

BLUE-COLLAR ARISTOCRATS? GENERAL MOTORS AUTOWORKERS AND OPPOSITIONAL CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT

Postwar social theorists (Goldthorpe, Lipset, Giddens, Hout, Brooks and Manza) have typically portrayed members of the Western industrial working-class as accommodative and suggest that an affluent proletariat has seen its oppositional working-class consciousness subverted and transformed by the 'cash nexus' into various forms of social integration. With reference to Mann's (1973) measures of class-consciousness I explore expressions of proletarian consciousness among organized workers at one of Canada's largest industrial union locals, the Canadian Auto Workers Local 222 of General Motors, Oshawa, Canada. Here I tested for the existence and degree of working-class imagery, proletarian identity and oppositional working-class consciousness using a survey questionnaire (N=102), in-depth interviews and participant observation. I found a shared view of class relations as primarily characterized by conflict, a clear working-class self-identification and measurable forms of oppositional working-class consciousness among this group. My findings confirm the hypothesis that Oshawa autoworkers' relative material advantage is insufficient to completely transform their proletarian consciousness. In this context I discuss the 1996 Oshawa plant occupation as an example of elevated oppositional class consciousness among Oshawa autoworkers.

PERSONAL REFLEXIVE STATEMENT

While working as an autoworker on the General Motors assembly line from 1984-1991, I often reflected on the existence and character of class consciousness. Having read Marx and Lenin in my teens I 'knew' that I should be able to find it—if only I looked hard enough. Where was Marx's revolutionary proletarian consciousness? Was it to be found at union meetings? Did I miss it while in conversation with my fellow workers? Was it an issue in the many shop-floor skirmishes I participated in? But after seven years of working on the line I

was stumped and discouraged, and after experiencing a painful repetitive stress injury I left the plant and began life as an undergraduate with these very same questions on my mind. Returning to my old GM plant as part of a national research project, I fell into conversation with some members of the local education committee. They had thought about these very questions, and had lamented the lack of 'union spirit' and militancy that once characterized Oshawa's GM autoworkers. Knowing full well that a study of something as fleeting and dynamic as proletarian consciousness is a 'fool's errand' I made it my goal to undertake a study of class consciousness among these workers in order to answer these questions once and for all. Of course, my research opened up more doors, and I'm still engaged in a hunt for the definitive answers to that elusive proletarian class consciousness.

During the postwar era, industrial unionized workers' comparative economic gains¹ have been cited as chief among the reasons for the demise of forms of social transformation and social justice. The heart of this argument claims that the wage worker's enthusiasm for social change evaporates inversely with an attendant increase in the size of their pay-packet, creating a relationship between group consciousness and material surplus. If Marx's assessment of proletarian consciousness was correct there should be some evidence of the potential for 'class action'—a conscious, class-based social group activity that is counter-hegemonic in character (Mann, 1973: 45-54)—among industrial workers. According to Mann (1973) working-class consciousness comprises *identity* (common cause with others in the working-class), *opposition* (to the interests of the capitalists), *totality* (acceptance of the societal causes of class as all-encompassing) and a goal of an *alternative* society which one struggles toward. It is in this context that the main purpose of this study lies in an attempt to determine and document specific dimensions and degrees of *oppositional* working-class consciousness.

In the Canadian context, GMC Oshawa's auto assemblers and skilled trades workers are among² the best compensated and most densely unionized industrial workers in the country (Lewchuk, 1996; Yates, 2000) and in many ways Oshawa remains an oasis of relative prosperity in a desert of rusted industrial carcasses. Using Oshawa autoworkers' comparative affluence as a starting point, a key question of this study is whether these well-heeled auto workers are moving closer to those who have social, material and ideological domination. While stratification theorists typically refer to the imbalance of distributed resources between the lower ranks of society and those in the upper stratum, this study examines a small proletarian elite whose cause has historically been facilitated by *favorable* historical and economic conditions.

170 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

In 2000-2001, I surveyed unionized General Motors of Canada (GMC) autoworkers located in Oshawa Ontario, Canada, in an attempt to determine whether these workers have seen their oppositional class consciousness subverted and transformed into particular forms of social integration as alleged by some observers (see for example Hout, Brooks and Manza, 2001). I used measures of (1) autoworkers' class imagery, (2) their working-class self-identity and (3) their working-class consciousness, with a focus on oppositional class consciousness. I assert that Oshawa autoworkers' material advantage is insufficient to transform their proletarian consciousness. Of course class consciousness is a dynamic process and I make no claim that the measures used here prove the existence of a 'fixed' and static proletarian consciousness. As Wright put it, "class consciousness is notoriously hard to measure (1997: 407)." But if working-class consciousness exists then a variety of discrete expressions of class consciousness should be detectable in some fashion and therefore measurable.

Due to space constraints I focus primarily on the current dimensions of oppositional working class consciousness found among surveyed GMC autoworkers. Comparative references will be made to a corresponding survey of Hamilton³ steelworkers and their families conducted in the 1990s (Livingstone and Mangan, 1996), as well as measures of class consciousness provided by the biannual OISE/UT *Survey of Educational Attitudes in Ontario*, conducted by Livingstone, Hart and Davie (1979-2000). I test the question identified by Livingstone and Mangan (1996), namely whether

... there are significant associations between employed men's current locations in the economic class structure of advanced capitalism and their expressions of class consciousness (1996: 50).

The respondents in this study are members of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) Local 222, the largest local affiliate in one of the most highly-organized trade unions in Canada (Gindin, 1995; Yates, 1998). The group under study here is composed of both unskilled and semi-skilled automobile assemblers and skilled trades workers, all of whom are employed at Oshawa's General Motors (GMC) automotive plants.

Data were gathered primarily through the use of responses to a series of questionnaire probes (N=102), my own participant observation as a General Motors (GMC) assembler from 1984-1991, a number of semi-structured interviews (N=5) conducted for this study which explore autoworkers' class consciousness and excerpts from seventeen interviews originally conducted for the Working-Class Learning Strategies (WCLS) study (see Livingstone and Sawchuk, 2004) that help to further illustrate autoworkers' jobs, security and life

on the General Motors assembly line. These methods were used to gauge the current levels of social class imagery, working class social identity and oppositional working-class consciousness among highly-organized, industrial workers in a mature industry. My own experience of working as a manual worker on General Motors' assembly lines for seven years (1984-1991) has furnished me with an additional measure: firsthand intimate knowledge of the assembly processes at General Motors (GMC), working-class mores and expressions of worker consciousness, discontent and solidarity.

OSHAWA'S WORKING-CLASS AND CAPITAL EXPANSION

Frise (1999) writes that "[o]n a per capita basis, Canada has about three times as much vehicle assembly capacity as the United States (1999: 27)." Since the early twentieth century, the Canadian automotive industry⁴ has played a key role in driving the economy and improving the living standards of Canada's industrial working class. The combination of a largely male workforce, a highly profitable enterprise⁵ and autoworkers' collective bargaining power have allowed autoworkers to negotiate a relatively high wage and generous benefits when measured against those in other employment sectors (Krahn and Lowe, 2002: 163-164).

