she commented: "oh that's really interesting... they come in here all the time... Yeah, they're like one of our little quirks... I mean I don't care who I'm working with -- although this office has more men -- but the guys from BCBC... they're a visitor... we don't care what they've come to fix, they're just people to talk to...”

4 There are differences between the organisation of offices in Regions A and B -- one line of demarcation appears to be their differential resistance to the use of temporary workers: see below. Regions C and D are likely to be different again, but because mapping out regional differences was not a central research question, it was felt that omitting these regions from the study would not be problematic. There are also significant differences from office to office, and the advantage of concentrating interviews in two regions meant that a picture of different types of offices within a region could be built up.
Figure 5: Office organisation in the Ministry of Social Services

Regional

Area

District (Income Assistance)

District (Family and Children's Services)

District (Income Assistance)
Figure 6

Social Services Regions in the Lower Mainland

A Vancouver/Richmond/Delta
B Vancouver/Howe Sound
C Fraser North
D Fraser South
with clerks working for a regional or area manager. In the smaller district offices, which are often described as the "front-line", workers deal directly with Social Services clients. Clerks in both regional and district offices often emphasised the differences between their different workplaces. One clerk in a district office mentioned that she had formerly worked in an area office. I asked her what that was like:

It was extremely professional... you were taught what was acceptable... It teaches you the necessity of professionalism and diplomacy. You can't just say "oh, just a minute" (in a bored voice)... [You are taught that] you're not just an OA2 but a representative of this office.

Other admin staff in district offices were highly critical of workers in regional offices: "they don't know what to do when a client comes in -- they just run and hide!"

Since 1988, district offices have performed specialised functions: Financial Assistance Workers (FAWs) in Income Assistance (IA) offices assist individual clients with welfare and unemployment insurance benefits, for example, while social workers in Family and Children's Services (FCS) offices deal with "family" and child welfare. In each type of district office, admin staff provide clerical support, both dealing with clients as they come into the office and answering telephone enquiries, as well as processing documents related to social services support.

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5 See Rosemary Pringle, 1988 Secretaries talk: sexuality, power and work London, Verso, esp. Chapter 2. In many ways, clerks in district offices have more individual autonomy than their counterparts in regional or area offices, who often have the title of Clerk/secretary.

6 An "OA2" is an Office Assistant 2: an entry-level position.

7 In addition to the offices described here, there also exist a smaller number of Services to People with Mental Handicaps offices, an Accounting Office and a Personnel Office. The latter two offices are purely administrative, and serve the entire Lower Mainland area. The breakdown of interviews was as follows: IA: 9; FCS: 2; Accounting: 4; Regional Offices A and B: 5.
District offices may function differently, depending upon the local clients: in the Kitsilano IA office, for example, clients may be on short term income assistance, whereas downtown IA offices deal primarily with clients on welfare. Because offices do perform different functions, the types of tasks which clerical workers perform also vary widely, even though workers are slotted into cross-region, and even cross-Ministry job classifications.

When I first set out to investigate the forms which flexibility had assumed in the British Columbia public sector, I had thought that I might consider temporary work, part-time working, and subcontracting. I suspected that part-time and temporary work would be the dominant forms within the Ministry of Social Services. British studies in particular have documented a significant increase in female part-time employment in the public sector. Additionally, much of the literature discussing the positioning of women within flexible work practices makes reference to women's part-time employment.

There is, in fact, very little part-time work amongst clerical workers. Two factors appear to operate here: first, under the terms of the BCGEU Master Agreement, a part-time government employee must receive pro-rated benefits -- so part-time work provides no net cost saving to the employer. Flexibility within the British Columbia public sector is thus shaped by the strength of the provincial union: the fact that part-time work

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9 See, for example, Constance Lever-Tracy, 1988 "The flexibility debate: part-time work" Labour and Industry I 210-241.
is rare makes the public sector very different from other parts of the service sector. Second, numerous workers suggested that their desire for part-time work was precluded by the low wages typical of clerical positions. A Supervisor of Administrative Services (known as a "SAS") commented that part-time work would not be feasible for clerical workers: "...unless it was just a second job... not for us single parents..."

The number of clients visiting a particular Income Assistance office determines the number of Financial Assistance Workers, which in turn fixes the level of clerical support. For every 2.2 FAWs, an office is allocated one clerical position. A similar process operates in Family and Children's Services offices, where the number of admin staff is proportional to the number of social workers -- which in turn is based on the size of an office's caseload. Where part-time positions do exist, then, they are in offices where 'the formula' churns out a fractional position.

10 One Senior Clerk had formerly worked for the Woodwards' department store. "Why did you leave?," I asked. "Woodwards?," she said, "It was a lifetime of part-time. No one works full-time any more there." In Britain, Hunter and MacInnes suggest that public sector unions had been cooperative in the switch to increased part-time working within several NHS hospitals because they were "determined to avoid the introduction of private contractors" (Laurie Hunter and John MacInnes, 1991 Employers' labour use strategies -- case studies Department of Employment (U.K.) Research Paper No. 87, p. 22).

11 Many of the workers to whom I spoke indicated that they were household heads. Generally they volunteered this information in the context of my question about part-time work.

12 In the early 1970s, an individual social worker typically had a caseload of 100 clients -- presently the figure lies between 230 and 260. Clearly, this increase has significant implications not only for the nature of the service which social workers are able to provide, but also for the amount of support individual clients receive from clerks.

13 Joan, who explained the allocation of staff to me, commented: "the formulas don't capture things out there... they don't deal with the clients... like in Kits the clients know all the rules, they know what they are entitled to down to the last dollar, where as downtown they're screaming and waving a knife at you... but whatever the case, you can't get through the caseload they say you should... there's no way you can capture that type of information in a formula... The differences between Kits versus Mount Pleasant East: that kind of stuff can't be measured..."
are almost always filled by a person who works half-time at one office and half-time at another. Clearly this arrangement provides little flexibility for workers, yet is advantageous for the Ministry, because, as a number of supervisors of admin staff commented, part-time positions are difficult to fill.

All of the employees interviewed suggested that they worked "flextime." All clerical workers, I was told, had their hours of work organised around a "flextime" arrangement. Upon first hearing the term, the provision seemed particularly relevant within the context of a discussion of flexible work practices. However I soon became aware that the colloquial usage of "flextime" by clerical workers was not an entirely accurate one. Under the terms of Article 14 (Hours of Work) in the BCGEU Master Agreement, flextime refers to

the hours worked by an employee, or a group of employees, who are given authority to:

1. choose their starting and finishing times; and
2. choose their length of work day within a stated maximum number of hours, subject to meeting the required annual hours of work in accordance with this Agreement, through a specified averaging period which shall be determined at the Component level.\(^{14}\)

Within the Administrative Services component, the agreement states that staff may work an average of 70 hours over a two week period. Yet there are only a few Component 12 employees who possess "flextime" as described above. The arrangement common to the vast majority of clerical workers is what is known as a modified work week. Over a two week period, clerks

\(^{14}\) Third Master Agreement between the Government of the Province of British Columbia represented by the Government Employee Relations Bureau and the British Columbia Government Employees Union, signed 31 October 1977, p. 32. The wording of this article remains unchanged in the present collective agreement.
work an extra forty-five minutes, either at the beginning or at the end of
the day, such that they get one day off. Diana, a SAS in a Family and
Children’s Services office, made it clear that the clerical workers were in a
very different position from those staff who actually did have flextime:

[What is your schedule?]
8:30 to 5:00...

[So that’s flextime?]
No, it’s a modified work week

[But other people call it flextime...]
No, that’s when, say, if you work late one day, you can come in
late the next morning -- that’s what the social workers have.
But we work a set number of hours per day in order to get one
day off every two weeks. It’s a different component, it’s a
different contract.

When I asked Brenda Felker, the chair of Component 12, about flextime,
she reiterated Diana’s point.

Our component doesn’t really have flex-time -- that’s something
that is in the Master Agreement, but for Component 12 it’s a
modified work week. Flex time is when you are setting your
own hours... our workers are not free to come in on a Saturday
if they’ve missed a Tuesday, for example... it’s a misnomer
definitely. There are cases where people do have flextime, but
it’s very seldom... a few people, like auditors... people at the
higher end of the component.

The use of the term "flextime" also does not reflect the rather
significant rigidities of the arrangement -- for both workers and
management.15 "Flexdays" must almost always be taken either on a
Monday or a Friday: it is only in a very few cases that clerks have a
Wednesday flexday. Further, although extra time may be put in at the

15 David Harvey’s discussion of ‘nine-day fortnights’ (1989 The condition of
postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change Blackwell, Oxford, p. 150),
suggests that they represent more a more flexible working arrangement for regular
employees.
beginning or end of the day, workers do not have a choice as to when they work this time. While many workers commented favourably about having a day off every second week, and suggested that the arrangement made their job less stressful, the modified work week does not actually provide them with flexibility, as does the flex-time provision (strictly defined). Joan, a worker in a Regional Office, commented: "the Area Manager and the Regional Director... they have the ability to free up a day if they want."

The modified work week is also a rigid arrangement from the perspective of management. As one worker stated:

The ministry would love to get rid of it, because every Monday and Friday there are people missing -- although you are putting in the time.

Management would like to eliminate the modified work-week provision, which has been in the BCGEU Master Agreement since 1977, however the union has been able to keep the provision in the contract.\(^{16}\)

**TRANSFORMATIONS IN WORK**

The primary change in the organisation of work over the last fifteen years has been the increasing use of temporary workers, and it is the case of temporary staff as a more flexible workforce to which I turn in the first part of this section. I then discuss other changes in the Ministry which have transformed the nature of clerical work in Social Services.

