

# The Rise of Non-Manual Work in British Columbia

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The growth of the white-collar labour force is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the economic and social development of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

The full emergence of the "non-manual" or "white-collar" sector of the labour force has led to widespread research, theoretical debate and political commentary.<sup>2</sup> In the social science literature several basic questions have been raised. Are workers in this sector becoming more like manual workers in terms of their class position, work situation, market conditions, union activities and political preferences? Or are they part of a "new middle class" with its own distinct characteristics and activities which serves as a buffer between labour and capital? Or are they in ambiguous or contradictory positions, as suggested by writers like Crompton and Wright?<sup>3</sup> Or, as many North American analysts claim, are they best understood as individuals occupying numerous or continuous strata of status and prestige for whom class analysis is an outmoded and inaccurate perspective?

\* We acknowledge with thanks the following assistance: The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for research funds; Kenneth Allison, Lesley Biggs, Stephen Scott and Zane Shannon for research assistance; Elaine Bernard, Lesley Biggs, Gene Errington, William Carroll and Graham Lowe for comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup> R. M. Blackburn, *Union Character and Social Class* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Blackburn, *ibid.*, M. Crozier, *The World of the Office Worker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); C. Jenkins and B. Sherman, *White-Collar Unionism: The Rebellious Salaried* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); J. Kocka, *White-Collar Workers in America 1890-1940* (London: Sage Publications, 1980); D. Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958); C. W. Mills, *White-Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> R. Crompton, "Approaches to the Study of White-Collar Unionism," *Sociology* 10 (1977): 407-26; R. Crompton, "Trade Unionism and the Insurance Clerk," *Sociology* 13 (1979): 403-26; E. O. Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1978).

In Canada, Clement, Denis, Guindon, Johnson, Lowe, Marchak, Milner and Rinehart are among those who have begun the task of describing, analyzing and explaining the increasing proportion of non-manual workers and outlining the implications of this process for class structure, labour relations and politics.<sup>4</sup>

In British Columbia long-standing working-class-based political activity and a strong labour movement testify to the constant presence throughout the province's history of struggles over wages, working conditions and wider issues concerning the distribution of wealth and power. But there is an enormous gap in the literature on labour history in the province which, despite concluding that British Columbia has been one of the most class-polarized provinces in Canada, has concentrated almost entirely on the experience and activities of miners, fishermen and forestry workers to the neglect of the "non-manual" or "white-collar" sector.<sup>5</sup> During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early years of this century manual workers in the primary industries were among the most militant and radical in all of Canada, forming the core membership of early socialist movements and the most active unions. In recent years, however, disputes involving government, telephone and hospital workers, physicians, professors, teachers, police associations, nurses and others, some of which have led to strike activity, indicate the need for research and analysis of the situation of "white-collar" workers in the province.

For convenience we define "white-collar" or "non-manual" members of the labour force as comprising managers, proprietors, professional and technical workers, clerical, recreation, sales and service workers.<sup>6</sup> Taken

<sup>4</sup> G. W. Lowe, *"The Administrative Revolution: The Growth of Clerical Operations and the Development of the Modern Office in Canada, 1911-1931"* (PhD dissertation, Sociology, University of Toronto, 1979); L. Johnson, "The Development of Class in Canada in the Twentieth Century," in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, ed. Gary Teeple, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); R. Denis, *Luttes de classes et question nationale au Quebec: 1948-1968* (Montreal: Presses Socialistes Internationales, 1979); P. Marchak, "Women, work and unions," *International Journal of Sociology* 5(4) (1975-76); H. Milner, *Politics in the New Quebec* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978), chap. 4; J. W. Rinehart, *The Tyranny of Work* (Toronto: Academic Press, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> See A. R. McCormack, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 21 (1976): 3-27; M. A. Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958); P. A. Phillips, *No Greater Power: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour, 1967); M. Robin, *The Company Province*, vols. 1 and 2 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972, 1973); C. A. Schwartzes, *Radical Heritage: Labour, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> The dividing line between non-manual and manual workers is notoriously ambiguous — see, for example, G. S. Bain and R. Prince, "Who is a White-Collar Em-

together, these occupations now include about two-thirds of the total British Columbia work force. Although the more traditional of them — administrators, managers, clerks and other office workers, sales persons, nurses and teachers — have been employed in the province for over one hundred years, they have either been ignored or assumed to be largely irrelevant elements in historical accounts of labour, socialist movements and the working-class experience. There has also been little analysis of the newer types of white-collar worker such as social workers, computer programmers, researchers, laboratory technicians and library personnel. Although foreshadowed by employees' associations among such groups as government workers and nurses, white-collar unions have been a relatively recent development. But now bodies such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the British Columbia Government Employees' Union, the Telecommunications Workers' Union and the Hospital Employees' Union are in the forefront of labour relations activity and constitute some of the largest unions in the province. These trends make it imperative that we study both the rise to prominence of non-manual workers in the labour force and their place within the overall social structure.

The presence of a large number of women in certain types of white-collar work is of central importance and has recently led a major researcher in this field to call for an examination of "the connections between the sex structure of work arrangements, the family system and the subordinate position of women within it, and the persistence of class-based inequalities in the larger society. . . ." He goes on to add that "the presence of working class women in the office may constitute the only real form of proletarianization . . . the crux of the issue is how researchers can most accurately identify the class position of women."<sup>7</sup>

It is not possible to deal with all these major issues in this paper. In what follows we simply begin to provide the background for an in-depth analysis of non-manual workers by (a) documenting the rise of non-manual workers in the province, showing the huge increase in the service

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ployee?" *British Journal of Industrial Relations* (1972): 325-39. Although the categories used here are very broad, they merely help to sketch the rise of non-manual work. Obviously more detailed analysis is necessary to reveal the full complexity of the situation. A major problem is presented by the inclusion of "proprietors" because, from the theoretical standpoint which informs this paper, they belong either to the capitalist class or the petty bourgeoisie rather than that of the working-class proletariat.