As the largest of the North American auto industry's 'Big Three' domestic automotive manufacturers, General Motors is a major economic driving force in Ontario's economy. GM Canada's Oshawa assembly operation manufactures an intermediate range of cars and trucks⁶ and Oshawa's assembly operations have consistently been placed among the top plants by the worldwide J.D. Power Initial Quality Survey for a number of years.⁷

The city of Oshawa, Ontario has been dominated by General Motors almost since 1878, the year the McLaughlin Carriage Company relocated its manufacturing facilities in Oshawa. In 1918, with the help of William Durant, then-owner of the Buick automobile corporation, the McLaughlins eventually founded what was to become General Motors of Canada and installed "Colonel" Sam McLaughlin to GM's Board of Directors and President of the newly-founded General Motors of Canada (Robertson, 1995: 53-169). Oshawa⁸ is located about 35 miles east of Toronto and is firmly nestled in the bosom of Southern Ontario's industrial heartland. This industrial corridor maintains an intimate connection to the U.S. automotive manufacturing and assembly industry. Oshawa hosts GM's Canadian headquarters and the largest complex of manufacturing plants in the nation. General Motors' automotive plants visually dominate the lakeshore vista of Oshawa, crowding the skyline with hundreds of exhaust stacks. There is no mistaking that Oshawa is virtually a single industry city, with all the associated characteristics one might expect, including above-

172 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

average pollution levels and widespread trepidation due to the domination of employment by a single industry. Oshawa's civic leaders have at one and the same time fretted about the city's over-reliance on the auto industry, while still kowtowing to General Motors' corporate industrial masters. For example, at a 2003 public event Oshawa's then-Federal Member of Parliament, Ivan Grose, said:

I've heard many people criticize General Motors over the years, but frankly I've always believed that without GM, Oshawa would be nothing but a wide patch on the (highway) 401.⁹

According to *Toronto Globe and Mail* journalist Virginia Galt (1995), General Motors' generous wages "fuel a good lifestyle," and an "independent streak" among the local citizenry. Given its history of employment stability and high wages, it is no accident that Oshawa is the site of Canada's first indoor shopping mall¹⁰ and the location of Canada's largest auto dealership¹¹ (these provide the fodder for anecdotal arguments describing autoworkers as über-consumers). Moreover, Oshawa enjoys one of Canada's highest per capita family incomes.¹²

FEAR, INSECURITY, AND DOUBT: THE LIFE OF A 21ST CENTURY AUTOWORKER

General Motors dominates Oshawa and when economic times are good, Oshawa's autoworkers are in a buoyant mood. However, when the industry is down on its luck, the autoworker's chief concern turns to his or her job security and there is little talk of anything else. Despite repeated attempts at diversification Oshawa and its citizenry are still largely supported by the North American automotive and auto parts industry, which is centred around the U.S. 'rustbelt'—the states that stretch from Michigan to the north, through New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee to the south.¹³ Steven High (2003) notes that deindustrialization devastated the U.S. far more than Canada. He points out that the term 'rustbelt' refers only to the old industrial heartland, while Canada's 'Golden Horseshoe' managed to escape the tarnished reputation connected to the rustbelt's industrial deterioration.

It is worth noting that Oshawa's automotive facilities ship approximately ninety percent of their manufactured goods to consumers living south of the Canada-U.S. border. As Canada's largest auto manufacturing facility, Oshawa reaps the rewards of relative job security (which has since waned) and generous wages (prompting the moniker "Generous Motors" for GM among the locals).

AUTOWORKER CULTURE: REBELS *WITH A CAUSE*

Workers who toil in General Motors' plants share an internal economy; on any given shift, the plants throb to the rhythm of workers buying, selling and bartering a wide variety of goods and services. In addition to beer and drugs, the list often includes homemade sausages, contraband coffee and cigarettes smuggled into the plant and sold in contravention to management directives giving the cafeterias a monopoly on these items. There is also an active exchange of labor and expertise in such areas as home and auto repair and computer or music lessons. This community of workers shares a vernacular and culture (see Joyce, 1991) conveyed in the plant every day. The speech of the Local 222 member is dotted with distinctive phrases such as 'ass-time' for downtime on the job when the assembly line stalls, or 'gloveball'—a pair of leather work gloves rolled in 'sock ball' fashion and lobbed, full strength, at the head of a fellow worker is a popular local sport, 'lost time' isn't a science fiction concept, but money received while on sanctioned union business. In this community, 'brothers' and 'sisters' are fellow union members and not related kin. In a reflection of shop-floor antagonisms, a General Motors foreman is referred to as a 'white shirt', 'getting out the kneepads' alludes to those who grovel in the face of management and a 'baglicker' refers to a management sycophant.

Reflected in this local dialect is a deep history and tradition of rebellion. Both individual and collective rebellions have maintained a resonance with GM autoworkers. Oshawa autoworkers are often abuzz at the news of depressed auto sales, an increase in gasoline taxes or a barrel of oil. When governments attempt to exercise control over auto safety or demand other regulation, autoworkers fume and wonder aloud why it is that governments apparently attempt to depress auto sales. Naturally, autoworkers worry at any news that even indirectly threatens sales and their jobs. While this may appear to the outsider as allegiance to their employer, it is merely an affirmation that these workers know the source of their material well-being. More important than newspaper reports of the national unemployment figures is how Canadian auto sales fared and, within that pool of data, how General Motors in general, and their local plant or model in particular, performed.

Despite longstanding evidence that the auto industry provides a fairly stable source of employment for Oshawa, a measure of job insecurity nevertheless remains a social fact for the average autoworker. Irrespective of employment patterns in the local industry, most Oshawa autoworkers will claim that they have no discernable measure of employment security whatsoever. For example, in the mid-1990s, Lewchuk et al. found that 72% of autoworkers surveyed in nine

174 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

Canadian auto assembly plants “reported concern about losing their jobs in the next three years (1996: 11).” The job insecurity Lewchuk et al. found was largely tied to age and workload; as the authors noted:

... there was general concern amongst those less than age 50 that they would be unable to maintain the current work pace until age 60. Many of these workers felt it was unlikely they would find a lighter job with the same company by the time they reached 60 (1996: 11).

A CAW Local 222 Education Committee focus group confirmed Lewchuk et al.’s findings and provides an apt illustration of the dilemma that GM workers faced when GM announced the closing of their Scarborough (Ontario) van plant in mid-1993 (DeSantis, 1999) leaving behind 2,700 jobless workers.¹⁴

But the thing is ... you got to remember in there we have an aging workforce. We don’t have people that are eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old coming out of school anymore in there. People that are in there now are .. let’s say mid-30s to whatever [...] Like it’s been so long since there’s been anybody hired in there. I mean, I don’t consider the [workers who transferred due to the] Scarborough closing a ‘new hire’ because a lot of those people had ten, twelve, fifteen years up there [...] after awhile, and after a certain age, I think people .. many people feel they’re not going to go anywhere and a lot of our membership right now—what’s the average age? 41, 42, 43, something like that—they say, “Okay, if I haven’t got it now, I’m not going to do it. I’m not going to start going to school now, I’ve got fifteen to twenty years in a plant, I can’t start all over again.