Temporary work within the Ministry exists in several different forms: as well as hiring workers from outside agencies, the Ministry also

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\(^{16}\) The Chair of the Government Employers Resources Board, Mike Davidson, commented during contract negotiations in 1982 that flex-time presented a problem for the government, because it "gives some people Fridays off, so the public suffers" ("Productivity: dark plot or seventeen minute solution?" *Vancouver Sun*, 31 July 1982, p. A2).
operates its own "float pool" of what are called "auxiliary" workers. Auxiliary workers are union members, and after they have worked 1827 hours (a year), receive benefits under the Master Agreement. Agency temps are the most vulnerable -- they do not have union support, nor can they 'upgrade' to a full-time position. The position of auxiliary workers is also precarious, however, particularly during their first year of employment. Although temps and auxiliaries are positioned differently, each has a relative insecurity of status as compared to full-time employees. Auxiliaries often do not receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Some workers reported that auxiliary workers, for example, did not work "flex-time" whereas others suggested that auxiliaries did fit into a modified work week schedule. I asked Brenda Felker about this:

[Do auxiliaries get flextime?]

They are supposed to. The modified work week agreement is in the contract, and is supposed to apply to everyone. But often auxiliaries don't -- they think that because the boss says they can't have it... they are told that, for example, new hires aren't eligible. But people don't know... It is cause for a grievance.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, almost all temporary clerical work was done by unionised auxiliaries. The issue of auxiliary workers acquired significant import during BCGEU contract negotiations in 1982, when General Secretary John Fryer revealed that the number of auxiliaries had increased three-fold over the previous three years and presently stood at more than ten thousand workers, comprising approximately one quarter of the union membership. The increase demonstrated an attempt by the Socreds "to disguise the growth of the civil service as it preaches restraint in

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17 Auxiliaries are not exclusively clerical staff -- there is, for example, a float pool of Financial Assistance Workers. However, Component 12 comprises the largest group amongst auxiliary workers as a whole, thus in discussing auxiliaries I refer to clerical workers.
spending." In previous agreements, the union had obtained significant layoff protection for regular employees, and it was for this reason that the government increasingly filled positions with auxiliaries.

By 1983, the contract between the government and the BCGEU was set to expire. This was also the year of "Restraint" in British Columbia, and the announcement of legislation in the 7 July budget placed the union in a particularly difficult position. Bills 2 and 3 particularly made null and void many provisions in the union's collective agreement, including the right to negotiate work schedules and overtime. The outcome of bargaining later in the year meant a loss of layoff protection for regular workers, however the BCGEU was able to negotiate a conversion clause by which 4000 auxiliary workers were converted to regular status.

Temporary workers have been employed in government departments and agencies since the mid-1970s. Temps were hired to cover vacations, and to do special projects: to fill in, for example, when an auxiliary worker was not available. By the mid 1980s, however, temps were being used increasingly as a trained pool from which the government could draw. The auxiliary conversion clause likely had some effect upon the increasing use of

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20 See Clause 31.01(b) in the Sixth Master Agreement between the Government of the Province of British Columbia represented by the Government Employee Relations Bureau and the British Columbia Government Employees Union, signed 20 January 1984. Peter Burton (former secretary to the Master Bargaining Committee) commented that the union "gave up layoff protection because of the more draconian threat contained in Bill 2." Many thanks to Peter for his overview of the changing position of auxiliaries.
agency workers: if auxiliaries were more difficult to hire and lay off, it is not surprising that the use of (even) more contingent workers became increasingly prevalent. However, the expanded use of temporary workers was also facilitated by the setup of a budget separate from the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff budget. When supervisors stated that they were short-staffed, they would be told there were no FTEs available, but that they could employ temporary staff, through a "standing order" with an employment agency.

I asked a clerk in the Accounting office why she thought temp workers increasingly were being used: she said

Because the offices don’t have a position available. The jobs are locked in with the government... that’s the only thing they can do (get temps in). It’s got to get really bad before they even do that...

Full-time, unionised positions are made unavailable -- to cope with increased workloads, offices can only hire temporary staff. In the Accounting office, then, as elsewhere, temporary workers were not only hired for vacation relief, but also employed to deal with increasing workloads.

When I first began to interview Social Services workers, they suggested that offices were "allowed" to use temporary workers "only a couple of years ago." Several workers mentioned the appearance of temp workers in offices in the mid-1980s, however others indicated that temps were a very recent phenomenon. A two-budget system, with one item for

21 Although data on increases in the number of temp employees does not exist for the early 1980s (see Figure 8 and discussion below), the BCGEU has calculated that spending on contractor fees has increased twenty times faster than expenditures on employee salaries. (Janet Patterson, 1990 "Changes in contracting" The steward: tips, trends and timely information for BCGEU stewards 9, December, p. 5).

full-time equivalent staff, and another for temporary workers, was in fact set up earlier in some Ministries than in others. In Social Services, a distinct purchase order number for temporary workers, has only recently been established. This is the "permission" about which clerical workers spoke.

Yet this is not to say that no temps were hired in the 1980s. Until roughly three years ago, prospective employees could apply to the Public Service Commission, and if ministries wished to fill a position, they would go first to the Commission’s files. If a potential applicant could not be found, ministries would request permission to use temps: the use of agency workers was therefore approved on a case by case basis. The abandonment of a centralised hiring procedure not only appears to have made it more difficult for the government to find workers, particularly for the 'clerical float,' but further, in conjunction with the setup of a separate budget line for temps, has facilitated the increasing use of temps rather than full-time staff.

Regular employees' perception that the use of temps is relatively recent has been coloured by the particular history of the BCGEU's resistance to the use of temporary agencies: increased union activity in the last several years has had the effect of making temps more visible in the workplace. One clerk remarked: "Five years ago... we were never told

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23 Dual-budgeting in the British Department of Social Services described by Peter Fairbrother is remarkably similar: he writes that "[o]ffice managers are given two budgets: (1) a budget which is the cash equivalent of the complement, and (2) a 'manpower' substitutes account which can be spent on overtime, casual or full time staff..." (1991 "In a state of change: flexibility in the Civil Service," in Farewell to flexibility? Ed. Anna Pollert Blackwell, Oxford, p. 76.)

24 I am indebted to Brenda Felker, Chair of Component 12, for providing me with an informative overview of changes in the Public Service Commission and the increasing use of temps.
where they (temps) were from. Now we have to know." As of the third quarter of 1989, the government has been required to report numbers of positions filled by temporary workers in each Ministry. Additionally, union workers must be told the name of the agency for which a particular temp is working.

Figures 7 and 8 depict change in levels of auxiliary and temp workers in recent years. Figure 7 is based on data obtained from the British Columbia Employees Union.\(^{25}\) There has been an overall decline in the total number of workers since 1984, although employment levels have remained relatively stable in the last three years. The proportion of auxiliary workers to regular employees has been relatively constant since 1984, standing at between nineteen and twenty per cent.\(^{26}\) Figure 8 displays total levels of temporary agency employment in provincial ministries, and is based on BCGEU figures as reported to them by the government each quarter.\(^{27}\) The shaded area of each bar represents the number of temp appointments in the Ministry of Social Services. Social Services appointments have increased relative to the total for all ministries: while appointments to the government as a whole have fallen -- at least over the limited period displayed in the graph -- the annual total of Social

\(^{25}\) The data set is limited by the fact that BCGEU records of auxiliary employees have been maintained only as far back as 1984.

\(^{26}\) In BCGEU records, "other" refers not only to auxiliary employees, but also to workers hired on "limited" employment contracts. As auxiliaries comprise the majority of the "other" category, and workers often move from "limited" to "auxiliary" status, I use the terms relatively interchangeably, to indicate a group of provincial public sector workers who are members of the union, but who do not possess all full-time employee benefits.

\(^{27}\) Many thanks to Janet Patterson and Kinder Takhar for access to these figures.
Figure 7: Auxiliary and regular employees (in January of each year)

Thousands


Source: BCGEU "Membership counts"
Figure 8: Employment agency count 1989–1991

Source: government reports to BCGEU
Services appointments has increased.\textsuperscript{28}

The expanded use of temps has taken place against a backdrop of other types of changes in the Ministry. Higher-level decisions, such as the announcement of the "Restraint" program in 1983, have had an impact upon clerical work in Social Services. Additionally, there have been several reorganisations of work within Social Services offices.

Many social services jobs (the ministry was at the time known as the Ministry of Human Resources) were eliminated in 1983 -- the first year of Bennett's "Restraint" program. The uncertainty about where the axe was going to fall made working conditions extremely difficult for employees. I asked Sylvia about the events of 1983:

That was a bad time... People kept bringing chocolate into the office. No one said let's all take turns bringing chocolate, but we all just did... when everyone was so stressed...

Many longer-term clerical employees whom I interviewed had worked for the Ministry of Human Resources in a quite different capacity prior to 1983. Sandi, for example, had been a homemaker with the In-Home Service program, providing help for mothers and emergency services, but was transferred into a clerical position due to the nature of layoff protection regulations contained in the BCGEU Master Agreement. Although many auxiliary workers and those with less than three years seniority were fired in 1983, the government could not fire workers who had been employed for more than three years. Many female in-home service workers were placed in clerical positions. According to the collective agreement, Sandi suggested, the government was required to place people in

\textsuperscript{28} BCGEU officials note that record-keeping within ministries may not be entirely accurate -- they suggest that overall levels of temporary working may well be higher than the numbers indicate. See the discussion in Chapter 3 above, concerning the data collection problems encountered by Peat Marwick.
jobs which had a salary of between five percent above and fifteen percent below their former position.

In-home service workers were the lowest paid workers... so the only place they could go was into clerical jobs... a lot of them hated it... they took early retirement or left the Ministry.

[Were all of the IHS workers women?]

No, there were some men in handyman services... they had to place some men too...

[But they didn’t go to clerical?]

Oh no, some got jobs at Riverview...

The attempt to dismantle portions of the public sector had distinctly gendered effects.\(^{29}\)

The present Ministry of Social Services has its origins in the Department of Human Resources, formed in 1973, renamed a Ministry in 1976 and the Ministry of Social Services and Housing in 1986.\(^{30}\) Social Services has undergone significant organisational changes throughout the 1970s and 1980s. One such change involved a regionalisation of authority: since the late 1970s, regional managers in the province have held significant authority.\(^{31}\) Other forms of organisational change have also affected the nature of clerical work. The first is the split of offices along functional lines. Prior to May 1988, the bulk of Social Services functions were handled

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\(^{29}\) The assumption that women could move easily between IHS jobs and clerical work has parallels with an episode in the history of the B.C. Buildings Corporation, where female cleaning staff were transferred to clerical jobs. Men who had formerly been cleaners were given the opportunity to move to engineering positions. See Chapter 5 below.