<sup>7</sup> Graham S. Low, "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 10 (Autumn 1982): 37.

sector and in the numbers and proportions of female employees, many of them being concentrated in subordinate and more poorly paid positions, and (b) presenting a modified Marxist political economy perspective as a way to begin to account for these trends. The organization of reproduction as well as production is considered essential for an adequate discussion of women's employment. But this can only be examined in this paper against the backdrop of the rise of monopoly capitalism, the differentiation of capitalist activity which it implies, and the rise of the modern state.

#### NON-MANUAL WORKERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1881-1981

##### a. *Occupation*

In the past century the proportion of non-manual workers in the British Columbia labour force has increased almost five-fold (see table 1). The proportion of white-collar workers doubled between 1881 and 1901 and was followed by a second spurt from 1911 to 1921, but the major growth has occurred in the past thirty years, when non-manual workers moved from a minority to a sizeable majority (66 percent) of the labour force.

Some light can be shed on the nature of these changes by breaking the labour force into the more traditionally used categories of "white-collar" (managerial, professional, clerical and sales), "service" (service and recreation) and "blue-collar" (manual) categories. It is apparent that the main "trade-offs" have been between the "traditional white-collar" and "blue-collar" sectors (figure 1). While the service category has shown a small but steady increase the percentage of blue-collar workers in the labour force has plummeted, primarily due to the decline in the number of agricultural and primary production workers.

There are, however, two distinct occupational distributions, one for men and one for women. Throughout the twentieth century most women workers have been concentrated in non-manual jobs (table 1). However, during 1891-1921, a period when some of the most intense labour struggles in the province occurred, at least three-quarters of all non-manual workers were men, and they have shown an increasing tendency to move into white-collar rather than into manual work, particularly during and after World War II (table 2). Nearly 60 percent of all new male jobs between 1941 and 1981 were non-manual. However, while until 1951 at least 60 percent of the non-manual labour force was male, the male *proportion* of all non-manual workers has been steadily declining. The

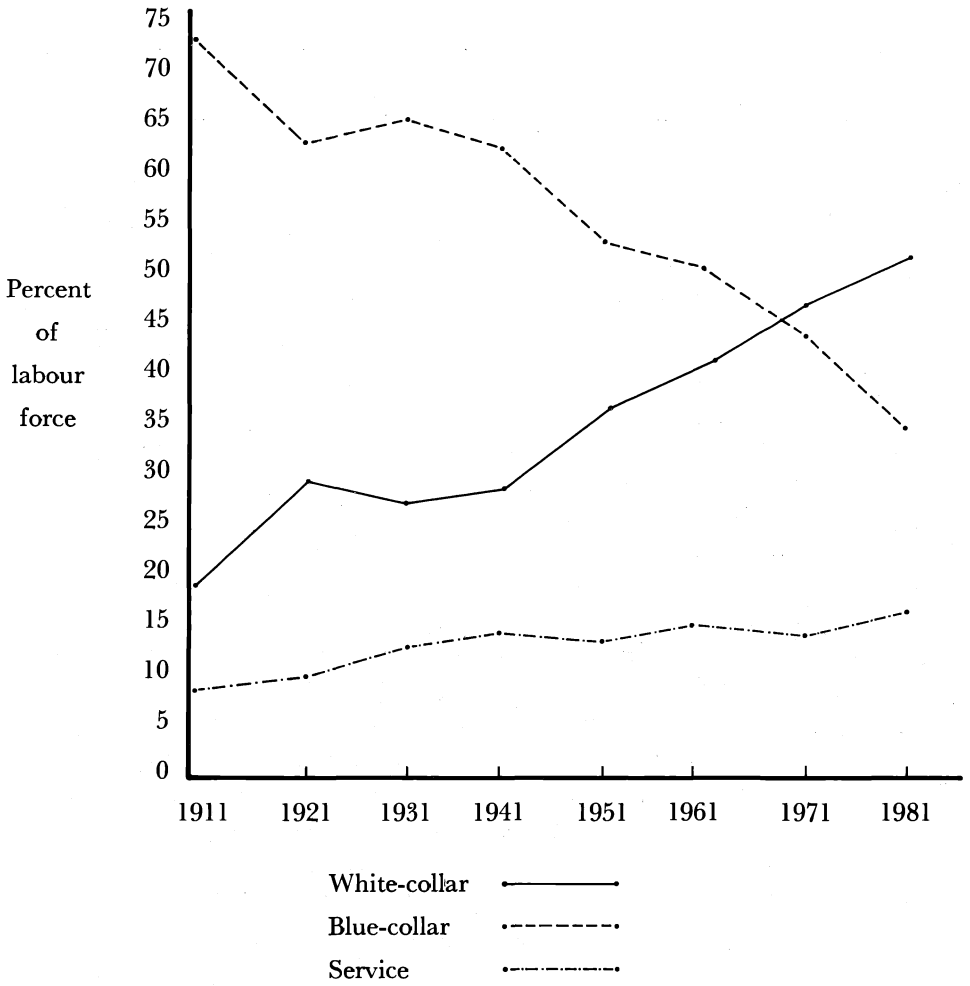
TABLE 1  
*Non-Manual Workers as a Percentage of the  
 Male/Female/Total Labour Force\**  
*in British Columbia, 1881-1981*

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Number in Labour Force</i>
1881	—	—	14	17,701
1891	22	46	26	48,032
1901	25	77	28	81,276
1911	23	76	27	205,062
1921	31	84	37	218,660
1931	28	84	36	305,890
1941	29	86	39	312,758
1951	36	83	47	437,688
1961	43	88	55	560,462
1971	45	90	60	824,489
1981	48	91	66	1,354,000

\* Omitting from the Labour Force totals the "occupation not stated" category.