A plurality of the Oshawa autoworkers interviewed here have at least a high school diploma, but many realize that the ‘outside world’ demands more. The pursuit of a postsecondary education competes with the average assembler’s age of fifty-one (in 2008) and the improbability of securing a job with higher pay and benefits than they currently make at GM. Of course some are reluctant to endure a typically unpleasant working-class school experience (see for example, Willis, 1977). By virtue of their pay and benefit package, they feel tied to General Motors, fear job loss accompanied by an undoubtedly diluted compensation package. Given their educational credentials, many of these workers tend to feel that they have likely reached the upper limits of compensatory benefits. As this Local 222 Focus Group participant characterized the view from the plant:

I’m making twenty-four bucks an hour, what else do I need? I don’t need to know that stuff. Why should I go back to school? I’m going to be here the rest of my life. Everywhere you look, hey, they’re eliminating jobs everywhere. Any more education

isn't going to get me a higher paying job somewhere else. It's like, hey, where am I going to go and get twenty-five bucks an hour? I got a grade ten education, why should I go and bang my head against the wall for something that's not going to do me any good? (Local 222 Focus Group).

But that is not the entire story, as the dread of possible job loss at GM Oshawa remains a viable concern in the face of new and changing technologies, job rationalization, job migration to low-wage regimes and the movement of parts sub-assembly to lower wage plants within the region.

“THE WORLD WAS YOUR OYSTER”: OSHAWA’S HISTORY OF PROSPERITY

Rinehart (2001) writes that industrial workers are often characterized as members of powerful unions who now have such a good wage and benefits package “that they now enjoy a state of affluence (Rinehart, 2001: 119).” On the surface the wage and benefits package of General Motors workers certainly seems to reaffirm Rinehart’s contention.

Witness the average individual Canadian’s earnings, as determined by the 2000 Census (Statistics Canada, 2000) in the table below. It is worth noting that the gender wage gap remains significantly wide, with Canadian men enjoying an advantage of \$13,414.

Table A: Average Canadian Earnings by Sex, 2000

Women	\$23,796
Men	\$37,210

Source: 2000 Census, Statistics Canada, CANSIM II, table 202-0102.

The longstanding presence of General Motors in Oshawa meant that Oshawa was (and remains) an area of stable job security, relative to other similarly-sized urban centers. This fact can be adduced in the statistic that Oshawa enjoys “the highest median family income—\$60,000 per year—of any metropolitan area in Canada.”¹⁵ However, it should be noted that 2000 Census figures pegged Oshawa residents’ individual incomes as the third highest in Ontario, behind Toronto and Ottawa.¹⁶ As seen in the table below, those in larger households enjoy a substantial per annum advantage of \$7,614 more than the average Ontario household of the same size.

Table B: Comparison of Median Household Income: Ontario and Oshawa (2000)

Household Characteristics	Median Household income (\$) All Households	Median Household income (\$) One-Person Households	Median Household income (\$) Two or More Person Households
Ontario	\$53,626	\$25,253	\$64,201
Oshawa	\$62,956	\$27,645	\$71,815

Source: 2000 Census, Statistics Canada.

In addition to this income advantage the existence of a well-established and powerful trade union lies at the core of Oshawa's historic sense of security, and this understanding assists in molding the local peoples' perspective. Edward Broadbent, former leader of the New Democratic Party, Oshawa MP and a native of Oshawa, noted:

I think part of the general mythology of North American ordinary working families, certainly since the Depression, was one of general prosperity and self-confidence, a sense of community and a sense of well-being in their own country. While that may not have been of Canada as a whole, it was true of Oshawa. In a way, the world was your oyster.¹⁷

Consequently, it is not surprising to discover that GM autoworkers' wages are the envy of those around them. When General Motors launched a recruiting drive for what were then-\$22-an-hour assembly line jobs in January 1995, they were overwhelmed by 26,000 applicants who queued up over the course of two days. During the two coldest days of a particularly frigid Canadian winter, the television news cycle was dominated by aerial video footage of thousands of hopeful squatters:

... the lineup topped newscasts across North America ... One woman, who lined up for 14 hours with her husband wrote to the *Oshawa Independent*: "Now we have not only one, but two chances out of 20,000 to provide a stable future for our children."¹⁸

This historic moment may be viewed as a testament to the notion that even Canadians who are loath to join unions may jump at the opportunity, if offered a chance to partake in a share of the wealth they offer.

The CAW is not simply a 'service union'¹⁹ but exercises a progressive form of 'social unionism' (Gindin, 1995) that stretches beyond the bounds of mere economism. Hence it is no surprise that most WCLS participants I interviewed

expressed very positive feelings toward their union, such as this member who claimed:

... the union is the big passion for me, like, I feel like that's the thing where I can .. have the most opportunity to do things.
WCLS Interview #O16ABRR3.N97

In stark contrast to the alienation of Fordist assembly-line work, unionized workers here find autonomy and opportunity within their union structure. The local union leadership plays a large role in the daily lives of workers. This elected, full-time body of committeepersons, alternate committeepersons and district committeepersons, (totaling over one hundred and twenty) is at the heart of Local 222's political life.

It would be misleading to skip the fact that Oshawa's comparable stability was not bestowed on it automatically or easily. Autoworkers earned their comparative prosperity through years of historic struggles,²⁰ such as the fight to join the United Auto Workers (UAW) union in 1937. This was a time when widespread support for striking autoworkers might be found across many social strata. For example, the GM Oshawa strike of 1937 enjoyed the support of the entire city, including the mayor and many local businesses (Abella, 1975). Ontario's Premier of the day, Mitchell Hepburn, was so opposed to the Oshawa strikers that he asked for resignations from two cabinet ministers who voiced their public support for striking workers. One of these cabinet ministers resigned with a flourish and wrote the oft-quoted line: "My place is marching with the workers rather than riding with General Motors. (Abella, 1975:113)." This level of support for trade union action is difficult to find in the early 21st century. Not only is there a general denial of the existence of social classes, but the denial of a continuing need for unions themselves (M. Yates, 1998).

THE CANADIAN AUTOWORKERS AND LOCAL 222

GM employees are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers²¹ (CAW) union, Local 222. With a base of over 215,000 members, the CAW is the largest private sector union in the country, with the most extensive collection of worker education programs in the Canadian labor movement (see Yates 1993; Friesen, 1994; Spencer, 1994; Taylor, 2001).

According to Yates, the historic 1985 separation between the UAW and the CAW can be attributed crucially to the democratic organizational structure of the then-Canadian Region of the UAW, as well as a more class-based, collective identity among its members and its anti-concessionary economic strategic direction. In contrast to the UAW which provides few intermediary structures, a democratically elected Canadian Council is a fundamental internal mechanism

178 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

which endows a voice and vote to elected rank-and-file delegates. This body both debates and decides the direction of the national leadership and played a pivotal role during the UAW-CAW split (Livingstone and Roth, 1997).