\(^{30}\) The Ministry is currently titled the Ministry of Social Services, as a result of the New Democratic Party’s cabinet reorganisation following the October 1991 provincial election.

within the same type of office: social workers, financial assistance workers and clerical staff worked together in a single office. The division into IA and FCS offices -- generally termed "reorg" -- has contributed to understaffing in both workplaces, as the clerical staff complement previously employed in a single office was split between two. One worker reported that in FCS offices, social workers often had to cover incoming telephone calls. Joanne also suggested that the separation between the two offices made it more difficult to share information:

Like with a family coming in for income assistance... if we saw someone whack a child across the room, we could call on the social worker... sometimes we would flag their cheques, and say that they couldn't pick them up until they saw the social worker.

Joanne thinks that the split was part of a long term strategy by the Socreds: that the privatisation of particular sections within Social Services was facilitated by the segregation of services into two self-contained operations. I had spoken to Joanne just prior to the provincial election in October 1991, and she commented that

If they (the Socreds) get in again, the social workers will probably go private... they've already privatised adoptions"

Another type of "reorg" occurred relatively recently: in March of 1991, the Head Office in Victoria changed the way in which client data was entered into the central mainframe computer. Formerly, clerical workers were solely responsible for data entry: after the implementation of a procedure called "Release 5", Financial Assistance Workers were able to record client data at the time of initial appointment. Particularly in Income Assistance offices, Release 5 (often termed "R5") has had a significant effect upon staffing. Along with the split into IA and FCS offices in 1988, clerical workers identified Release 5 as one of the most significant changes to
clerical work in Social Services.

Initial installation of an on-line system had begun in 1984, at which time clerks could only view the database. By 1985/6, data could be entered directly into the computer by clerical staff. Formerly, data entry had been contracted out, but the Ministry transferred the responsibility to administrative staff by, as one SAS suggested, incorporating it as "other related duties" within clerical job descriptions. Admin workers had to cope with a significant increase in their workload. A time study was conducted, which measured the amount of time necessary to key in a "batch" of income assistance data. It was assessed as 35 hours a week -- equivalent to one person.

Based on the results of the 1986 time study, decision-makers in the Head Office assumed that the transfer of data entry tasks from clerks to Financial Assistance Workers which occurred with the introduction of "R5" would make possible the elimination of a position from the clerical staff. However, Joan reported that clerks were initially much slower -- those familiar with the system could now enter a batch much more quickly than the original time study calculated. The removal of an entire position from offices has left them short-staffed. Interestingly, clerical workers reported that FAWs were concerned that "R5" might transform them into typists/clerks.

They thought they'd have to be typists, but they soon realised all they had to do was with two fingers...

Despite the direct entry of data by Financial Assistance Workers, paper files are still maintained, and thus whenever clerks file documents, they must pull the entire physical file (which FAWs used to do), file the documents, and then "refile" the particular paper folder. Because R5 left
offices short a clerical position, there are insufficient staff to cover the front counter, answer the telephone and to do refiling in a "back room." In a number of offices, (re)filing is left to accumulate, until an auxiliary or occasionally a temp worker is employed to do backfiling. Several Senior Clerks commented that since the introduction of "R5", their jobs had been deskilled. They are now required to spend much of their time doing straightforward filing. Clerks also perceived the transfer of data entry to Financial Assistance Workers as a loss of status and responsibility.

FORMS OF FLEXIBILITY AND THEIR GENDERING

The changes described in the previous section, combined with an increasing demand for social services throughout the 1980s, has had a number of effects. Here, I highlight the development of a variety of different practices, including overtime working, turnover in the Ministry and temporary assignments given to permanent staff. Although these are arrangements which have developed in an ad hoc manner -- they do not necessarily represent a "strategic" use of flexible work practices -- they have acted to forestall a severe crisis in staffing in the Ministry. Beyond the use of temporary agency workers -- a topic which I will address in more detail shortly -- there are a fairly wide range of other ways in which, effectively, the government as employer has been able to obtain flexibility in its workforce. The types of flexibility achieved in the Ministry of Social Services have been mediated by the gender of clerical workers.

Clerical workers do a great deal of overtime -- some of it paid, but

32 Technical change, then, has not "rendered... filing or straight clerical work obsolete." Cf. Patricia Marchak, 1984 "The rise and fall of the peripheral state" Paper prepared for The structure of the Canadian capitalist class conference, University of Toronto, 10-11 November 1983. Revised for publication (in Regionalism in Canada, ed. Robert Brym) January 1984. Mimeo, p. 27.
the vast majority unpaid -- which enables adjustments to changes in work flow. Discussions of overtime working within the flexibility literature generally refer to paid overtime -- however, unpaid overtime (so often, of course, performed by women) can be just as much a means by which flexibility is achieved as paid overtime. This is particularly true within the Ministry of Social Services, where there are extremely high levels of unpaid overtime working. Of the twenty clerical workers I interviewed, three reported that they were currently working more than fifteen hours of overtime each month, and another stated that in the past, she had worked more than twenty hours per month, in order to keep up with her work. She no longer puts in this much overtime, even though the workload is still heavy:

You've got to pile 10 hours in your head into an 8 hour day... but I don't worry about it now. I just do what I can. I guess it's working in this place for 14 years...

A shop steward reported that since 1988, when the subdivision of offices required a significant amount of extra work, Deputy Ministers have actually budgeted for 25% free overtime, "cause they knew the workers would do it

Anna Pollert has argued that "overtime working can be and is a traditional practice for permanent 'core' employees, particularly male manual workers." (Pollert, 1988b, op. cit., p. 294). She suggests that there are problems with including overtime working in a "numerical flexibility" category. However, it is possible to argue that a consideration of overtime undermines a core/periphery numerical/functional division (precisely because it is generally full-time workers who work -- and receive remuneration for -- overtime) without dismissing overtime working altogether as a flexible practice. Cf. also Ontario Ministry of Labour, 1987 Working times: the report of the Ontario Task Force on hours of work and overtime. Toronto, esp. Chapter 10, where it is suggested that the use of overtime is linked to the development of more flexible work arrangements.
anyway."

The extent of overtime working is very much dependent upon the nature of the office: upon local office work cultures. The situation in one of the regional offices provides an example. There are five management staff, three admin staff, a float coordinator and an administrative assistant. The latter two workers fall under the Administrative Services classification, but because they work closely with management, feel pressure to work late alongside salaried employees. The float coordinator supervises and schedules the employment of both auxiliary and temporary workers within all offices in the region. The administrative assistant's duties are even more extensive, and involve working closely with the Regional Director on projects such as monitoring the FTE budget.

I asked Joan, the Administrative Assistant, about the hours she worked:

Do you want the truth?

[Yes]

It's supposed to be 8:30 to 5:15, technically... but I'm really here till 6. Some nights it's 9 or 10... I've been coming in on weekends -- but then that's me personally... The workload is too heavy for one person... I'm not financially reimbursed... but also I have more flexibility than someone in a district office...

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34 High levels of turnover of permanent clerical staff in the Ministry are in part a result of this high level of overtime working as well as to difficult and stressful working conditions. Turnover in and of itself is a means by which the government can adjust its workforce. Cf. John Atkinson, 1984, "Flexibility, uncertainty and manpower management" I.M.S. Report No. 89 Institute of Manpower Studies, Brighton, p. 17: here, he suggests that a relatively high level of labour turnover amongst full-time employees will provide numerical flexibility. These employees are described as being "peripheral", despite their full-time status. Atkinson also suggests that jobs within "Peripheral group I" are characterised by "lack of career prospects," a "systematisation of job content around a narrow range of tasks," and that the recruitment strategy within this group is "directed primarily at women." (Ibid.) A counter-argument might be made, to the effect that turnover was frequently high under Fordism: Ford's labour force itself is reported to have had an extremely high turnover (Harvey, op. cit., p. 128)
[Do other workers put in a lot of overtime?]

Yes, in this office... the excluded staff -- the Area Manager and the Regional Director -- they work beyond a 70 hour week. [The float coordinator does]... that's because of the nature of the job... There are a lot of extra job duties... we can't pay overtime, but some days I tell Sara to disappear [i.e. leave early]. It's very different in the regional offices, when all the non-admin people are here till midnight. There's one manager -- she would like [the admin staff] to be more flexible [and work overtime alongside management] -- but she's getting sixty thousand... or maybe it's ninety...

The admin staff are clock watchers... You could tell the time by their comings and goings... Admin work doesn't require you to stay beyond the (regular) hours, though...

Joan suggested that she "liked to get things done": she felt the necessity to finish a particular task. While she was aware that management received substantially more remuneration for the extra hours they worked, she was somewhat ambivalent about working overtime. Both Joan and Sara (the float coordinator) continue to work long hours not because they have been deluded by management or their employer, but, seemingly, because overtime working provides them with a form of status; a sense that their particular jobs, because they are not regulated by the clock, are more important than those of the clerk/secretaries.

Admin staff are paid what is effectively a biweekly salary based on an hourly wage. Particularly if regional or area managers make paid overtime unavailable, a wage is transformed into a very low salary. In Rosemary Pringle's study, one secretary commented that she was "whacking up about 80 hours a week... I'd be rich if they paid overtime!" As Pringle suggests, overtime working is important in the construction of secretarial and clerical work as female. Working overtime positions women as "loyal"

35 Pringle, op. cit., p. 33.
and "committed." While Pringle's discussion of overtime is set within a context of relations between bosses and secretaries, it might also be argued that women who work overtime are located within a larger-scale dynamic of power. Women's paid labour responsibilities are constructed in a parallel way to their work in the home -- as caring, loyal, dedicated and unregulated by time -- and as a particularly gendered form of flexibility, overtime working affords significant benefits to (in this instance) the government as employer. While unpaid overtime constitutes a reassertion of status and professionalism by female employees, it is also complicit with governments' organisation of work.