SOURCES: (1) 1881, 1891 — calculated from the 1881, 1891 censuses by the authors using the 1961 census occupational classification. The 1881 census does not break down occupational data by gender. (2) 1901 — detailed occupational distributions are not available on the provincial level for 1901. Non-manual/manual totals were calculated using broad occupational categories in which linear extrapolations 1891-1911 had to be made in separating "Trade and Finance" workers in 1901 from the "Transportation" category. (3) 1911-1921 — from the 1961 census (historical series). (4) 1931-1961 — from the 1971 census (historical series). (5) 1971 — from the 1971 census. (6) 1981 — from the June 1981 Statistics Monthly Labour Force Survey.

NOTE: The non-manual/manual divisions in this paper are largely based on broad census categories of occupation. The 1971 census, for example, includes twenty-four occupational categories of which eleven are non-manual, the 1931 census fourteen broad categories with four of these being non-manual. Census occupational and industrial classifications frequently change from one census to the next; hence detailed occupation/industry distributions are not directly comparable although broader groupings are generally roughly comparable. Fortunately the censuses themselves provide comparable historical occupation/industry data across four or five census decades in the historical series accompanying most censuses. Overall, then, there is good comparability for the manual/non-manual split 1911-1981, while the 1881-1901 data are estimates or were calculated by the authors from detailed occupational data.



SOURCES: See table 1.

FIGURE 1  
*Trends in the Percentage of White-collar, Service, Blue-collar Occupations in the B.C. Labour Force 1911-1981*

TABLE 2  
*Male and Female Workers as a Percentage of  
 the Non-Manual Labour Force in  
 British Columbia, 1891-1981*

	Male	Female	M/F Ratio	Number in Non-Manual Labour Force
1881	—	—	—	2,478
1891	88	12	7.3	12,566
1901	84	16	5.2	23,032
1911	77	23	3.4	55,183
1921	74	26	2.8	81,698
1931	67	33	2.0	111,203
1941	61	39	1.6	121,144
1951	60	40	1.5	205,830
1961	57	43	1.3	307,744
1971	49	51	1.0	489,318
1981	44	56	0.8	891,000

SOURCES: See table 1.

NOTE: No breakdown by gender is available for 1881.

increasing feminization of the non-manual labour force is thus not the corollary of an absolute decline in the *numbers* of male employees in that section, but a great upsurge of women in the labour force nearly all of whom have become clerical, sales, service, professional, technical or managerial workers. Between 1891 and 1981 the percentage of women who were employed outside the home in British Columbia increased from about 12 to 56 percent. The period of accelerated growth of non-manual employment after World War II has thus coincided with the increasing feminization of that sector which by 1971 included approximately equal numbers of male and female workers and, more recently (1981), an excess of female over male workers of 12 percent.

Closer examination of the trends within the non-manual sector reveals that the changes in individual categories among men have not been great; all categories showing a more or less steady increase (table 3). The most rapid growth patterns occurred among "managers and proprietors" between 1941 and 1951 and among "professional and technical" between

TABLE 3  
*Percentages of the Male and Female Labour Force  
 in the Non-Manual Occupational Categories  
 in British Columbia, 1891, 1911-1971*

	<i>Males</i>								
	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971
Managers and Proprietors	7.6	—	6.4	9.8	7.3	7.3	10.6	12.2	12.9
Professional and Technical	3.8	—	3.0	4.0	4.2	5.0	5.8	8.1	9.9
Clerical	2.2	—	3.2	5.0	4.5	4.3	5.7	5.9	5.8
Commercial and Financial (including Sales after 1911)	—	—	4.4	5.6	5.5	5.0	5.3	6.3	6.3
Service and Recreation	8.4	—	5.6	6.6	6.9	6.9	8.8	10.0	9.6
	<i>Females</i>								
	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971
Managers and Proprietors	1.8	—	1.6	2.9	2.5	3.3	4.5	4.7	3.6
Professionals and Technical	10.5	—	12.8	21.2	18.2	16.5	14.4	15.4	15.0
Clerical	1.2	—	13.3	22.0	20.2	19.8	31.7	32.8	37.2
Commercial and Financial (including Sales after 1911)	—	—	6.4	10.1	9.1	9.8	11.0	10.8	9.6
Service and Recreation	33.0	—	41.7	28.1	34.3	36.5	23.2	24.6	22.6

SOURCES: See table 1.

1951 and 1961. World War II marks a major transition period before the rapid expansion of these two occupational categories.

The female non-manual sector, however, has shown quite dramatic changes over the years. The most pronounced of these changes has been in the clerical and service divisions. From 1891 to 1971 these two groups showed inverse growth trends. Clerical work as a percentage of the female labour force increased from 1.2 percent to 37 percent, while the service



sector declined from 33 to 23 percent over the same period. A closer look at this latter decline shows that the single largest change for women occurred between 1911 and 1921, when the service category fell from almost 42 to just over 28 percent of the female labour force. Then, after increasing between 1921 and 1941, it decreased rapidly again from 36 to 23 percent in the next decade. Another notable change was in the high proportion of women in the "professional and technical" category in the 1921 census (21 percent) which subsequently declined to 15 percent by 1971. The female "managers and proprietors" formed an increasing percentage of the female labour force between 1931 and 1961 but by 1971 had dropped by one percentage point. The "commercial and financial" group (which has included "sales" since 1921) has actually declined since 1951.