CAW Local 222 is composed of sixteen units²², the largest of which is General Motors, with about 11,500 employees at the time of writing—a drop of approximately 4,000 workers over a period of 13 years²³—the result of new technologies, the increased use of robotics, massive rationalization and downsizing over this period. Local 222 members are represented by three groups of elected union representatives: full-time shop floor representatives (committeepersons, district committeepersons and plant chairpersons) whose task it is to police the negotiated union-company contractual agreements. These shop floor representatives are assisted by a team of service representatives (service “reps” to local members) who assist workers in navigating the various negotiated benefits (i.e. Drug Benefit Plan, Dental Plan, etc.) and social safety nets (i.e. Workers’ Compensation, Employment Insurance). Following traditional, democratic trade-union practices, these two groups—and the local administrative body (the executive board)—are elected from the shop floor by the entire membership body. Service representatives act as essential guides through a confusing jungle of benefits. In addition to the assembler’s wage of over \$31 per hour²⁴, workers’ benefits are made up of a comprehensive benefits package that includes sickness and accident insurance, life insurance, a dental plan, legal assistance benefits, an extensive drug plan, a short work week benefit that guarantees a full forty hours worth of wages (during a shortage of work²⁵), an eyeglass, prosthetics and hearing aid benefit, Supplemental Unemployment Insurance Benefits (SUB), vacation pay, one Scheduled Paid Allowance (SPA) week per employee, per year and one of the most envied private-sector pension plans in Canada.

With as extensive a wage and benefits package as that outlined here, it is little wonder that 1995’s queue of 26,000 GM hopefuls, treating a job at General Motors as a veritable lottery, lined up in the cold to obtain secure, high-paying, unionized, jobs.

For over a century the McLaughlin Carriage Company, later General Motors of Canada, played a fundamental role in Oshawa’s economy, building a thriving, local working-class. Evidence for the location of a ‘cash nexus’ in Oshawa can be seen in statistics that reveal Oshawa’s household income is among the highest in Ontario. Moreover, GM wages are the envy of many and, as shown by the massive lineup of prospective job applicants in 1995, many are willing to join work on the line for a piece of GM’s pie.

COMPARATIVE EARNINGS: PROVINCIAL AND SECTORAL

As noted earlier, as a result of their wage, one-half of General Motors of Canada's unionized workforce is more affluent than the bottom four-fifths of Canadian income earners (all figures in Canadian dollars, see Statistics Canada, 2000). At an average household income of \$71,815 Oshawa residents enjoy higher income than the provincial or national averages. This study asked respondents to supply their total (gross) annual family income as reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Reported Total Household Income per Annum (000s): Oshawa Autoworker Respondents

< \$40	\$40-60	\$60-80	\$80-100	\$100-110	\$110-130	\$130+
0%	6%	35%	33%	12%	12%	2%

Most respondents (68%) claimed their household income was in the range of \$60-100,000 a year. Over 25% claimed household incomes of over \$100,000 per annum. Due to their comparatively favorable economic position, this highly-organized, considerably advanced sector has ostensibly been characterized as a blue-collar elite whose manners, behaviours, political and social views—in fact, the core of their very consciousness—has been transformed by the girth of their wallet.

The widespread belief that changing material conditions directly creates 'false consciousness' was expressed by former Federal Member of Parliament for Oshawa, Mike Breugh, who described Oshawa's GMC workers as follows:

If they are an hourly-rated worker..they're going to be making good money by anybody's standards, sixty five to seventy five thousand, in that range. If they are a skilled tradesman [sic], then they will be much in demand and they will probably be into six figures. These are people who have at least two cars—brand new—probably got a boat, probably got a camper, probably got a cottage. These people are concerned about how they accumulate wealth, how they hold onto it; taxation is a big problem.²⁶

Here Breugh claimed that the withdrawal of Oshawa autoworkers' electoral support for democratic socialism was due to the ideological shift *directly* generated by their relative affluence. His statement is not too distant from the testimony of a 19th century Staffordshire manufacturer²⁷ on the disposition of his workforce: "you cannot get them to talk of politics so long as they are well employed (Heilbroner, 1967: 155)."

180 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

Autoworkers' relatively high wages have consistently been at the root of false consciousness arguments. A measure of the wage differential between various sectors in Canada's labor market (see Table 2) reveals a major gap between the manufacturing and service sectors. This disparity is even greater when one substitutes the average wage of a General Motors assembler (see Table 3) for the average manufacturing wage. Juxtaposed against the average accommodation or food services worker there lies an average annual wage gap of \$56,863. This gap alone represents almost one and a half times the average Ontario wage.

Table 2: Canadian Wages by Sector per Annum (December, 2002)

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Avg. Annual Wage</u>
Manufacturing	\$43,680
Health care/social assistance	31720
Retail Trade	22672
Accommodation /food services	14872

Source: The Daily, February 26, 2003. Statistics Canada.

Table 3: Average Annual General Motors Wage

GMC Assembler	\$71,735*
GMC Skilled Tradesperson	\$85,962**

Source: CAW Contact, January 2003.

*Calculation: \$28.34 per hour multiplied by an average 48 hour week multiplied by 52 weeks, which includes the annual negotiated vacation payment. Note this figure excludes non-monetary benefits.

**Calculation: Electrician's rate of \$34.44 per hour multiplied by an average 48 hour week multiplied by 52 weeks, which includes the annual negotiated vacation payment. Note this figure excludes non-monetary benefits.

In 1998 the top twenty percent of Canadian families had an average annual income of \$68,518 (Statistics Canada, 2000) which places the majority of GMC Oshawa autoworker families among the top quintile of Canadian income earners.²⁸ From this standpoint it is not terribly difficult to see the source of the claim that GMC autoworkers are no longer part of the working-class.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The location of a research site was based in part on my association with the members and executive of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union, Local 222 and my link to members of the local union Education Committee.²⁹ Over eighty questions were posed to autoworkers in a nine-page survey.³⁰ A written

endorsement of the project by the President of Local 222 was also attached to each survey form. Approximately 450 questionnaires were successfully distributed to GMC autoworkers by Local 222 education committee members to assembly and trades workers at their workplaces between June 2000 and February 2001. The response rate of approximately 20-25 percent is low in part due to the fact that 150-200 surveys were stolen from potential respondents' work benches for the value of the attached postage stamps. Distribution of survey questionnaires was accomplished via snowball sampling, with surveys distributed by volunteer members of the Local 222 Education Committee, several key informants and me. This nonrandom sampling methodology further decreases the likelihood that the results of this study are representative of the study population. Therefore, the findings and analyses contained in this study should be confined only to the respondent group.

Sixty-five percent of the workers who responded to the survey were car assembly plant employees, while thirty-five worked at the truck plant. Virtually all workers in the study worked at the General Motors South plant.³¹ Respondents' job titles are direct reflections of their actual job tasks. The two largest groups, *assemblers* and *production technicians* have jobs that consist of the gradual construction of an automobile in a close approximation of traditional Fordist assembly techniques. These typically involve minimal levels of control or autonomy.