A further way in which the government is able to achieve a certain degree of flexibility is through the movement of full-time, permanent workers from one office to another, on temporary assignments. Sometimes workers are "seconded", or offered temporary placement in a higher-paying position; on other occasions they are transferred laterally. Joan, an Administrative Assistant, described the secondment process:

Management has the right to take permanent employees and put them anywhere... but secondment's different - it's an employment opportunity that's time limited... (the job ad) is distributed to the world... it's usually something that you want to do...37

However, not all of Joan's own transfers were to jobs she preferred: later in the same interview, she continued

I moved offices 5 times in 2 years, all at management's whim... the thing is if you are good, they'll put you somewhere else... they never shift the problems around, they just shift the people who can deal with them...

36 Ibid.

37 Secondment positions are posted on the Ministry's internal electronic mail system. By "distributed to the world", Joan means that all clerical workers have access to the list of positions.
Another worker had similar comments: "I moved around -- often it wasn't my choice... they knew I'd deal with difficult situations."

Occasionally, regular workers are asked to fill in for a very short time. During a recent Canadian Union of Postal Workers strike, Alix was asked to distribute Social Services cheques in a district office:

...sometimes we're sent out into the field...

[Have you ever been?]

Yes, when there were problems with the mail, I went down to B11 (a district office) to hand out cheques... or if they're short-staffed... Gloria will often go to help out -- she's really good that way.

The movement of workers from office to office is frequently, constructed as "helping out": the float coordinator to whom Alix referred above described the situation in her own words: "I'll come in on my flex day if they need someone..."

Job to job transfers within the same office may be formal, as in the case of secondments, or entirely informal. Frequently, SASes switch workers from one job to another during the course of the day, week or month. One Senior Clerk told me:

I have different responsibilities every two weeks... This office is really unusual... the SAS arranged it so that we all can benefit from doing the front desk/files. In other offices everyone does a specific task -- and they do that thing until the day they die... (here we have) a two week period at each desk: cheques, files, and phones... we rotate...

From the workers' perspective, arrangements such as this do seem to relieve some of the stress in busy district offices. However, switching positions also provides flexibility for the Ministry. If workers are able to do a range of jobs within a particular office, adjustments to changes in work flow are made easier. Without increases, through the 1980s, in both overtime working and in job-to-job movement, individual Social Services offices would
have been unable to function adequately, given the expansion in demand for their services.

**RELATIONS BETWEEN 'PERMANENT' AND 'TEMPORARY' CLERICAL WORK**

Historical studies of clerical work note that the entry of women into the clerical labour force relied upon the reconstruction of such work as requiring attention to detail and manual dexterity -- particularly with the development of the typewriter. In the British Civil Service, Walby notes, the introduction of women into the labour force was accomplished initially through the creation of new clerical grades for women, located beneath those of the established male workers. The resulting segregation of work positioned women at the bottom of the office hierarchy. In this final section of the chapter, I suggest that temporary work is constructed, in part, in relation to 'permanent' work. I first elaborate on notions of skill within clerical work more generally, and then examine the case of temporary workers within the Ministry of Social Services.

One worker described the positioning of clerical workers in social services, suggesting that intersecting relations between skill, gender and wage levels acted to construct lines of division across both the component and the ministry. She stated that

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39 Sylvia Walby, 1986 *Patriarchy at work: patriarchal and capitalist relations in employment* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
In Component 12, it's mostly women, that's why the wages are so low... because it's female dominated -- that's why we get all the crap... Our component is considered the lowest on the scale. They figure we can just make do -- work a little harder, a little faster...

Julia also suggested that the Ministry as a whole was "the lowest on the scale."

We work with people who are poor... there is an association... the front person who gets the lowest pay gets the biggest flack of all...

Here Julia referred to the fact that when programs are cut, admin staff have to deal with complaints. Particularly under the Socreds, people would see advertisements on television, and then arrive at a district office to find that a particular program had been cancelled, or lacked significant financial backing.

Assumptions about gender and skill converge in clerical work. A number of the clerical workers whom I interviewed perceived their job to be unskilled. Sylvia, for example, felt she possessed few skills because she was unfamiliar with word processing. As I was writing down her answers to my questions, she asked me:

Do you have a computer?

[Yes...]

...'cause that's another thing -- we don't have word processing skills. It's difficult to go and get another job outside the ministry,'cause they all want word processing...

Diana, a Supervisor of Administrative Services in a Family and Children's Services office, echoed Sylvia's comments:

I always say that I know more about nothing than anyone else. If I left, well, I would have people skills, but as far as anything else... I don't have a clue about word processing and computers. All of our programs are preprogrammed

[They're on the mainframe?]
(Diana nodded) ... we're just trained: this is what to do, that's how you do it... our skills aren't as current (as someone outside the Ministry)

Word processing might not be described as skilled -- the construction of typing as a feminine task is carried over into word processing as well, although within a particular feminised (sub)category of skill, word processing is perhaps higher in the hierarchy. Diana plays down what she describes as "people skills": something often perceived to be a 'natural', feminine quality.

Barker and Downing suggest that in secretarial work, job descriptions are frequently absent. Where descriptions do exist,

they usually specify: 1) shorthand and typing; 2) general office duties; 3) etcetera. It is the "etcetera" which not only permits the gross exploitation of office workers, but also assumes the naturalness of women performing specifically feminine tasks which involve caring and servicing.40

In an interview in the Accounting office, I asked Barb what her job title was:

Well, it's clerk 3, but I'm supposed to answer the managers phone. I do secretarial work for everyone in the office, but I don't have a secretary title. That's the thing -- everyone's got "and other related duties" in their job description - they'll fit anything there...

Angie, a supervisor in a District Office, made a similar comment: when the Ministry made clerks responsible for data entry (formerly it had been contracted out -- see above), Angie suggested that it was easily incorporated

40 Barker and Downing, op. cit., p. 75.
under "other related duties." "It was a major chore for us," she said. As Jane Jenson has argued, "a secretary’s job is probably the ideal-typical form of flexible specialisation, albeit in the tertiary sector." This could apply equally to the work performed by admin staff in Social Services, whose jobs might be described as straddling a divide between clerical and secretarial work.

Workers did not always describe their jobs as unskilled. Alix, for example, when asked about her specific job duties, said

I do everything! I track training and professional development for everyone in district offices... work on a big database. I compile figures for every document processed for clients, plus the usual secretarial duties... You get people asking you about everything under the sun, and you have to sift through a lot of verbiage -- so even answering the phone isn’t an easy job.”

In one interview, Gloria wanted to know the central question of my project. What was I really doing?, she asked. I was in the process of outlining Atkinson’s core/periphery model, and discussing the use of temporary workers to provide numerical flexibility in areas such as clerical work which were ”unskilled”, when she interjected ”but they’re (clerks) not unskilled!”

Interestingly, this transfer of work to clerks in Social Services runs counter to a general point often made in discussions of changes to clerical work. It is often argued that technological changes in particular have resulted (or will result) in increased rationalisation within clerical work, and have increasingly separated its component tasks. Discussions of the segregation of key punching into geographically separate "back offices" are one example. See Kristin Nelson, 1986 "Labor demand, labor supply and the suburbanisation of low-wage office work," in Production, work and territory: the geographical anatomy of industrial capitalism Ed. Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper Allen and Unwin, Boston, pp. 149-171.


Note the shorthand Alix uses for the vast range of meanings attached to the term "secretary" (i.e. "the usual secretarial duties") -- and her assumption of a relatively uniform, and shared meaning. See Pringle, op. cit., particularly Chapter 1: "What is a secretary?"
Recall also the discussion above concerning management's movement of workers from office to office. If the levels of skill required in Social Services are disregarded, it might seem that such transfers also represent numerical flexibility -- that an 'unskilled' workforce is merely being redistributed. Yet what must be recognised here is that admin staff are asked to fill in where particular skills are needed. Clerks who are able to develop and set up systems within an office, and to organise personnel within it, are essential if an office is to function adequately.

Beyond the multi-skilled nature of many clerical, and particularly secretarial jobs, there is also a significant amount of what might be loosely classified as "cross-training." As I have suggested, the shifting of staff from job to job within an office by the Supervisor of Administrative Services appeared both to relieve workers' stress, and to provide the Ministry with flexibility. We might think about such an arrangement in more detail, through the lens of what Atkinson defines as functional flexibility. It is different from attempts in, for example, the automobile industry, at least in the sense that the initiative for arranging for/allowing for workers to acquire more "skills" comes from the workers themselves, rather than from management.44 However the informal training organised by SASes does make possible mobility between job titles such as records clerk and voucher

44 There is some question as to whether attempts to reorganise labour along "multi-skilled" lines is, in fact, occurring in the auto industry, or whether workers are merely experiencing task enlargement based on "off-the-job" training. For recent analyses of the industry, cf. John Holmes, 1991 "From uniformity to diversity: changing patterns of wages and work practices in the North American automobile industry," in A flexible future?: prospects for employment and organisation. Ed. Paul Blyton and Jonathan Morris. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York; and Tod Rutherford, 1992 "Training for flexibility?: production restructuring and recruitment and training in the UK and Canadian automobile industry" Paper presented at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers, Vancouver, 20-24 May. However, manufacturing sectors such as the automobile industry are often held up as an example of the use of multi-skilling practices.
clerk, for example, which benefits the Ministry. Particularly where offices are short-staffed, it is important for one worker to be able to step into another’s job.

The implicit connection between gender and skill which operates in the construction of clerical jobs as female acts to position temporary jobs at an even lower level on a skill/pay hierarchy. This link between gender, skill and the temporary nature of jobs is constructed at a number of different places. One of these places is at the agency itself, where, for example, workers’ skills are often defined by their performance on typing tests.\(^4^5\) Additionally, however, skills are defined at temps’ places of employment. Agency temps in the public sector not only earn significantly less than unionised workers, but also the jobs that they do are constructed and reconstructed as unskilled in relation to those of regular staff. The following comments were made when I asked clerical workers what type of work temporaries do:

Usually answering the phones, filing, mail... the tedious boring jobs that no-one else would do... we say, oh, we’ll get the temp to do it...\(^4^6\)

An auxiliary is sent out for training for 12 days, but with the agency people -- they’re put [straight] into an office... they’re doing bare minimum...

[They do] typing, reception, photocopying... not very much... filing we don’t have them do... unless you’ve had formal training... temps couldn’t do computer work.