A comparison of the occupational distributions of women and men indicate differences in labour market segmentation. Men tend to be in the higher and women in the lower status occupations in each of the broad categories. In 1971, for example, 13 percent of non-manual male workers were "proprietors or managers" compared to only 4 percent of the females. In the "professional" category, the largest female groups throughout the years have been teachers and nurses, as compared to predominantly male professors and physicians.<sup>8</sup> But most remarkable is that in 1971 almost 60 percent of all female workers were in the "clerical" and "service and recreation" sectors. The data for both British Columbia and Canada as a whole shows women confined to a relatively small group of occupations in which they comprise the vast majority of workers.

#### b. *Industry*

The occupational distribution in British Columbia is at least in part a function of the province's underlying industrial structure which can be fairly easily described because of its basic continuity since the late nineteenth century. Shearer has noted:

The economic base of British Columbia . . . involves primarily the extraction and processing of a few natural resources. Fishing and agriculture are

<sup>8</sup> In 1911 there were 1,735 female teachers and nurses compared to 547 males and only 28 female professors and physicians as compared to 431 males. In 1971 there were 25,070 women in nursing and teaching and 9,080 men in the same occupations. The same census reports 780 women professors or doctors and 6,070 men. Even within the non-university teaching category 74 percent of female teachers were in elementary or kindergarten schools while 71 percent of the males were in secondary teaching.

important, but in much lesser degree, although the recreational use of resources is a rapidly increasing component of the economic base.<sup>9</sup>

Directly or by multiplier effect forestry has influenced the employment of about one-half of the province's labour force and accounts for about 66 percent of the province's exports.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, while the provincial economy continues to be largely dependent on the export of semi-processed resources, the extractive industries have employed an ever-smaller percentage of the labour force, mainly because of the use of more capital-intensive, highly mechanized production methods.

Using census data, McInnis has calculated industry classifications comparable over the 1911-1961 period for all the major regions in Canada.<sup>11</sup> We have updated his British Columbia data to 1971, adding roughly comparable 1981 data from the Labour Force Survey. Remarkable trends appear over the seventy-year period — e.g., the increase in the percentage of the labour force in the service industries (from 12.6 to 30.7) and the decreases in both agriculture (from 11.8 to 2.1) and in the primary sector as a whole (including agriculture) from 27.3 to 7.4 (table 4). Both "trade" and "finance, insurance and real estate" show steady increases. The most significant change, however, is the percentage employed in "manufacturing," which was steadily increasing until 1951 and has been declining ever since. The current British Columbia labour force comprises a very small proportion of primary sector workers (7.4 percent), a shrinking secondary manufacturing and construction sector (22.0 percent) and a huge tertiary sector employing over two-thirds of all B.C. workers (70.6 percent).

There are three possible ways in which the industrial composition of the labour force can be related to the occupational trends discussed

<sup>9</sup> R. A. Shearer, "The Economy of British Columbia," Study 1, R. A. Shearer, J. H. Young and G. R. Munro, *Trade Liberalization and a Regional Economy: Studies of the Impact of Free Trade on British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 3-42. See also R. E. Caves and R. H. Holton, "An Outline of the Economic History of British Columbia, 1881-1951," in *Historical Essays on British Columbia*, ed. J. Friesen and H. K. Ralston (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> R. Schwindt, *The Existence and Exercise of Corporate Power: A Case Study of MacMillan Bloedel Ltd.*, Commission on Corporate Concentration, Study No. 15 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> R. M. McInnis, "Long-Run Changes in the Industrial Structure of the Canadian Work Force," *Canadian Journal of Economics* 4, 1971, pp. 353-61; R. M. McInnis, "Long-Run Trends in Industrial Structure of the Canadian Work Force: Regional Differentials, 1911-1961" (unpublished paper, Queen's University, Economics, 1973).

TABLE 4  
*British Columbia Labour Force  
 Industrial Structure, 1911-1981*

<i>Sectors</i>	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981
<i>Primary</i>								7.4
Agriculture	11.8	16.7	14.8	13.2	6.3	4.1	2.7	2.1
Forestry	5.9	6.0	5.4	5.9	5.7	3.8	3.3	
Fishing and Trapping	2.3	2.5	3.3	3.2	1.2	0.8	0.5	5.3
Mining	7.3	5.4	4.4	4.6	2.6	1.5	1.8	
<i>Secondary</i>								22.0
Manufacturing	17.2	17.0	16.6	20.2	22.6	20.2	17.5	14.4
Construction	15.4	7.0	8.1	6.3	7.0	7.1	7.8	7.6
<i>Tertiary</i>								70.6
Transp/Comm/Ut	9.7	11.3	10.6	9.1	10.0	9.7	8.8	10.0
Trade	9.5	12.2	13.3	14.2	16.7	17.7	17.6	18.0
Fin/Ins/RE	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.5	3.3	4.0	5.0	5.5
Service	12.6	15.4	17.2	17.3	17.1	22.0	26.9	30.7
Public Administration	5.6	4.2	3.7	3.5	7.4	9.1	7.8	6.4

SOURCES: 1911-1961 McInnis, unpublished data; 1971 Canada Census; 1981 Canada Labour Force Survey, June 1981.

NOTES: Dr. McInnis kindly gave us his data for British Columbia. We standardized 1971 British Columbia census data on industry with McInnis's classification. The 1981 industry data from the Labour Force Survey differ only slightly from the rest.

earlier.<sup>12</sup> The growth in the proportion of non-manual workers may have involved (1) their employment in greater numbers within existing industrial sectors, (2) the rise of newer predominantly non-manual industrial sectors, e.g., "financial" or "service," or (3) interaction between the two.