Approximately six months following the conclusion of the in-plant distribution, a series of semi-structured telephone interviews (N=5) were conducted to more deeply explore workers' attitudes on a number of issues related to the questions of Canadian class imagery, working class identity and political attitudes, among other factors. Respondents for this portion of the study were selected based on their written questionnaire replies, particularly their stated work location, class self-identity and willingness to occupy an assembly plant. Here I made an attempt to select workers representative of a range of views and characteristics. Additionally, relevant excerpts from interview transcripts and Working-Class Learning Strategies (WCLS) respondent interviews are included in this study and help to further sketch the views of autoworkers, about their jobs, as well as the range of expressions of working-class consciousness and embourgeoisement among this group.

OPPOSITIONAL WORKING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

In their study of steelworkers' class consciousness, Secombe and Livingstone (2000) used an oppositional consciousness scale composed of two major components:

182 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

Oppositional class consciousness is measured here in terms of the rights of corporate owners to maximize their profits by investing wherever they choose, and the rights of employees to hire workers to take the place of striking employees (2000: 47).

Thus one major hallmark of an ‘appropriated class consciousness’ would be evidence that waged workers in the main uphold this central right of capital to obtain profit in an unimpeded manner—something that might be characterized as a *primary right* of capitalists. Measuring working-class sympathy on the issue of capital mobility as a right might be characterized as one of the key ideological doctrines that underpins support for the present social system. An examination of Oshawa respondents’ replies to this question can be seen in Table 4 which reveals responses almost evenly divided between those who generally agree with this statement on the rights of the bourgeoisie to invest where they please (a grouped total of 48 percent ‘somewhat agree’ and ‘strongly agree’) and those who generally disagree with this statement (a grouped total of 52 percent ‘somewhat disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’).

Table 4: Support Capital’s Right to Invest Freely: Oshawa Autoworkers’ Responses

strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree	don’t know/ c.s.
19%	29%	26%	26%	1%

The OISE/UT *Survey of Educational Attitudes* (1979-2000) has asked variants of this question since 1980, and found the following long-term trends: steadily growing numbers among those who ‘strongly agree’ with this statement (with a range from 8 to 23 percent from 1980-1996), those who ‘agree’ are a relatively stable group (ranging from 25 to 34 percent in this group), declining numbers were found over this sixteen year period among those who ‘disagree’ with this statement (from 34 percent in 1980 to 21 percent in 1996) and generally declining figures in the group that ‘strongly disagrees’ with the statement. These are illustrated in Table 5.

Grouped 1996 Ontario unionized workforce responses among those who generally disagree with this statement among the sample is 36 percent compared to the aggregate autoworker response of 52 percent (see Table 5). This appears to indicate that a slim plurality of Oshawa autoworkers generally stand in opposition to the rights of capital mobility and accumulation while support for profit maximization shows a steady rise among the unionized Ontario population.

Table 5 - Support Capital's Right to Invest Freely: Ontario Unionized Workforce (1980-1996)

	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	Oshawa 2000
strongly agree	8%	10%	10%	17%	16%	14%	13%	23%	21%	19%
agree	25	31	32	34	34	33	25	27	31	29
neither	7	5	10	6	11	10	16	3	12	0
disagree	34	33	31	31	29	26	36	20	21	26
strongly disagree	25	19	-	11	10	14	13	26	15	26

Source: OISE/UT Survey 1980-1996

If this is a hallmark of oppositional class consciousness, then the views of Oshawa autoworkers on issues such as taxation and the role of the profit motive in Canada's economic problems should be similarly be accounted for. A question regarding corporate flight posed in Table 6 below may be considered a close cousin to the "rights of corporate owners to maximize profits" query. This is a 'linked' question intended as a twin to the inquiry on capital mobility rights and juxtaposes the question of whether Oshawa respondents would accede their collective right to retain their jobs against the countervailing freedoms of corporate owners. Given that the likely result of an employer's freedom of mobility in the pursuit of greater profit is the physical relocation of the place of employment itself, the question attempts to interrogate respondents' views of this particular employer right.

Table 6: Oshawa Autoworker Responses to the Question: "If GM decided to relocate its operations elsewhere, and you were about to be laid off, what solution from the list below would you be most likely to support?"

Accept the layoff and look for a new job	Through the union, pressure GM to stay	Through the union, buy the plant and operate it as a worker cooperative
22%	46%	13%

Indicative of a significant predisposition to broad based workers' rights, the cumulative reply to this question reveals almost 60 percent of respondents would opt to use their union as a vehicle to either pressure corporate owners to remain in Oshawa (46 percent), or to purchase the company facilities and operate a worker cooperative (13 percent), versus only 22 percent who would accept a

layoff and simply cast their lot in the labor market as ‘free agents’ while upholding the rights of their employer. By actually naming their present employer, alluding to the consequences of a plant shutdown and posing solutions that would exercise their union rights (and thus the strongest expression of workers’ rights), I believe this question provides the necessary ballast to the ‘rights of employers’ query. The second half of the “oppositional working-class consciousness” scale developed by Livingstone et al., consists of the statement: “Management should be prohibited by law from hiring workers to take the place of strikers.” A comparison of unionized Ontario responses from cumulative OISE/UT surveys and the Oshawa autoworker 2000 sample can be seen in Table 7. A longitudinal view of unionized Ontario responses from 1990-2000 shows that between one-quarter and one-half of unionized Ontarians strongly agreed with the statement, while those who ‘somewhat agreed’ ranged from 12 percent to one-quarter of those sampled. This compares with the Oshawa sample where 84 percent of respondents ‘strongly agree’ with this statement, indicating a fairly high level of sympathy in favor of employees’ rights. An additional ten percent ‘somewhat agree’ with the statement, for a cumulative showing of 94 percent of Oshawa respondents who oppose hiring scab labor. Only a grouped six percent of autoworker responses disagreed with this statement, a figure that ranges from about one-third to almost one-seventh of the comparable provincial unionized figures over this ten-year period. This question forms the core of the oppositional consciousness scale discussed in Livingstone and Mangan (see esp. 1996: 45-49) and as noted earlier, allows us to clearly “observe a certain pattern among the mean scores of the classes, such as those in the most [...] subordinate class positions would be most strongly pro-labor (1996: 45).” Livingstone and Mangan note their main finding “confirmed by a continuing series of Ontario surveys, is that most people in most class positions express a mixed class consciousness (1996: 150).”

Table 7: “Management Should be Prohibited from Hiring Replacement Workers”—Ontario Unionized Workforce OISE/UT Survey (1990-2000) and Oshawa Autoworkers (2000) Compared

Year	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	Oshawa
strongly agree	39%	25%	41%	43%	39%	50	84%
somewhat agree	27	26	17	21	16	12	10
neither	11	16	5	7	7	4	-
somewhat disagree	15	18	17	9	11	14	1
strongly disagree	7	14	20	20	28	17	5

Source: OISE/UT Survey 1990-2000

Table 8 presents a crosstabulation using only Oshawa respondents who indicated ‘strong agreement’ with an anti-scab position (84 percent of the sample) and juxtaposes this group’s views with their position on the rights of capital. The result is a fairly even distribution across the options on the capital rights question.