\(^4^5\) See Matthew Sparke, 1991 Temporary topics: critical interpretations of the temporary work industry M.A. thesis, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Chapter 4.

\(^4^6\) Temp workers in Potter’s case study of the DHSS in Britain reported a similar "division of labour" between temporary and permanent staff: one temp worker commented "we found that we got the worst jobs around the office -- jobs that permanent staff would resent doing" (Terry Potter, 1987 A temporary phenomenon: flexible labour, temporary workers and the trade union response West Midlands Low Pay Unit, Birmingham, p. 44).
We've used Office Assistance 10/12/15 times in the last year... it's very frustrating because they don't know the system and we have to train them...

To some extent, then, Social Services workers position temps as unskilled and as incapable of coping with the workload, particularly in busy district offices. Unionised employees are quick to suggest, however, that the lack of fit between the local knowledge needed in the ministry and the ”general, industry-specific skills” which peripheral workers (like temps) are seen to possess is not necessarily the fault of the temps:

Some of the temps are wonderful... they have great telephone skills.

A lot of them have been quite good: they can answer the phones alright.

Administrative supervisors particularly, however, are frustrated that ”the body is there but we’re not getting the work done.”

It also appears that temps’ duties have become more limited over time.

Five years ago they weren’t as stringent... they let them do anything -- keying in documents, working on terminals... in the mid 1980s there was no difference between a temp and an OA2 float....

The BCGEU has attempted to resist the use of temp workers by arguing that temps have access to confidential documents without having taken the oath of confidentiality required by the Provincial Government.47 Thus it may be that the current restrictions on temps’ duties -- having them only work on the switchboard, for example -- is a function of the governments’ attempt to circumvent the union’s confidentiality argument. The restrictions on temps’ duties then acts to reinforce their jobs as requiring

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47 Letter dated 10 April 1990 to Mr. R.K. Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Services and Housing, from Peter Burton, Coordinator, Research and Arbitration Services.
only limited skills.

One Supervisor of Administrative Services (SAS), however, explained it to me another way. She suggested that the restrictions on temps duties, rather than being a function of security requirements, were applied for financial reasons:

They hire someone from office temps -- they can only do certain things... they can only do the switchboard -- you can run into problems because the person can't do, say, straight copy typing... because I think switchboard must be the lowest classification they have...

[So it isn't security?]

No, I think it's the dollars... it has to do with the money...

[So the government hires at the cheapest level?]

Yes.

Temporary work is also constructed as "tidying-up" work. Workers are hired to come into offices and clear away "backlog": i.e. to do, as the clerk/steno I quoted above stated, "the tedious boring jobs that no-one else would do." Social Services offices are increasingly understaffed -- the effects of the latest recession on the client base in the Lower Mainland are immediately apparent upon entering a downtown Income Assistance office. Because of budgetary restrictions on full-time equivalent positions, work -- particularly filing -- accumulates, and must be dealt with by an auxiliary or a temp worker. Elaine commented that

In an office you can do applications, filing, cheques, but if you're a float you do filing for two weeks... I hate that: filing for two whole weeks!!

Beyond the general assumptions about "women's work" which act to create clerical/office jobs as female, then, the construction of temporary work as "tidying up" or "clearing away" contributes further to gender temporary work.
The ideas behind functional and numerical flexibility intersect. According to the terms of Atkinson's model, clerical workers are located in peripheral group I. Temp workers are considered to be part of peripheral group II. Yet I have attempted above to suggest that both functional flexibility (multi-skilling) and numerical flexibility (overtime working) are important within clerical jobs.

Further, functional and numerical flexibility intersect in a different way. Part of the need for functional flexibility stems from the use of temp workers. Many clerical workers commented that temps were unable to come into an office and cover all the responsibilities of a 'regular' unionised worker:

Temps don't have a lot of training, so (when the come in) then I have to juggle all my staff... it really disrupts the office...

Numerical flexibility -- the hiring of temps -- thus only appears (to a limited extent) to be a successful form of flexibility because other office staff are able to fill in when a temp hired as a 'switchboard operator' is not able to do filing, for example.

Temporary working has been the most visible of flexible work practices in the Ministry of Social Services. However, other practices such as overtime working and the movement of workers from job to job and from office to office have also been important in the functioning of Social Services offices. The combination of increasing demand for social services in B.C., along with the placement of restrictions on full-time equivalent positions (reflective of an ideological commitment by the Socreds to decreasing the size of the unionised public sector), and in addition to reorganisations within the Ministry of Social Services, have created a shortfall in office staffing.

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48 See above, fn. 33.
Yet a significant crisis has been forestalled both because clerical workers are able to substitute for one another, and because they work substantial amounts of unpaid overtime.
SUBCONTRACTING IN THE BRITISH COLUMBIA BUILDINGS CORPORATION

BACKGROUND

The British Columbia Buildings Corporation has represented the government as landlord since the Corporation was formed in 1978. It purchases or constructs buildings, rents space to ministries and agencies, and charges a fee for cleaning and maintenance. Individual "Property Management Units" are responsible for any building (which may be either leased or owned by the Corporation) within a particular area of the province. Originally, BCBC did provide all services itself, and was staffed by government employees who were transferred from the Department of Public Works. As these employees have retired or quit, however, subcontract staff have taken their place. Contract workers, who are hired in all areas of the corporation, presently outnumber permanent employees -- particularly within the lower paid/skilled/status positions of Building Operations Services workers. The numbers of management/professional staff have been increasing, although some professional services, such as those provided by architects and accountants, are also contracted out.

Information about changes in the organisation of work in BCBC was obtained primarily from questionnaires distributed by a long-time employee and union activist to workers at various sites in the Lower Mainland. At a preliminary interview, John indicated that other BCBC employees would be

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wary of speaking to me directly, and it was at his suggestion that I constructed questionnaires. After reviewing the completed questionnaires, I conducted a further interview with John, asking him to clarify a number of the workers’ responses. Data was also obtained from the Annual Reports of the B.C. Buildings Corporation.

Speaking at a First Ministers conference in 1978, Premier Bill Bennett argued that current economic problems in Canada stemmed from the growth in government spending and what he saw as an over-expansion of the public sector. Increases in public sector “compensation,” or pay levels, were a particular problem. He announced

We have got to curtail the cost of government. We have got to provide more opportunity for the private sector. We have got to do something in a very real way. Compensation in the public sector has, in many areas, led the way for the private sector and put costs out of balance.

It is clear that the formation of BCBC, and the contracting out of work from the Corporation, fit squarely within Bennett’s agenda. Through the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bennett not only attempted to reduce the size of government -- at any rate ‘direct’ government employees -- but also he sought to alter the structure of public sector employment.

Swainson has suggested that the expansion of other government departments in British Columbia in the 1970s placed particular pressures on the Department of Public Works. The NDP were in the process of

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2 When I approached B.C. Buildings Corporation management, they declined to participate in the project. There appears to be significant tension between workers and management in the Corporation.


4 Swainson, op. cit., p. 146.
reorganising the department when they were defeated in the 1975 election.

Their successors chose instead to write it off and to transfer responsibility for providing the government’s physical facilities to a new Crown corporation (the B.C. Buildings Corporation). Its remaining responsibilities were shifted to other agencies.5

B.C. Government Employees’ Union officials have suggested that BCBC was set up from the beginning as a contract agency. Peter Burton commented that "the hyper-inflation of the mid 1970s meant that regulating wage costs was a motivating factor.” BCBC, along with the BC Systems Corporation and to some extent the BC Ferry Corporation, was set up as a part of this "regulation" of wages.

To describe the formation of BCBC as 'regulation' might seem unusual. On the one hand, BCBC could be seen as an attempt at deregulation or perhaps privatisation. But it is, in effect, 'regulation' by 'deregulation', reflecting the New Right desire to subject the public service to the 'discipline' of the 'free market'. Although the placement of a provincial Minister on BCBC Boards of Directors allowed the Cabinet to maintain some influence over Corporation policy, labour regulations in BCBC, like those in other Crown corporations, were dismantled in the sense that personnel policies were no longer governed by the provisions of the Public Service Act.6 There existed a degree of executive control by the government, but BCBC was free to develop its own procedures with regard to the staffing of the Corporation, for example.

The act creating BCBC received assent on 30 June 1976. It is clear from the wording of the Corporation’s mandate contained within the act that BCBC was to be modeled after a private sector corporation: it was to

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., pp. 151-2.
be controlled by a Board of Directors, and was charged

to identify the short and long term accommodation service
requirements of the B.C. government and to satisfy those needs
in a responsive and cost-effective manner.⁷

"Cost-effectiveness" was to be achieved by contracting out work: from the
beginning, BCBC was to "emphasise the utilisation of B.C. services and
resources in the private sector."⁸ Annual Reports consistently assert the
role of the private sector in BCBC operations. The 1981/2 Report notes that

...the Corporation is not in competition with the private sector.
Rather, it relies upon private sector consultants and contractors
to perform much of its work.⁹

The continual emphasis of the private sector both reflects and reproduces
New Right ideas about 'deregulation'. Additionally, it constructs the private
sector as the leading edge: because the private sector is able to achieve
'cost-efficiencies', this is the lead which the public sector should follow. In
the day-to-day operation of the Corporation, this meant that

Report 1977/78 Victoria, Queen's Printer, p. 4. Emphasis mine. The association of 'cost-
effectiveness' with the private sector stems from an assumption that while 'market forces'
determine wages in the private sector, forms of resource distribution are substantially
different in the public sector. Jane Pulkingham has argued for a rejection of this
assumption: she suggests that both leftist and New Right sides of the debate over
privatisation are problematic in that they assume that "the 'logic of the market' provides a
salient description of the overall process occurring." (Jane Pulkingham, 1989 "From
Although the full implications of Pulkingham's arguments cannot be addressed here, it is
useful to retain her general assertion that a strict 'public welfare'/private market' division
be dismantled.

⁸ BCBC President's Report, contained within BCBC's first Annual Report (op.
cit.), p. 4.