Based on a method used by Singelmann and Browning, comparisons were made of the net shift in occupational distribution between 1941 and 1971, the crucial years of growth of non-manual occupations. Table 5

<sup>12</sup> Following J. Singelmann and H. L. Browning, "Industrial Transformation and Occupational Change in the U.S., 1960-70," *Social Forces* 59 (1980): 246-64.

reveals that all three processes are at work.<sup>13</sup> While all of the non-manual categories listed increased during the period, the only manual group to gain was that of "craftsmen and operatives." Independent of growth in the labour force there have been large shifts among occupational categories. As we have already seen, the major changes have been away from primary and labouring occupations toward "clerical," "professional and technical" and "managerial" groups.

A comparison of the non-manual and manual groups as a whole, however, indicates that about three-quarters of the shift from manual to non-manual work can be explained by changes in the British Columbia industrial structure, i.e., 129,292 out of a total net shift of 169,615. There have been large shifts in workers among industries, those gaining the most being the ones already predominantly white-collar in nature.<sup>14</sup> For more specific occupational categories it can be seen that clerical workers show trends which somewhat contradict the results for non-manual workers as a whole. While the other non-manual categories (such as "managers") show larger "industry shift" than "occupational shift" effects, the proportion of the growth in clerical workers in the labour force due to the increases *within* industries is over twice that due to changes in industrial structure. In other words, more clerical workers were employed in many

<sup>13</sup> At the basis of the procedure is the calculation of the shifts among occupational categories independent of the growth of total employment (the net shift). The number of workers in each occupational category is then calculated as if there had been only shifts due to changes in industrial structure but not "within industry" shifts in occupational composition, thereby producing "industry effect." The remaining shift totals are those due to within-industry shifts plus interaction effects. The procedure is then reversed by calculating the number of workers in each occupational group had there been only "within-industry" changes but no shifts in industrial structure. This produces "occupation effects." The "interaction effect" is then obtained by subtraction of the industry and occupation effects from the total net shift.

In order to calculate the effects of within-industry and industry shifts on occupational composition one must have comparable matrices for occupations and industrial sectors of the labour force over time. Such a matrix is available for British Columbia for 1971 based on the 1961 occupation and industry classifications as applied to a random sample of the census. A complete occupation by industry matrix had been published for the 1941 occupation and industry classifications and, although they are not commensurate with the 1961 classifications, this matrix was re-calculated to match the 1961 (hence also the 1971) sample classifications, thus permitting an analysis of the major recent growth in non-manual occupations 1941-1971.

<sup>14</sup> While these findings largely reflect the widespread trends in industrial structure that we illustrated earlier, the results should not be extrapolated further back. We suspect, for example, that earlier increases in the non-manual categories (say between 1881 and 1921) were due more to compositional shifts within industries than to changes in industrial structure. See Lowe, "The Administrative Revolution. . .", *op. cit.*

TABLE 5  
*Changes in the Occupational Structure and its Components  
 British Columbia, 1941-1971*

<i>Occupational Category</i>	<i>Net Shift</i>	<i>Components of Net Shift</i>		
		<i>Industry Effect</i>	<i>Occupation Effect (within industry)</i>	<i>Interaction Effect</i>
Managers	25,061	16,340	6,681	2,040
Professional and Technical	41,959	23,527	19,496	-1,064
Clerical	81,288	20,413	46,843	14,032
Sales	8,171	21,104	-6,928	-6,005
Service and Recreation	13,136	47,908	-24,434	-10,338
<i>Total Non-Manual</i>	169,615	129,292	41,658	-1,335
Transportation and Communication*	-12,899	4,587	-15,760	-1,726
Craftsmen and Operatives	14,820	4,006	19,935	-9,121
Primary*	-97,779	-103,870	28,160	-22,069
Labourers	-73,749	-34,013	-73,987	34,251
<i>Total Manual</i>	-169,607	-129,290	-41,652	1,335

SOURCES: 1941 census occupation by industry matrix converted to 1961 classifications; 1971 census occupation by industry matrix converted to 1961 classifications.

\* These categories were developed by excluding non-manual workers from each of the two industrial categories involved.

different industrial sectors of the economy. On the other hand both "sales" and "service and recreation" categories would actually have lost proportionately if there had only been within-industry compositional shifts. They gained only because of increases in sales and recreation industries. Overall these detailed comparisons reveal that the "service and recreation" group has been the main beneficiary of changes in industrial structure and clerical workers the main beneficiaries of occupational composition changes within industry.

In this first section we have traced the rise to prominence of non-manual workers in the British Columbia labour force, their increasing feminization and the placement of women workers in dependent, less

prestigious positions. We have also noted the expansion of the service sector as a major element in these developments.

#### DISCUSSION

In the absence of detailed research into the growth and decline of particular industries and occupations in the province a thoroughgoing explanation of the rise and feminization of non-manual work in British Columbia is not possible at this time. However, we believe that a modified Marxist political economy perspective provides the best explanatory framework; i.e., British Columbia's changing economy and social structure are best understood in relation to a developing capitalist mode of production introduced by Europeans in the nineteenth century.