Table 8: Cross tabulation of Oshawa Subsample Indicating ‘Strong Agreement’ With Anti-scab Statement and Their Views on the Rights of Capital

	strongly agree	somewhat agree	somewhat disagree	strongly disagree	Total
Not hire scabs	16%	22%	22%	24%	84%

Responses among this subsample are fairly equivocal; while opposition to scabs is exceptionally high among autoworker respondents, these respondents are much more divided in their views on capitalists’ rights to profits. This finding bears a closer relation to the mixed views of oppositional class consciousness in general population surveys, as noted by Livingstone and Mangan (1996: 150). As they put it: “... even among Hamilton’s unionized working class, mixed class consciousness is *at least as likely* [my emphasis] as an oppositional working class consciousness (1996: 151).”

OPPOSITIONAL CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

GMC Oshawa workers have experienced a steady stream of strikes since 1937 (see Abella, 1974), with the most recent strikes taking place in 1996 and 1999. The CAW’s 1996 strike also gave way to a plant occupation which was a protest of the company’s threat to remove stamping dies from a parts manufacturing plant, as well as GMC’s announced sale of the North Fabrication plant. This event opened up an opportunity to test workers’ views on an event that signified ‘class action’ but went beyond the usual abstract social science measures.³²

I questioned autoworker respondents on several workplace-based measures which were comprised of three carefully-constructed questions that progressively increased the theoretical level of class action by degrees, in keeping with a view that oppositional class consciousness resides at the higher levels of class action, as per Michael Mann’s four-part schema (Mann, 1973). Moreover, strikes, wildcats and plant occupations had *all* taken place in General Motors’ 80 year-plus history in Oshawa, which locates these questions in actual, rather than hypothetical, events. The ‘workplace oppositional consciousness’ questions posed to Oshawa autoworkers are as follows:

- “If Local 222 went on strike, would you participate in some way?”
- “If there were a wildcat strike at your plant, would you participate?”
- “If there were a plant occupation at your plant, would you participate?”

As seen in Table 9 below, eighty-four percent of respondents were ‘very likely’ to “participate in some way” if “Local 222 went on strike.” This show of support for a sanctioned strike is unlikely to be surprising for those who read the business section of their newspaper. Unionized industrial workers are quite likely to express support for a strike call that is sanctioned by their union. However, in an uncommonly strong show of unanimity on a singular issue, not a single Oshawa participant chose the ‘very unlikely’ option when responding to this question.

Table 9: Oshawa Autoworkers’ responses to the question: “If Local 222 went on strike, would you participate in some way?”

very likely	somewhat likely	somewhat unlikely	don’t know/ can’t say
84%	13%	2%	1%

Overall, Oshawa respondents’ support of their union and their likelihood of participation in a strike is quite high at 97 per cent of those surveyed.³³

Table 10: Oshawa Autoworkers’ responses to “If there were a wildcat strike at your plant, would you participate?”

very likely	somewhat likely	somewhat unlikely	very unlikely
35%	20%	20%	12%

The wording of the next two questions deliberately omitted the sanction or participation of a union in what are increasingly risk-taking (although not unheard of) workplace activities. Both Tables 10 and 11 show that a combined fifty-five percent of Oshawa autoworkers were ‘very likely’ or ‘somewhat likely’ to participate in a wildcat strike. Similarly, a combined total of fifty-five percent of Oshawa autoworkers would be ‘very’ or ‘somewhat likely’ to occupy their plant. Even if we only accepted the ‘very likely’ Lickert responses to either of these two questions, *over one-third* of Oshawa respondents would be *highly likely* to engage in job-actions that are indisputably illegal, such as wildcat strikes and plant occupations.

Table 11: Oshawa Autoworkers' responses to "If there were a plant occupation at your plant, would you participate?"*

very likely	somewhat likely	somewhat unlikely	very unlikely
35%	20%	20%	12%

*Responses to all fields of both questions in Tables 10 and 11 were identical, including the 'don't know/can't say' option, which was 13% and the non-response rate of 6 missing of 97 total.

In sum, when compared to responses from either Ontario general population or the Hamilton Families study, the Oshawa findings are indicative of a high level of oppositional class consciousness among GMC autoworkers, especially with regard to the question of the willingness to participate in proletarian class-based action at the workplace. Frankly, my own observations and experiences at General Motors serve to validate these findings. During the course of my seven years at GMC I participated in and witnessed both verbal and physical battles between rank-and-file workers and union officials and company team leaders, supervisors, managers and executives. These battles were a daily occurrence at all plants and parallel the discussions by Roy (1959), Burawoy (1979), Fantasia (1988) and Wells (1984) among others.

DISCUSSION: THE 1996 OSHAWA PLANT OCCUPATION

I believe the Oshawa responses can generally be taken as representative of the unified community view when it comes to certain ideological touchstones which might be taken-for-granted outside the community of autoworkers. For example, the 1996 plant occupation by 125 Oshawa Autoworkers Oshawa's North Fabrication plant served as a similar gauge of a unified consciousness and a community view.³⁴ During the October 1996 contract negotiations with General Motors, GMC management attempted to remove 75 stamping dies from the North Fabrication Plant in Oshawa, but strikers had held back tractor trailers from crossing their picket lines. Claiming Durham Regional police's attempts to open the plant gates as "woefully inadequate," GMC applied for an injunction to remove the crucial dies. Tony Alphen wrote

the union could have waited for the injunction, bolstered picket lines and forced a potentially violent confrontation. But they decided on a plan to seize the plant ... and hold on until GM backed down on its injunction bid (Van Alphen, 1996: D1).

Organized by the National CAW, the North Fabrication plant was occupied for 5½ hours by approximately 125 GMC workers. As soon as word of the plant occupation spread, Local 222 workers from across Oshawa flocked to the plant

gates in order to participate in and support their colleagues. A Local 222 WCLS interviewee explained his 'insider' role in the plant occupation this way:

... we all got hats, okay, and Burt [Rover, the CAW National union liaison to Local 222] being the tallest, like, six foot four or five or whatever it is, a big man, hard to lose in a crowd, the signal was that he would wave his hat and hold it up in the air and he took his hat off and held it up, all us guys that knew what was going on ... and we had rallied hundreds of workers by that gate and told them they were going to take the [metal stamping] dies out, we all have to get up there. We had hundreds of people up there all in the street and everything and we all went into that plant [...] When we were in, I mean we worked really hard. I mean, we were running around there was [...] a committee man from the other shift, we were running around with a portable welder ... an arc welder. [...] We were welding doors shut and [...] the trades were taking out the dies and we were chaining doors and we checked every door. I mean, there's a lot. [...] where the rail comes in [...] I said, somebody can come in here and we were looking around, I said we've got to move all these crates in front of this door and block it, barricade it. We had a guy, he had a lift truck and we're trying every one we can find and we finally had to kind of 'jimmy' one to start it and got it going and barricaded the rail entrances with, [...] the big bins, the metal bins full of parts and just kept loading them up until we were up to the top and then kept piling them behind, so if you did come in, you would have had [...] to climb in over top [...] you'd have to move the train out to get any kind of equipment to start unloading it from the other side... WCLS Interview #O15RRAB.