⁹ British Columbia Buildings Corporation, 1981/2 Annual report Victoria,
Queen's Printer, pp. 16-17.
[a]ll major capital projects of a market comparable nature were designed and constructed to a market-derived capital budget. The Corporation quotes firm market rents to clients prior to the working drawings stage of each project. This forces designs to conform to the same capital budget constraints as would be the case for a private developer. Mismanagement of the project would result in a deterioration of the Corporation's return on investment, rather than an increase in the client's rent. To our knowledge, this approach represents a unique discipline in North America as applied to construction of major facilities for government occupancy.10

Yet as will become clear from a later discussion in the chapter, in "the general argument surrounding privatisation... ideological commitments to the private sector often override any simple cost considerations."11

In December of 1977, Public Works employees were informed that they had a number of different options, including early retirement, severance pay, transfer to another part of the public service (as openings became available) or employment with the new B.C. Buildings Corporation.12 Workers were told that

The Government and your Union have attempted to ensure that sufficient options are available to enable each employee to make a decision which best suits his particular circumstances and needs, recognising that the Corporation cannot offer employment to all existing DPW employees.13

BCBC Annual Reports suggest that there were 1674 permanent positions in the Corporation "pre-startup", however by the end of the first year of BCBC's operation, 1213 employees remained. Some former Public Works

10 BCBC, 1980/1 Annual Report, p. 5. Emphasis mine.


13 Ibid., p. i. Note the gender-specific language. Department of Public Works employees were predominantly, although not exclusively, male.
employees were placed in temporary positions within the Corporation, and later moved to permanent jobs in other parts of the government.\footnote{14}

Comprehensive data on changing levels of employment in the B.C. Buildings Corporation has been exceedingly difficult to obtain. However, the general trend -- a decline in the number of full-time, unionised employees -- can be approximated in several ways, as demonstrated in Figure 9. "Component 15" (Building Support Services) totals were compiled from BCGEU membership records. While a small number of Building Support Services Staff work in areas other than BCBC, this data does provide the best approximation of the decline in unionised staff within the Corporation. A second set of data is provided in BCBC Annual Reports. Here, figures reflect the Corporation’s "total authorised staff complement," which includes not only unionised employees, but also "excluded," or management, staff. It should be noted that these net annual totals obscure the movement of employees into BCBC: for example, 243 Ministry of Health workers were transferred into the Corporation early in 1984.

Even within the limited context of the data displayed in Figure 9, it is clear that the decline in Component 15 membership has been sharper than the decrease in the total number of BCBC employees. The number of management staff has not fallen as quickly as the number of workers -- in fact, BCGEU officials have suggested that as contracting out has increased, jobs have been \textit{created} at the administrative/management level. When

\footnote{14} In a debate on 26 June 1978, Emery Barnes and other NDP members argued that not only was the government policy costing taxpayers money because work performed by contractors cost more than if it had been performed by a public works employee, but also that some public works employees continued to be paid their full wage but were no longer working. Barnes suggested that the Socreds were "bending over backwards to avoid embarrassing situations" ("Gov't costing taxpayer plenty by contracting out," \textit{Vancouver Sun}, 27 June 1978, p. A14.)
Figure 9: British Columbia Buildings Corporation 1978–1991

Source: BCGEU records; BCBC Annual Rpts.
subcontracting was in its beginning stages, difficulties arose because individuals employed under contract could not obtain a Worker's Compensation Board number unless they were declared 'employees'. As a result, what the BCGEU terms "sham contractors" were set up, where one or two workers formed small companies which in turn employ subcontract staff.\textsuperscript{15} Monitoring this layering of contracts has necessitated an increase in management personnel.

The B.C. Buildings Corporation sought to reduce the numbers of unionised workers through a process the Corporation described as "attrition-based staff reduction." In 1983 it was reported that only two out of every ten BCBC jobs which became vacant were filled.\textsuperscript{16} By the Corporation's definition, the staff reduction plan is "aggressive." Union employees describe it as giving people a "golden handshake":

If you give them a golden handshake, you can always entice people to leave. They won't admit it, but for people close to retirement, they can call up [the Human Resources manager] and ask how much would I get if I retired now... he will set up a meeting, then it will go to superannuation -- they have a slush fund -- that's what I call it. You normally get benefits from early retirement, but they'll top it up... this isn't advertised, though...

Thus although Annual Reports argue that with the implementation of the attrition based "staff reduction program"

not only are major savings resulting, but also, the program serves as a positive motivating force as employees at all levels are constantly challenged to find more efficient ways of discharging their responsibilities.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Personal service contracts also still exist -- here workers are declared "employees" for the purposes of the WCB and Revenue Canada, but not in terms of the BCGEU bargaining unit.

\textsuperscript{16} Vancouver Sun, 22 July 1983, p. E5.

\textsuperscript{17} BCBC, 1984/5 Annual Report, p. 3.
transferring jobs out of the public sector is clearly far from inexpensive.

While both data sets displayed in Figure 9 show a general decline in BCBC employment since 1978, the figures do not show changes in the levels of contracting out which have accompanied the decrease in the number of unionised workers. Contracting out has increased despite a clause in the B.C. Government Employees Union Master Agreement which prohibits this practice. Article 24 states that

The Employer agrees not to contract out any work presently performed by employees covered by this Agreement which would result in the laying off of such employees.

Clearly, however, in the case of BCBC, the provincial government has been able to evade this provision simply by replacing unionised staff who have retired or quit with subcontract workers. Contracting out has also been possible because, as noted above, employees of Crown corporations are excluded from the terms and conditions of the Public Service Act. BCGEU members working in government Ministries are subject to the provisions of the PSA, however bargaining between BCBC and its employees is governed by the Labour Code of the province.

As I have suggested in Chapter 3, much attention has been paid to the effects that Bill Bennett's 1983 "Restraint" program had on government workers. It was only after 1983, many have argued, that the Social Credit party "embraced on a neo-conservative solution to the crisis of

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18 The first collective agreement was negotiated with the NDP government in 1974. Collective bargaining had been in adopted in other provinces and in the federal government prior to its implementation in British Columbia. See Swainson, op. cit.

19 Eighth Master Agreement between the Government of the Province of British Columbia, represented by the Government Personnel Services Division and the B.C. Government Employees Union. 25 January 1989. A new collective agreement was under negotiation at the time of writing.
capitalism." However, "downsizing" in the B.C. Buildings Corporation preceded the announcement of "restraint" in government as a whole. The change in employment practices such as, for example, increased contracting out, which became visible in other parts of the government in the mid 1980s, was not a new feature in the B.C. Buildings Corporation. In 1983, President Peter Dolezal suggested the Corporation provided a model of restraint not only for other parts of the British Columbia public sector, but also for other North American governments to follow.

Contracting out in BCBC has advanced to such an extent that subcontract workers presently outnumber unionised staff by a ratio of approximately 4:1. The fact that, in the words of a Building Maintenance Engineer, "there is more contract worker than BCBC worker, working @ BCBC worksite," has had a number of effects. First, unionised workers have experienced a narrowing of their job duties as a result of increases in contracting out. Many male workers perceive a deskilling of their jobs. Second, the defining line between public and private sector has become increasingly blurred. As the previous quotation suggests, work sites are still defined as belonging to the Corporation -- yet the majority of the workers are not direct government employees.

Many jobs in the Department of Public Works were defined as "trades." An apprenticeship program existed, and pay grades were more

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22 There are variations from site to site: the ratio can be as low as 2 to 1 (Law Courts, located in downtown Vancouver).
sharply demarcated according to skill levels. In BCBC, however, only one or two classifications exist within a particular job title. Gardening provides one example: in the Department of Public Works, there existed up to six classifications, however in BCBC there are only two. John Walker commented:

> Our gardeners are not paid as trades people -- that’s been a grievance, because they should be... There used to be a Master Gardener... now that was back in the days of Public Works... and he supervised labourers... BCBC never had an apprenticeship program. So we have, for example, rough carpenters.

The work of some "trades people" -- in fact tradesmen -- which was formerly defined as skilled, therefore, is now classified at a lower pay level. In the absence of an apprenticeship program, workers are limited to relatively few job classifications.

In the last several years, there also appears to have been a relaxation of qualifications for particular jobs. A number of workers, when asked if their job had changed at all, noted that fewer qualifications were now required. Jobs which formerly required a Third Class engineering ticket, for example, are now being filled by people with a Fourth Class ticket. Longer-term employees particularly were concerned about what they saw as a downgrading of their position.

Further, as BCBC workers have worked alongside subcontractors, the jobs of permanent workers have been substantially altered. One Building Maintenance Man wrote that

> the major part of my job has been taken over by contract staff. I have been reduced to performing the more menial tasks (changing light bulbs, cleaning, etc.)

According to Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model, core workers are those who possess skills specific to the firm. Peripheral workers, by contrast, perform
tasks requiring more 'general', or industry-specific skills. In BCBC, however, there has been, in a sense, an inversion of Atkinson's core/periphery model. Subcontractors are hired to do specific tasks, while at the same time, there has been an (at least perceived) deskilling of permanent jobs. Subcontract workers perform 'core' tasks, while full-time, unionised employees appear to be placed on the periphery.

However, it would be misleading to pursue this argument much further: difficulties with Atkinson's model stem, at least in part, from its dualistic structure. It would be spurious to argue that turning Atkinson's core/periphery model on its head provides a more appropriate representation of the work context at BCBC. Despite the fact that contractors may be taking over more of the work that had been performed by unionised employees, contract workers have been employed under quite different conditions -- conditions, clearly, which are not of their own choosing. Subcontract workers are positioned at the margins of work arrangements: they have little job security, receive no benefits and frequently work long hours.

The situation at BCBC, with contractors working alongside permanent staff, is similar to that which Ralph Fevre has outlined in his study of the British Steel Corporation's Port Talbot operations. Pollert, commenting on Fevre's work, argues that

The 'core-periphery' model... fails to register the type of situation found at BSC, where casualised workers perform 'core' operations alongside 'core' workers doing the same jobs.\(^{23}\)

However it is not just that 'peripheral' workers are doing 'core' jobs. We should be careful to realise that the nature of permanent jobs -- in both

\(^{23}\) Anna Pollert, 1988b "The 'flexible firm': fixation or fact?" Work, Employment and Society 2, p. 291.
BCBC and BSC -- has changed as contracting out has increased. The scare quotes tell the story: the incursion of casualised work has had a direct impact on the work of permanent staff. The core-periphery couplet is not appropriate to the BCBC case.