In adopting this approach we acknowledge the significance of technological change, the growth of large, complex bureaucratic organizations, new forms of communications, the expansion of leisure activities and advances in prosperity as all having been involved in the rise of non-manual employment. But there are major shortcomings in theories which emphasize such processes as part of the logic of industrialization, bureaucratization, modernization or the advent of the post-industrial or service society. Most important is their tendency to see these developments as unrelated to concrete social relations, particularly those involving power and interests. Whether, how and to what extent new forms of activity such as technological processes or work organization are to be introduced is usually decided by men in positions of authority within corporate or governmental organizations. Property ownership, especially that which confers control over capital expenditures, is a fundamental condition of the exercise of such authority and the class relationship between employers and those who produce the commodities and services they sell is the primary context in which decisions to adopt new technology or work organization are made.<sup>15</sup>

In not making these social relations explicit, many social scientific approaches provide only partial accounts of the rise of non-manual employment and thus serve as ideological screens which obscure rather than clarify class relations, sometimes to the extent of denying their very existence in favour of an atomized hierarchy of prestige or income levels.

Orthodox social science has also failed to present an adequate approach to problems of gender and women's oppression. Theories of sex

<sup>15</sup> For a recent cogent and empirically well-documented application of this approach in Canada see W. Clement, "The Subordination of Labour in Canadian Mining" *Labour/Le Travailleur* 5 (Spring 1980).

role socialization are of limited value in explaining the movement of women into the work force and into certain kinds of white-collar work rather than others.<sup>16</sup> We prefer the approach of Seccombe, who has recently modified traditional Marxist analyses by placing reproduction processes — the production of labour-power on a daily and generational basis — at the centre, arguing that, together with production of the means of subsistence and of the means of production themselves, reproduction is not a “superstructural” element but a basic ingredient of particular modes of production and specific social formations.<sup>17</sup> In this way the position of women in all societies, which is dependent on conceptions of wife/motherhood and is organized within household/family/kin relations, is analyzed as part of the basic forces and relations of production and reproduction.

Following a modified Marxist approach, therefore, we note that accumulation takes place within capitalism through a steady increase in surplus value — e.g., through the introduction of more efficient technology, the use of management techniques or work fragmentation. Increasing surplus value provides the basis for the expansion of corporate enterprise and for the employment by corporations and by the state of increasing numbers of workers who are unproductive in the sense of not contributing directly in their own activity to the production of surplus. In the succeeding outline of an explanatory approach we stress (1) the growth of large-scale corporate organizations as a primary feature of the transition from competitive, entrepreneurial to monopoly (perhaps more appropriately “oligopolistic”) capitalism, (2) the expansion of state organizations and (3) the feminization of subordinate forms of white-collar work. These trends have been accompanied by the decline of self-employed members of the labour force, the differentiation of capitalist activity whereby various specialized workers take over many tasks previously performed by capitalist employers themselves, and a general increase in the use of female labour power.

### 1. *From entrepreneurial to monopoly capitalism*

During the nineteenth century, when it first established a foothold in British Columbia, capitalism co-existed with other modes of production, notably those of the native peoples but also petty or independent com-

<sup>16</sup> P. and H. Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978), chaps. 5 and 6.

<sup>17</sup> W. Seccombe, “Marxism and Demography,” *New Left Review* 137 (Jan.-Feb. 1983).

modity production in which the owners of capital goods and resources used their own labour (or that of their households) to produce saleable commodities or provide services.<sup>18</sup> But capitalism tends to supersede petty commodity production, partly because of the high levels of accumulation made possible by its superior productive capacity. This process was greatly helped in British Columbia by concessions to corporations from governments in the form of legal access to land and resources, subsidies and tax benefits.

Malcolmson's research shows clearly how, after completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886, the legal framework of state activity shifted away from supporting independent producers towards catering to resource companies.<sup>19</sup> Around the turn of the century the formation of the British Columbia Packers' Association in 1902, through the acquisition of forty-two canneries, and the arrival of large American lumber companies were early landmarks in the trend towards monopoly capitalism.<sup>20</sup> By 1980 the four largest canning companies between them accounted for 82 percent of all salmon canned in the province and 84 percent of herring roe.<sup>21</sup>

In the forest industry Marchak noted the following data on corporate concentration in 1978:

At present, ten companies control between 80 and 93 percent of the forestry resource in each of the seven forestry districts, own about 35 percent of the lumber facilities, 90 percent of the pulp facilities, and 74 percent of the plywood and veneer facilities.<sup>22</sup>

In manufacturing the trend towards oligopolistic concentration has been steady for the past hundred years. In 1881, 16.4 percent (68 of 415) of manufacturing establishments in the province produced 69.1 percent of total product value in that sector.<sup>23</sup> By 1975, 4.9 percent (154

<sup>18</sup> J. D. Malcolmson "Resource Development and the State in Early British Columbia" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> C. Lyons, *Salmon: Our Heritage* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1969), p. 492; J. C. Lawrence, "Markets and Capital: A History of the Lumber Industry of British Columbia" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1957), p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> P. H. Pearse, *Turning the Tide*. Final Report of the Commission on Pacific Fisheries Policy (Ottawa: Ministry of Supplies and Services, 1982), p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> P. Marchak, "Labour in a Staples Economy," *Studies in Political Economy* 2 (Autumn 1979): 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sources of manufacturing data include Canada Year Book, 1927, 1922-23, 1927, 1952-53 and a series on manufacturing statistics for various years. Statistics Canada Cat. No. 31-203.



of 3,131) of establishments produced 90.3 percent of total product value in manufacturing.

In the retail merchandising trade 6.8 percent of all stores had 61 percent of total sales by 1971. Even in the retail service area, a traditional field for small or independent businesses, 71 percent of sales were controlled by only 7.7 percent of establishments.