Moreover, In an act that would likely baffle outsiders, many late arrivals jumped the plant gate to join the occupation *after* it took place, an act which is expressive of a unified community culture and economic understanding (Livingstone and Roth, 1998). This worker capped his description of the experience this way:

I've got a poster. [...] WE all signed ... we took a big easel of paper out of the boardroom and everybody signed their name to it and then when we went to the rah-rah speech at the Holiday Inn on King Street in Toronto, they gave us all a poster that they had made up with all our signatures on there, and then at the bottom, one of the most historic and proud days in our union history and about the occupation at the bottom. So everybody that was in there [the occupied plant] got a poster [...] I mean it was just heroic, like, I mean, it was like winning the Stanley Cup. That's what it was like. [...] it was like, one person, okay, you felt proud, but it was a *group effort*, you know, and [...] We've never been more proud of our union than that day. WCLS Interview #O15RRAB.

Thus there exists a substantial repository of oppositional class experiences among members of CAW 222 and the 1996 plant occupation (the first at GMC since 1937) was but a recent visible example. Within a day of the plant occupation a worker who had videotaped the event sold (at cost) hundreds of copies of a tape he carefully edited with excerpts from that evening's newscast (Traill, 1996).

Using measures established in the Hamilton Families studies (Livingstone and Mangan, 1996) and the OISE/UT surveys, I have found that Oshawa autoworkers show measurably greater levels of oppositional class consciousness than most of their union and nonunionized contemporaries. Oppositional class consciousness among GMC autoworkers is higher when compared to Ontarians who are non-unionized, as seen in the Ontario general population responses in the OISE/UT survey. Oshawa autoworkers' reactions to questions that test for oppositional class consciousness demonstrate a unified class position that is a reflection of three out of four of Mann's criteria (1973). Additionally, I have noted that Ontario workers' support in favor of capital mobility rights—a trend noted in the OISE/UT Survey regarding the rights of corporations to invest their Canadian earnings wherever they can make the greatest profit—grew even among *unionized* workers during the neoliberal 1980s and 1990s. However, in opposition to this tendency sits the cumulative view of Oshawa autoworkers who generally resist the embrace of laissez-faire capitalism. Once again Oshawa autoworkers have demonstrated a like-mindedness in their apparently united proletarian class consciousness.

All in all, the data and analysis presented here shows us not that the working-class men and women of General Motors exhibit and possess a measure of agency; that of course we already know. Rather, the data show us that within the secure and familiar confines of the shop floor, this group's comparative material, social, cultural and political resources are manifold, that they fit very proletarian strategies and tactics and that they foster many strategic alliances. Possessing a consciousness that while not revolutionary is certainly counter-intuitive, GMC/CAW Local 222 autoworkers exhibit a plethora of contrarian strategies that skirt the dictates of management. Moreover, all of this activity takes place 'below the surface' as it were, outside the peripheral vision of managers and overseers; away from the prying eyes of supervisors, interfering human resources managers and curious onlookers.

Within the limitations of the nonrandom sampling methodology used in this study, my contention that Oshawa autoworkers' material advantage cannot transform their proletarian consciousness has been upheld by my findings. This study has amply demonstrated many of the associations between the occupational location of autoworker respondents and their expressions of class imagery, identity and oppositional class consciousness. In short, their material

advantage has not trumped autoworkers' class imagery, proletarian self-identity or oppositional class consciousness, although I cannot make a claim for Mann's (1973) "Conception of an Alternative Society". However, any findings of oppositional working-class consciousness are comparatively weak when compared to the strong indicators of trade union consciousness found among the sample. The findings discussed here correspond closely with those of Livingstone and Mangan, although as they put it, no single isolated study can resolve the debates among class theorists (1996: 51).

While many social scientists such as Lipset and Marks (2001) have worked to determine why industrial workers do *not* engage in broad social and political action, this study has discovered—perhaps rediscovered is more apt—that Oshawa autoworkers mobilize in visible as well as unobserved ways. More often than not, the class conscious actions of industrial workers remain largely unseen and undocumented. Of course not even the best instruments we have at hand can capture the broad and nuanced range of expressions that constitute proletarian oppositional class consciousness.

CAW Local 222 activists (those who were WCLS focus group participants) expressed little explicit concern regarding issues of class consciousness, but demonstrated considerable curiosity in unearthing the reasons their fellow trade unionists were less active. However, the question of dwindling union activism, (and a suggested weakening of class cohesion) was raised repeatedly. As this Local 222 activist put it:

I feel that our issues, after twenty years of oppression, are macro-societal and the only way to get our membership onside is to deal with the general public. When you have an oppressed people — after twenty years oppressed people will blame themselves and *they will disassociate themselves with that oppression area* [my emphasis]. We've been oppressed for so long [...] I'm sure this is all related but [...] how do you get the person on the [factory] floor to see that? Well, I think you first have to start with the general public. When you have somebody's neighbours say to a General Motors employee, 'hey, your union is doing something pretty good for you and for society in general', then you'll see that person take an extra part in the union and he will come out [...] to the union and try to be involved and try to learn more about it so when you want find out that issue on the [shop] floor (Local 222 Focus Group).

This autoworker suggests that oppressed people, such as his working-class mates, typically attempt to separate themselves from ongoing persecution by distancing themselves from an ongoing form of workplace oppression. Although it is tangential to this study, this worker's statement cuts through the heart of the

traditional embourgeoisement thesis. Furthermore this respondent's quote is reflective of a *diverted* class consciousness rather than one appropriated by a ruling class. Moreover, this worker's statement does not suggest an end to class stratification, but refers to it as a continual, ongoing process. Far from denying that class exists, this worker suggests that the misery brought on by class oppression causes withdrawal on the part of some and heightened awareness from others like himself. This can be demonstrated by the connections he draws between factory-floor exploitation, broader social oppression and the need to extend union campaigns for social change beyond internal shop-floor issues and into the community. This worker displays a greater grasp of the dialectical relation between the classes (and the links between experience and consciousness) than some who research social class.

Why do Local 222 respondents respond to survey questions in ways that clearly designate their attitudes as distinct from those of the general population? I believe the answer lies in the formation and roots that shape their core consciousness, and that is their collective sense of exploitation on the job—the crux of Marxist alienation theory³⁵—and the degradation they experience outside of work as a result of their social class. Outward measures suggest Oshawa autoworkers share a particular view of society and that this view is a clear divergence from the dominant, hegemonic viewpoint. Both are both strongly indicative of a *measurable common consciousness*. These two separate but important features are often merged in the literature, but the knowledge that counter-hegemonic viewpoints can exist *and be shared among a group* should hearten those who claim that 'ideological hegemony' trumps all hands.

Lastly, although this study did not explicitly test for *revolutionary* consciousness, there are nevertheless some signs of a defiant—and primarily workplace-based—oppositional working-class consciousness among Oshawa autoworkers. The evidence in favor of the social integration of Oshawa's proletariat is admittedly weak, but signs of class-based protest, antagonism and resistance abound, especially on the shop floors of General Motors. As this Oshawa autoworker explained his feelings regarding the 1996 North Fabrication Plant occupation:

It was like everybody was on the same wave, we were on the same page. You know the first thing I said [...] we all said it, if General Motors wants to take us back to the 1930s, we'll take them back to the 1930s and occupy their plants just like they did sixty years ago in Oshawa. [WCLS Interview #O15RRAB].