Increased subcontracting in BCBC has also meant that unionised employees have lost the possibility of supplementing their wages through overtime. A Building Maintenance Man stated:

I work very little overtime now because most of the work I used to perform in the past is now being done by contract staff, and overtime is allotted more towards them.

Whereas contract provisions require that unionised workers in BCBC be paid time-and-a-half or double-time for the extra hours they work, subcontract staff can be paid straight time for their "overtime" hours.24

In response to the question "what types of work does the Corporation contract out?”, many of the workers simply wrote "all types." The question "who are the contractors?" prompted answers such as "Paladin Security and on and on". Many of the workers felt that the union had not been involved in attempts to resist contracting out, and suggested that increases in subcontracting were a "natural fact of life.” This demonstrates the success of the ideological construction of a trend towards more flexible working as inevitable.25

24 Note that in contrast to the unpaid overtime performed by admin staff in Social Services, BCBC workers almost never work beyond their required hours without pay. When I asked John Walker about unpaid overtime, he stated that in the rare occasions where, for some reason, workers had to work beyond 'regular' hours, he would arrange for them to receive "time off in lieu.” But, he continued, "I keep close watch. There isn’t a lot of going on in [my unit], because I monitor it. [Do people work unpaid overtime anywhere else?] "Maybe in other regions... well, women in the offices -- the clerks at year end...”

25 See Anna Pollert, 1988a "Dismantling flexibility" Capital and Class 34 42-75.
**BLURRING**

The use of contract labour in BCBC has meant that the boundary between public and private sectors has become increasingly blurred. As I have indicated, BCBC staff and subcontract employees often work at the same worksite. Contract workers are frequently supervised by BCBC employees. Increasingly, this has created difficulties for unionised workers.

A shop steward said that

Workers take orders from our supervisor -- and they go to our meetings, our training... now [the relationship's] closer, but it was originally separate... If a contract worker lodges a complaint against one of our people, our people can be disciplined... that shows the close relationship...

John Walker noted that contractors use our workshops, our equipment... some of our equipment... the perception is to our tenants that these people (contractors) are BCBC employees... they work our hours...

[I saw someone come into the personnel department, with a tag... would he have been BCBC?]

Our people have a badge with a picture on it... other workers will have, like security passes etc, but our people have a picture... but after a while, people don't notice... they've seen the face so often... they're surprised when they find out [that these are not BCBC workers]...

A number of the clerical workers to whom I spoke confirmed John's point: they were unaware that the workers who came in to repair the radiator, for example, were not direct government employees. A similar situation in the British Steel Corporation has been documented by Fevre: BSC employees perceived contractors -- particularly those with which BSC had an

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established relationship -- to be subsidiaries of the Corporation.\textsuperscript{27}

Much of the BCGEU's efforts to resist contracting out have revolved around a struggle over the definition of "employee": whether or not individuals are defined as "employees" or "contractors". The dissolving of boundaries has made it difficult for the union to reverse the trend towards contracting out.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{THE GENDERING OF SUBCONTRACTING IN BCBC}

The intent of the first part of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the changes which have occurred since the formation of the B.C. Buildings Corporation. The discussion centres largely around the changes in work experienced by male employees. In this second section, I draw out the different implications that subcontracting has had for men and women. I have suggested above that a "core-periphery" distinction is problematic. A crucial problem is the lack of space for gender. As indicated in Chapter 2, discussions of flexibility construct a divide between core and peripheral categories. Although subcontract workers can be placed within the latter group, I want to argue that there are also lines of division \textit{within} this particular type of (using Atkinson's terminology) numerical flexibility. Flexible working practices look different for men and women because they are infused with traditional notions of gendered work.

I began the study with the intent of trying to understand the processes by which subcontracting was gendered as male. BCBC is male-dominated (over 70 per cent of employees are men), and contracting out is

\textsuperscript{27} Fevre, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{28} The BCGEU has met with somewhat greater success in other parts of the public sector (e.g. the Ministry of Social Services) than they have in BCBC.
certainly most advanced in this sector of the public service, so the construction of an opposition between BCBC and Social Services seemed to make sense. At a general level, subcontracting is gendered as male. Further consideration of processes at work in BCBC reveals that while women are also participants in subcontracting arrangements, they are frequently positioned at the bottom of a subcontracting hierarchy, as Angela Coyle has shown in her discussion of contract cleaners in Britain. Divisions within the subcontracting category reflect and reproduce gender relations.

According to Piore and Sabel's account in The Second industrial divide, skilled workers, employed in the "small firm sector," are the contributors to a craft revival. Here subcontract workers are gendered as male through a process which relies on an unproblematised notion of skill. Accounts of subcontract labour in Japanese production arrangements, in which workers possess a relatively stable relationship to a larger firm, also establish subcontractors as both men and as skilled workers. The subcontracting arrangement itself takes on a particular -- that is, male --

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29 Women work in BCBC offices, however management and 'trades' categories are predominantly male. See Figure 10: Workers in BCBC.


Figure 10
Workers in BCBC

Source: BCBC Annual Report 1978/9
One of the questions which I asked both BCBC and Social Services workers was whether or not they thought there was a gender difference between temporary work and subcontracting. One of the clerical workers in Social Services commented:

The thing is, when you contract, you spend a lot more money. The contractors... apparently they just rake in the money -- they're quite pleased. With agency temps, they're making a lot less.

There does seem to be a perception of subcontractors as workers with special skills offering their services at a premium.

Subcontracting fits uneasily within Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model. As I have indicated, subcontracting is defined as peripheral within the context of the core/periphery distinction. Numerical flexibility is achieved through the ease by which firms can take on and lay off subcontractors. However, a dualist model is frequently difficult to sustain. As Pollert has pointed out, if we consider the case of computer programmers, for example,

the concept of 'peripheral labour', in the sense of exposure to the open market, is meaningless in relation to a privileged employment group enjoying skill scarcity."

The core/periphery model obscures possible divisions within subcontracting arrangements.

33 One of the reasons subcontracting appears gendered as male is that discussions within the subcontracting literature tend to be gender-blind. Analyses of subcontracting have often been conducted in sectors such as the automobile industry, for example, where male workers predominate. However, subcontracting arrangements in the industrial home sewing, clothing and microelectronic sectors rely significantly upon the work of women. See Lourdes Beneria and Martha Roldan, 1987 The crossroads of class and gender: industrial homework, subcontracting and household dynamics in Mexico City University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Nonetheless, analyses of production subcontracting do tend to gender the arrangement as male. In the BCBC case study particularly, subcontracting is in general terms constructed as male.

34 Pollert, 1988b, op. cit., p. 290.
The difficulty here, and the reason that subcontracting remains for the most part untheorised in Atkinson’s model, is that a core/periphery grid provides little space for thinking about gender. This is revealed when we examine in more detail subcontracting arrangements in BCBC.

The B.C. Buildings Corporation presently contracts out a wide range of jobs. Not only are these jobs segregated by gender but also the terms of contract arrangements serve to reproduce inequalities between male and female workers. I had asked workers what types of work BCBC contracted out. Some wrote, simply, ”everything.” Many made a distinction between ”trades” and ”general labour”, and suggested that contracting was prevalent in both areas. I received the following response from a gardener:

Tradesmen -- plumbing, electrical, painting, carpentry, gardening, locksmith, sign painters
Non-trades -- cleaners, garden helpers, furniture movers, security, light fixture washers and changers, interior plant people, pest control
Professional -- project managers, architects, consultants

Women are employed in jobs which fit into the category which the gardener defined as ”non-trades”: they work as cleaners and sometimes in security positions.

I asked a union contact if there were wage differentials amongst workers performing different types of jobs under contract:

Oh yes... in certain classifications - say cleaners - it’s two for the price of one... even trades -- they don’t get the same: there it wouldn’t be 2 to 1, probably 75 or 80%...

But there are also gender divisions within job classifications, depending upon the nature of the contract. Many men -- generally those who have taken early retirement -- are re-hired under personal service contracts. They are, in effect, ”one-man companies.” One man was appointed to a security position, and paid at his pre-retirement wage rate. Women,
alternatively, are generally employed by private companies, such as cleaning and security firms, who have contracts with the government. The instability and insecurity of these workers is described in the following:

At the courthouse, we’re at -- let’s see -- at minimum the third, possibly the fourth contract, yet the cleaners have been there since day 1. If one company loses the bid and another comes in, they hire the staff already there. The owner changes, but the people don’t.

[So does that mean there is some sort of security for the employees?]

Oh no, they lose things every time a new one comes in. The company will bid lower, then come in and say to the workers, you’ve got a job, but we’ll have to pay you less. And most of them... don’t have a choice if they want to keep the job.

The labour-intensive nature of cleaning, combined with the competitive tendering process, results in a downward spiral of wages. As Madeline Leonard has noted in relation to the contract cleaning industry in Belfast,

> to be successful and secure a contract, the subcontractor is continually involved in attempts to increase workloads, intensify work practices and lower the wages of the cleaners he employs.\(^{35}\)

Yet despite such conditions, contract workers are continually "disciplined by the fear of unemployment."\(^{36}\)

Ideas about gender are also reproduced as work arrangements change. In 1983, the effects of Premier Bill Bennett’s declared intention to "downsize" the B.C. public sector were felt by many government workers, who lost their jobs. But a less well-known element of the "Restraint" program was the displacement of jobs from one part of the public sector to


\(^{36}\) Fevre, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
another. In 1983/4, approximately 300 cleaners working for the Ministry of Health were transferred to BCBC. These positions then increasingly began to be contracted out. A shop steward reported

BCBC said -- they said it straight out to me -- "cleaners are dinosaurs". Any of them they could encourage to move out of cleaning, they would, if they had the background/education.