From the labour force point of view, these developments had a major impact, as illustrated in the following section. In 1979 33 percent of all employees in manufacturing worked in establishments which employed 500 or more and 56 percent in those with 200 or more. Less than 10 percent were in establishments with fewer than 20 employees. More germane to our main concerns here is that non-production workers comprised 34 percent of the largest establishments (those with over 500 workers), 19 percent of those in moderately sized companies (200 to 500 workers) and only 12 percent of the smallest firms (less than 20 workers). Overall, 65 percent of non-production workers in manufacturing in 1979 were in plants with 200 or more employees. There were both larger plants and a greater number of non-manual workers employed in administering these larger enterprises.

The precise significance of the above trends towards monopoly capitalism for the spread of non-manual work lies in the diversification of tasks carried out in large bureaucratic organizations. In the early stages of industrial capitalism the owner-entrepreneurs (often together with a partner or relative) were personally responsible for and involved in all aspects of the activities of the enterprise: employing, organizing and supervising workers, co-ordinating production, transportation, distribution, etc. These tasks and many newer ones are now carried out by specialized personnel. Financing, marketing, supplying raw materials, legal assistance, advertising and data processing are all examples of what Crompton calls the "differentiation of capitalist activity."<sup>24</sup> These changes involve an increase in the proportion of administrative, professional, technical and clerical workers within industries, as well as the rise of predominantly white-collar industrial sectors — e.g., advertising, communications, banking. Control over the labour process has also been extended by the application of "scientific management" techniques in imposing stricter forms of work discipline on employees.<sup>25</sup> As Marglin has shown, this was not simply a move towards greater efficiency but also a means of

<sup>24</sup> Crompton, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> See H. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) and Rinehart, *op. cit.*

controlling potentially recalcitrant employees.<sup>26</sup> It led to the growth of several strata of productive workers with different job tasks, rates of pay and work privileges. More people were also needed to administer and monitor these processes.

One major example of the expansion of white-collar work is provided by clerical workers. According to Lowe, there was in Canada as a whole an administrative revolution in the first three decades of this century. He observed that increasing company size due to growth, mergers and take-overs generated the need to organize and control the bigger and more geographically dispersed production and distribution units. With the increase in size of the clerical and administrative functions came the need to control administration itself, a problem leading to the growth of management consulting and such new occupations as systems and budgetary analysis.

All the above examples of occupational diversification are closely related to the processes of production and the realization of surplus. They are organizational measures taken by occupants of distinct class positions as the owners and controllers of capital (or their representatives) in order to increase the amount of surplus extracted from the workers.

We recognize that, in the absence of data on the extent to which British Columbia conformed to the above general trends, these comments constitute only a plausible theoretical sketch. Table 7, however, shows that, although British Columbia has had a larger tertiary sector than other Canadian regions since 1911, the proportions across Canada are remarkably similar. In table 8 regional similarities in occupational distribution are also apparent.

## 2. *The growth of state institutions*

We have already noted the role of government in assisting capital accumulation directly through favourable legislation and access to resources. Provision of transportation routes — railroads, highways, air routes, ferries — and easy access to energy sources, especially electrical power, has been another major state service to corporate capital, as have scientific, technological and other forms of research.

The state's contribution to reproducing a stable and co-operative labour force and maintaining support for the existing political and economic order lies in the fields of education, labour relations and health,

<sup>26</sup> S. Marglin, "What Do Bosses Do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 6(2) (Summer 1974): 60-112.

TABLE 6  
*Numbers Employed in the Provincial Public Service  
 in British Columbia*

	<i>Permanent</i>	<i>Temporary</i>	<i>Total</i>
1872	85	6	91
1881	54	1	55
1891	98	20	118
1901	319	16	335
1910	293	266	559
1912	824	N/A	824
1921	1,262	93	1,335
1931	1,313	135	1,448
1941	1,489	362	1,851
1951	7,494	500	7,994
1961	8,763	1,470	10,233
1971	16,011	13,130	29,141
1981	33,108	10,044	43,152

NOTE: This table is abridged from a document tabled in the Provincial Legislature on 15 April 1982 and provided to us by the Public Service Commission. Figures for 1910 and 1912 are included because those for 1911 were not available.

welfare and recreational services. Many of those services were introduced to cope directly with problems of unemployment, poverty, industrial and social unrest and worker-supported political opposition.

Recently released data on the size of the public service in the government of British Columbia provide a broad picture since 1872 (table 6). There was a three-fold increase before 1900, an increase of more than four times between 1901 and 1921. From then until after World War II the figure grew to over seven thousand employees. By 1961 it reached to over 10,000 and in the prosperous sixties it climbed towards the 30,000 mark. The figure for 1981 showed that there were over 43,000 provincial government employees. This number is almost identical to that for employees of the federal government within the province which by June 1981 numbered 43,259, up from 19,546 in October 1959.<sup>27</sup>

But the state has far greater influence on employment than simply a growth in the number of its own employees. Wide sectors of society,

<sup>27</sup> *Federal Employment in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada), Ref. HA-72-004.

TABLE 7  
*Percentage of the Labour Force in Broad Industry Groups,  
 B.C., Ontario, Atlantic, 1911, 1951-1981  
 (omitting the "unclassified")*

D*		Primary			Secondary			Tertiary		
		BC	Ont	Atl	BC	Ont	Atl	BC	Ont	Atl
146	1911	28	36	51	32	29	19	40	36	30
103	1951	16	14	29	29	39	21	56	48	49
81	1961	10	10	17	27	34	21	63	56	62
71	1971	8	6	10	25	34	25	66	61	65
64	1981	8	5	10	23	30	22	70	64	68

\* Differences among the three regions comparing all possible pairs and using percentage differences across ten broad industry categories: e.g., Agriculture (B.C.-Ont.) + (Ont.-Atl.) + Manufacturing (B.C.-Ont.) + ...