When asked to delineate the depth of their antagonisms, and as demonstrated by their generally unequivocal responses, the views of the Oshawa autoworkers sampled for this study detail a sharply-rendered oppositional consciousness.

192 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

However, these autoworkers' opinions are most pointed when describing workplace-based issues. In their actions during the North Fabrication plant occupation of 1996 and in their daily minor "assaults" aimed at the lower management of General Motors the members of CAW Local 222 display at least a potential for a future, perhaps deeper, proletarian consciousness.

ENDNOTES

¹Autoworkers earn 25 per cent more than the average industrial wage (Frise, 1999: 27).

²Autoworkers are joined in this category by steelworkers, chemical workers and several other categories of industrial worker in primary occupations.

³The Hamilton project used here as a comparator is based on a research initiative that Hamilton families in terms that included class identity and class and gender consciousness. This research—the Hamilton Families Project—was conducted over the course of over ten years and are discussed in Corman, Luxton, Livingstone and Mangan (1996) and Seccombe and Livingstone (2000).

⁴Over 2.5 million vehicles are produced in Canada annually, making it the fifth largest producer of motor vehicles, representing about 16 per cent of North American production. Frise (1999) noted that the automotive sector comprises Canada's largest industry. About one in seven Canadians and one in six Ontario residents earn their living in the auto industry, making this sector Canada's largest employer (Frise, 1999: 27).

⁵Note that this article was written prior to 2008, when it seems that North America's domestic auto industry is in danger of a near-collapse due to softening credit, rising gas prices and the virtual collapse of the U.S. housing industry due to the sub-prime mortgage crisis.

⁶As of July 2008, the Oshawa Assembly operation produces the Buick LaCrosse/Allure, and Chevrolet Impala. The Chevrolet Monte Carlo and Pontiac Grand Prix were discontinued in 2007. The Oshawa Truck plant currently manufactures the Silverado and Sierra trucks.

⁷Industry data are from the GM of Canada Limited (GMCL) "GMCL Overview" (www.gmcanada.com) and excludes the Ingersoll-based CAMI operations, GM's joint venture with Suzuki Motors.

⁸Oshawa's population is 150,000. Statistics Canada, 2000 Census.

⁹Member of Federal Parliament Ivan Grose gave this speech at the inauguration of 'Colonel' Sam McLaughlin's former estate as a National Historic Site, August 1, 2003.

¹⁰The Oshawa Shopping Centre was built in 1957-8.

¹¹Oshawa Motor Sales (OMS) occupies a huge portion of Oshawa's downtown area. Established in 1923, OMS was at one time the largest auto dealership in Canada.

¹²See for example "Family Incomes on the Rise." *Oshawa This Week*. May 14, 2003. P. A5.

¹³Note however, that since the late 1980s and the North American Free Trade Agreement NAFTA, many traditional U.S. industrial states such as Michigan have been losing ground to the relatively low-wage Southern U.S. region, such as Tennessee, as well as the Maquiladora 'free trade' zone bordering the U.S. and Mexico.

¹⁴Thanks to their negotiated seniority provisions, hundreds of Scarborough employees with sufficient seniority 'bumped' their way to secure positions in GM's Oshawa plants on the closing of their plant in 1993.

¹⁵Sean Silcoff, "Oshawa presents a snapshot of Canada." *The National Post*. August 21, 2000. C1.

¹⁶"Family Incomes on the Rise." *Oshawa This Week*, May 14, 2003. P. A5.

¹⁷Virginia Galt. "Oshawa still clings to the Canadian Dream: Many local residents will not allow themselves to get distraught about high unemployment rates as they realize that prospects in their community are still relatively good compared with the rest of Canada." *The Globe and Mail*. February 6, 1995. P. A8.

¹⁸Galt, 1995.

¹⁹Within the context of the left-wing of the Canadian labor movement, a union which focuses primarily on the maintenance of its members is often disdainfully referred to as a practitioner of 'business unionism'.

²⁰See for example Abella (1975) or Gindin (1995).

²¹Originally established as the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 1937, until the historic U.S.-Canada separation in 1985.

²²Note that eight of the 16 units are directly related to the automobile manufacturing industry, as follows: General Motors, PPG Canada (Duplate), A.G. Simpson, Lear (Seating) Corporation, Mackie Automotive Systems (3 facilities: Oshawa, South Blair, Tricont) and Woodbridge Foam.

²³The Oshaworker, March 1998. Current (2008) total hourly (unionized) employee estimates are approximately 9,500 workers at all GM Oshawa assembly and parts plants.

²⁴As of March 1, 2008, a GM Assembler's hourly wage, including cost of living adjustment is \$33.91, or \$70,532 per year without overtime (from the bulletin *CAW Contact*, February 22, 2008).

²⁵In those cases where an employee works at least part of the regularly-scheduled work week.

²⁶Mike Breugh, Oshawa NDP MP, 1990-1993 on "The House" Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio One broadcast, July 24, 1999.

²⁷This factory owner's testimony was made to the British Committee on Depression convened to examine the economic slump of 1886. The British Committee on Depression, convened to examine the economic slump of 1886, reported on the vastly improved conditions of the working class since the dire days of the 1840s, the commission reported: "There is no feature in the situation we have been called upon to examine, as satisfactory as the immense improvement which has taken place in the conditions of the working class (Heilbroner, 1967: 155).

²⁸The February 25, 2005 issue of *CAW Contact* (Vol. 35, No. 8) reports that a GMC assembler's hourly wage (total straight time earnings, including cost of living adjustment (COLA) is \$31.24 and an electrician's hourly wage (total straight time earnings, including COLA) is \$37.32. This is an increase from the 2003 rates used in the above calculations, around the time the survey was in the field.

²⁹I was employed as an assembler at General Motors Oshawa from August, 1984 until January 1992. During that time I was also active in the Canadian Auto Workers Local 222 as a caucus volunteer, health-and-safety trainer and elected delegate to the Durham Regional Labour Council.

³⁰Copies of the survey are available from the author: rroth@oise.utoronto.ca.

³¹A single operation remained in the North end of Oshawa. Constructed in the 1920s GMC's North Fabrication Plant is the last remnant of McLaughlin's original assembly operation. The 'North Plant' (later 'Peregrine' and 'Acsys') was sold—twice—in the 1990s, only to be mothballed in 2004 and is slated for demolition in 2005.

194 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

³²See Fantasia (1988) or Mann (1973). I provide a substantive description of CAW 222's internal life and the 1996 plant occupation in Roth, 2005.

³³Significantly, there is no indication in the question as to whether the strike is sanctioned by the union or not, although the prevailing assumption would be that all strikes are approved by their union.

³⁴See Paul Irish. "Workers pledge battle over sale of GM plants." *The Toronto Star*. 23 April, 1996.

³⁵However, the Oshawa autoworker questionnaire did not pose questions directly related to alienation.

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196 HUMANITY & SOCIETY

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