Men and women experienced this transition differently: men were given on-the-job training, and were upgraded into higher level, largely engineering, classifications. Women, by contrast, were moved into clerical positions. Men were promoted, while, in most cases, women were transferred. Almost eighty per cent of all clerical workers currently working in BCBC offices have formerly been cleaners. The assumption that women could move easily from cleaning to clerical work makes visible just how firmly entrenched are ideas that both of these jobs utilise 'natural', 'feminine' talents.37 This episode recalls Valerie Oppenheimer's suggestion that

it is not that jobs favourable to the employment of women require no skills, but that the skills required can be obtained before employment.38

However, employers rarely recognise, nor do they remunerate women for,

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37 Cf. Jane Jenson's suggestion that women are constructed as having "talents," while men are seen to possess "skills": 1989 "The talents of women, the skills of men: flexible specialisation and women." in The transformation of work?: skill, flexibility and the labour process Ed. Stephen Wood Unwin Hyman, London.

training which they receive in former workplaces or in the family.\textsuperscript{39}

A central tenet of Oppenheimer's discussion is that low pay and low skill cannot be equated: women are frequently hired not simply because of a demand by employers for cheap labour, but rather because women constitute a \textit{skilled} lower wage labour force.\textsuperscript{40} Barbara Baran has drawn on Oppenheimer's work in order to make a similar point with respect to changes in the insurance industry: "the salient characteristic of the labour force is not... that it is unskilled but rather that it is both \textit{skilled} and \textit{cheap}."\textsuperscript{41}

A comment in a recent B.C. government publication is interesting in this context: "The rapid growth of the service sector in the province can be partially attributed to the increased availability of a flexible and skilled labour force."\textsuperscript{42} The construction of women as a particularly (and 'naturally') flexible labour force is central to many discussions of women's work, and is particularly important in writing about flexibility.

\textsuperscript{39} Veronica Beechey and Tessa Perkins, 1987 \textit{A matter of hours: women, part-time work and the labour market} Polity, Cambridge, p. 145. Although they refer here to part-time workers, their point applies equally to work performed by women more generally. With respect to training acquired "within the family," Beechey and Perkins suggest that "it would be wrong to conclude from this that women are 'naturally' suited to such jobs, but more accurate to say that domestic work and unqualified caring work have been constructed in such a way that they replicate women's domestic role within the home" (p. 79).

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 98-99.


The example of the movement of female cleaning staff into clerical positions clearly demonstrates the ways in which work performed by women is constructed as a homogeneous category, defined as "unskilled." Ideas about the gendering of cleaning and clerical work have shaped the outcome of flexible work practices: unequal relations of power are produced and reproduced through changes in the organisation of work.

The expansion of flexible working in the public sector in British Columbia has had different implications for men than it has for women. In BCBC, men who retire early, receive substantial superannuation bonuses, and are then rehired under personal service contracts have largely benefitted from increased subcontracting. The 1987 Annual Report declares:

professional consultants, contractors, tradespeople and the taxpayers of British Columbia have all benefitted in this progressive approach to the provision of accommodation and related services for the ministries and agencies of government.43

Women employed directly by BCBC are segregated within particular job classifications, and those employed indirectly work for subcontract firms, under precarious and uncertain conditions. Subcontracting is filtered through conventional assumptions about the gendering of work, and divisions within the subcontract workforce are constructed along gender lines.

A final point concerns the experience of male BCBC workers, which is not exactly revealing of a 'core'. Many of the benefits which formerly accrued to male manual (or at least full-time, unionised employees) have been effectively lost. I noted above the loss of overtime working. A further

example involves seniority regulations.

During my interviews in Social Services, a shop steward suggested that auxiliary workers often found it difficult to build up seniority, because the government purposely made the size of the seniority block small. Auxiliary workers employed in one region would lose seniority if they moved to another. "The government wants to shrink the size of the seniority block -- they want to make it desk to desk," Joanne said. Limiting the block clearly keeps workers in a more temporary employment relationship. When I spoke with a BCBC shop steward, I asked about the seniority block there. "Well," he said,

it's province wide, but seniority doesn't really matter any more. I've never heard of it coming into play [in a competition]... it would come in if there were layoffs, but it hasn't been used because there haven't been any layoffs... and they're very proud of that, they keep telling me.

Thus the security of position afforded by seniority regulations -- a feature supposedly characteristic of the core workforce -- does not operate in this situation.

In BCBC longer term employees, who might be perceived as the 'core', have felt that alongside increases in subcontracting, they have experienced a loss in status. The fact that contracting has continued over many years has led to a general feeling of despondency: many workers perceive contracting out within the Corporation to be inevitable -- to be a "natural fact of life". The loss of workplace status has particularly affected male workers. Although they define themselves as skilled in relation to subcontractors (a gardener foreman remarked upon contractors' "poor quality of workmanship"), BCBC workers are aware that their jobs have become more limited over time, as contracting out has increased.

Women working in subcontracted positions in BCBC have largely
lost out relative to men. However, these have been gendered losses within a particular form of flexible working, rather than across different types of practice -- across 'core' and 'peripheral' categories. Thus, as Linda McDowell has suggested, gender divisions under more flexible working are far from straightforward.44 Disadvantages may be registered by both men and women. Gender divisions in the labour market may have been restructured, but "the gains and losses have not been lined up straightforwardly on a gender basis, or at least not in the expected way."45 In BCBC, advantages under more flexible working have not always accrued to male unionised workers.


INTERROGATING FLEXIBILITY: SOME CONCLUSIONS

While I have discussed the gendering of temporary work and subcontracting individually in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, I now draw out several contrasts between the two case studies. Making direct comparisons is not as straightforward as I had initially thought, as flexible working arrangements in BCBC and Social Services were not limited to temporary work and subcontracting, but rather other practices such as overtime working operated alongside these two types of flexibility. In attempting to answer the question of how and why gendering took different forms, I focus upon temporary work, personal service contracts and subcontract working. I make a distinction between "PSCs" and working for a subcontract firm because of the gender divisions found to exist between the two (see Chapter 5).

In the Ministry of Social Services, there are restrictions on the types of office work temps are allowed to do. Generally, temps are limited to answering incoming telephone calls or working on the front counter. Limitations exist partly because of union resistance -- the BCGEU has argued that breaches of confidentiality would arise if temps typed casework notes in Family and Children's Services offices, for example. Additionally, temps are frequently slotted in as "switchboard operators," a classification which is lowest on temp agencies' pay scales. Thus the terms under which temps are hired are restrictive. Further, however, temps perform only limited tasks because they lack the local knowledge required of clerical workers in Social Services. Under Atkinson's model, numerically flexible workers are required only to have 'general skills'. These are indeed what
agency temps would seem to possess. Yet working as a clerk or clerk/secretary in Social Services not only demands significant knowledge of ministry filing systems, mainframe computer operations and Social Services regulations, but also requires familiarity with clients entering the office. A Supervisor of Administrative Services commented: "the receptionist does more than just book appointments." Thus temps' activities on the job are limited because they cannot, for example, do data entry or filing. Firm-specific knowledge is required. In BCBC, however, it has been the unionised workers whose activities have become more limited. Subcontractors increasingly perform a wider range of tasks -- they have taken on duties formerly done by regular workers. One effect here has been that unionised, predominantly male, workers feel their jobs have been deskilled.

Different (gendered) forms of flexible working are manifest in different types of employment contracts. Temporary working, personal service contracts, and subcontracting are all relatively precarious arrangements, with little job security, for example. Divisions among these three forms follow gender lines: women work as temps, and for subcontract firms, while men are employed under personal service contracts, or, occasionally, head small two- or three-person "companies". Women, therefore, must report to a contractor or agency, while the position of men is somewhat more autonomous. A discussion with a clerical worker in the Accounting office is of interest here: when I asked about possible gender differences between contracting and temporary work, Marie responded with the following comment:

when they contract, you are stuck there permanently... we are not a contract, we are permanent. A permanent employee has the right to leave... a contract employee, can they quit?
I suggested that the employee could leave the subcontract company, at which point Marie interjected "...but they couldn't get out of the contract." Marie's husband, she told me, ran an import/export business, and her participation in the small firm seemed to colour her response here: she was considering the binding terms of a contract. Hers is an interesting observation if the position of women is considered -- particularly in cases where subcontract companies are (as an Administrative Assistant in Social Services described) "family-run", and headed by men. Women working in cleaning firms, for example, are positioned very clearly within both patriarchal family structures as well as within those power structures which frame the subcontract relation in capitalism.

There are some final theoretical points to be made. It is Anna Pollert's contention that the notion of flexibility, in the labour market and in work, "should be abandoned as a framework for research." Unlike Pollert, however, I do not wish to reject altogether a discussion of flexibility. Rather, as I have suggested, categories of numerical and functional flexibility need to be re-evaluated. Flexible work practices should be conceptualised not as producing a distinct core/periphery or central/marginal structure, but rather as reworking the employer/employee relationship. While we may want to use the terminology that John Atkinson's 'flexible firm' model sets out, it is necessary to examine critically the assumptions made by, for example, a category such as functional flexibility, in which

1 Marie not only worked full-time in the Accounting office, but also for her husband. I asked, [so you work in the business too?] "Oh yes... he says, are you free today? Then on Saturdays, after I've finished my shopping, I do data entry for him. I'm learning word processing for the business... then I try and go out and get some business for him..."

particular conceptions of skill are so strongly embedded. Further, a less rigid association between core and periphery, function and number, would make space for a consideration of a range of flexibilities. A specific point here is that functional flexibility is enacted in those jobs, frequently defined as 'peripheral', which women do.

Additionally, while taking Pollert's argument that a central difficulty with the flexibility debate has been its prescriptive message, it is still possible to consider work practices in the public sector in light of flexibility. We can then see more flexible forms of working as arrangements mediated by political concerns. Economic regimes in British Columbia have been shaped by the political practices of Social Credit governments. Flexibility has not been an apolitical strategy: one aim of Socred policy has been to curtail the power of public sector trade unions.

By siting temporary and subcontract work -- by looking at these forms of flexibility in a specific context -- I have hoped to reveal the gendering of flexibility as dynamic. Lines of division in the workforce between men and women are continually renegotiated -- it is in part for this reason that positions of gain and loss are not aligned with gender divisions. Finally, by using the British Columbia public sector as a means to interrogate the categories of flexibility (and the 'flexible firm' in particular), I have attempted to intervene in debates concerning privatisation. Increased contracting out in the public sector, along with the use of temporary workers has blurred boundaries between what might be seen as a unionised 'core' and a non-union 'periphery'. 
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