SOURCE: 1911, 1971 from McInnis, 1973; 1951-1961 from 1971 Canada Census historical series; 1981 from Canada Labour Force Survey, June 1981.

TABLE 8  
*Non-Manual Occupations as a Percentage of Total Labour Force,  
 B.C., Ontario, Atlantic Region, 1931, 1971  
 (omitting "not stated")*

	1931			1971		
	BC	Ont	Atl	BC	Ont	Atl
Managerial	6.6	6.2	4.8	9.7	8.6	7.8
Professional and Technical	6.2	6.4	5.3	11.6	14.5	13.9
Clerical	6.8	8.5	4.5	16.5	17.7	13.0
Sales	6.0	6.1	4.0	7.4	7.3	6.1
Service	10.8	9.1	8.8	14.0	12.1	14.8
Total Non-Manual	36.4	36.3	27.4	59.2	60.2	55.6

SOURCE: 1971 Census historical series.

including educational and health sectors, depend directly or indirectly on state financing. Defining public employment more widely in this way to include educational and institutional workers in hospitals, charitable and religious institutions as well as government employees provides further evidence of the huge growth of state-dependent employment. Between 1947 and 1975 public employment in the province increased from 35,851 to 229,885 workers, a six-fold rate of increase, which is over twice that for the labour force as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

Although we do not have a breakdown of these figures along occupational lines the 1971 census showed that 81 percent of employees in British Columbia in the "public administration" sector fell into our definition of the non-manual category.

### 3. *Feminization*

We have shown that female workers have formed a growing proportion of the provincial labour force since the turn of the century and that the majority of them occupy subordinate positions in the "clerical" and "service and recreation" sectors. Even in the "professional and technical" and "commercial and financial" fields they tend to find themselves in relatively powerless, dependent and lower-paid situations compared to male workers.

In order to account for these trends we suggest an analysis, following Seccombe, which accommodates both the domestic and the occupational division of labour — i.e., social reproduction as well as the production of surplus value through goods and services. During the early development of capitalism in Europe and Eastern North America women (and children) were employed as wage-labour on a large scale. As a result of male workers' struggles for a living wage, the displacement of labour power by machinery and pressures from the male-dominated labour movement, women (and children) were removed from many industrial establishments. The mainly single women who did take up employment were paid low wages partly because of the application of patriarchal ideology in the form of sexual discrimination but also because of the need for reduced labour costs on the part of profit-making enterprises.

As the clerical and service sectors grew around the turn of the century women workers were preferred because they cost less to employ, were prepared to carry out menial tasks, could work on a part-time basis, did

<sup>28</sup> D. K. Foot, ed., *Public Employment and Compensation in Canada: Myths and Realities*. Institute for Research on Public Policy, vol. 1 (Scarborough, Ontario: Butterworth and Co., 1978).

not expect promotion and were unlikely to unionize. According to Lowe's research on clerical workers, fragmentation of clerical tasks and speeding up of correspondence were accomplished effectively by employing women.

In the early part of this century married women provided a reserve labour force which could be drawn upon when needed — e.g., during the two World Wars. Men were not attracted by clerical and service work because there was little chance for upward mobility and because of low salaries. Patriarchal relationships, though not originating under capitalism, have thus been reproduced at both the domestic and paid-employment levels, each reinforcing the other. The subordination of women in the traditional professional fields — e.g., male physicians directing female nurses — indicates a similar type of patriarchal control.

The feminization of white-collar work involves mainly the employment of married women. This has also been facilitated by the shorter length of reproductive activity. The definition of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living, as defined to a large extent by commercial advertising, has also been a major factor encouraging married women to take paid employment — i.e., male salaries and wages have been insufficient.<sup>29</sup>

Production, reproduction and consumption must be analyzed under changing historical conditions in order to reach a fuller explanation of the trend to greater women's employment in the white-collar sector. The use of women workers to weaken employee solidarity must also be considered. Rosenthal and Bernard present evidence of such behaviour in a dispute involving telephone workers as early as 1906.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although we have presented evidence to show that similar patterns in the rise of white-collar work can be found in various parts of Canada, it is likely that subsequent research would show unevenness in the differential impact of industrial development, geographical location and the place of a given region in the national and international economic orders.<sup>31</sup> For example, Vancouver's entrepot position in trading patterns and the

<sup>29</sup> P. and H. Armstrong, *op. cit.*, pp. 147ff.

<sup>30</sup> Star Rosenthal, "Union Maids: Organized Women Workers in Vancouver, 1900-1915," *BC Studies* 41 (Spring 1979): 36-55; Elaine Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers' Union* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1982), pp. 32ff.

<sup>31</sup> V. Burris, "Class formation and transformation in advanced capitalist societies: A comparative analysis," *Social Praxis* 7-3/4 (1980): 147-79.

impact of the West Coast climate on tourism may have had a significant influence on B.C.'s slightly higher proportion of service industry workers.

We noted at the outset the neglect of non-manual workers in historical studies of labour and politics within British Columbia. The question of their class position and class activities is of crucial significance for an understanding of social structure and change within the province. What part, if any, did they play in the intense industrial struggles of the past? Does the rise of non-manual work imply a reduction or exacerbation of the conflict between capital and labour? Have white-collar unions emerged in response to work degradation and proletarianization? What differences exist between the newer white-collar unions and the more traditional ones in the forest, mining and other industries? What role do female employees play in the structure of class and in forms of industrial and political action? In our subsequent research we expect to shed light on these matters by analyzing in greater specificity and depth the labour-market situation, working conditions and class-related activity of non-manual workers in British Columbia.