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"Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop": The Rhetoric of Sealing Counter-Project

By Cynthia Lamson

(*St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979. Social and Economic Studies No. 24. Pp. viii + 113, illus., index. No price given.*)

Protest against the seal hunt in Newfoundland waters, spearheaded by the Greenpeace Foundation and Brian Davies, has received international publicity from the late sixties to the present. Canadians, especially Newfoundlanders, will recall Davies' 1976 hiring a crew of airline hostesses and Greenpeace's threat to spray green dye on baby seals; the appearance of Brigitte* Bardot in 1977; Swiss millionaire Franz Weber's offer to replace the hunt with an artificial fur factory; and other, less dignified attempts to interfere with the fishery.

While such protests, world-wide in their concern for preserving global ecosystems, are by and large sincerely motivated, media interest has tended to ignore such counter-protests as may arise unless they produce highly visible confrontations. Even then, media rarely attempt to present a balanced view of the controversies.

Cynthia Lamson is to be commended for her very succinct study of the phenomenon of counter-protest as it has appeared in Newfoundland in the context of the seal hunt. The opening chapter of *"Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop"* details the protests as they occurred in Newfoundland, largely promoted by Davies and Greenpeace, and then examines the themes and expressions of the counter-protest.

She draws attention to visual statements (e.g. bumper stickers), electronic media (e.g. open-line talk shows), dramatization (e.g. the Mummies' play "They Club Seals, Don't They?") and publications (e.g. Ryan and Small's *Haulin' Rope*

and *Gaff*). In their various ways, these expressions of counter-protest attempt to justify and rationalize in response to situations created by protesters. In analyzing the counter-protest argument, Lamson points to five factors which characterize it: economic necessity, tradition, occupational hazard, ecological responsibility and divine sanction. Each of these types of counter-argument was articulated in response to specific types of accusations levelled at the hunt or the hunters.

Chapter II of *"Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop"* contains the theoretical core of the study. It attempts "to identify and describe characteristic features of counter-protest and argues that preferred rhetorical strategies are: (1) emergent through time, and (2) derivative of shared geographic and historical experience." (p. 18). Lamson notes that the most common forms of rebuttal include objection to interference, discrediting opponents, retaliation and assertion of rights, with outrage, frustration and pride forming the emotional core of sealing counter-protest. These points are amply illustrated by quotations from a variety of involved sources.

A key section of this chapter deals with style and language. Noting that the function of rhetoric is to persuade, and that persuasion requires skillful manipulation of language, values and sentiment, Lamson points out that rhetoric is culturally specific as counter-protest; in other words, it is aimed largely at fostering an in-group identity, at strengthening the bonds between those subject to protest. In the context of the seal hunt, it unifies Newfoundlanders in their general resolve to resist outside interference with their life style.

In a broad examination of the "literature" of the counter-protest, Lamson identifies three "strategies" or attitudes taken towards sealers, protesters and the controversy as a whole: (1) celebratory and condemning; (2) sympathetic and reproachful; and (3) facetious and satirical.

The third section of the work examines at some length the literary manifestations

* Consistently misspelt Brigitte in the text

of the strategies of pro-sealing rhetoric Lamson draws on poems or songs composed usually in an emotional response to specific events or the controversy as a whole, broadly distinguishing between "amateur" and "professional" writers. The outstanding characteristic of counter-protest literature is its highly emotional, reactionary message and delivery (in contrast to governmental counter-protest which often relies on cold facts and figures).

What is the value of examining the "rhetoric of (sealing) counter-protest"? As Cynthia Lamson rightly concludes, expressive forms of counter-protest "provide an index to the beliefs and values held by a particular group (p. 87)." It helps to identify characteristics which make Newfoundlanders what they are. Indeed, Lamson has pointed to a task for a Newfoundland scholar, which would be to examine the whole phenomenon of "provincialism" in the Newfoundland context; to assess how Newfoundlanders see themselves, and how they perceive others (e.g. Mainlanders) see them. This "exoteric-esoteric" factor, as defined by the late William Hugh Jansen, would be a choice interdisciplinary theme for Newfoundland studies at a time when cultural self-discovery is attaining new heights in the province. That Newfoundlanders are proud of their heritage despite attacks by outsiders is the core of the message to be read in *"Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop"*.

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The Bread Ovens of Quebec

*By Lise Boily (Blanchette) and
Jean-François Blanchette.*

*(Ottawa: National Museums of Canada,
1979. Pp. 119, illustrations, photographs,
list of informants, bibliography. \$8.95)*

The entire range of small outbuilding forms — bake ovens, privies, ice houses, root cellars, boat houses — has long been neglected in serious North American vernacular architecture research. Many of these types are believed too simple (and therefore somehow non-cultural) to be worthy of study. With this area of material culture research long neglected, the appearance of Lise Boily and Jean-François Blanchette's work, *The Bread Ovens of Quebec*, is especially important.

Containing over a hundred photographs and drawings, and obviously aimed at the general public, this book, however, does not merely function as a source of visual information. Rather, it places the outdoor bake oven of Quebec in both its historical and contemporary contexts, using field research and archival sources. The work consists of four major sections concerned with a general history of the ovens themselves in the province, a description of the construction of an actual oven near the Rivière à Mars, the various types of bread baked in the oven and their preparation, and finally the oral traditions surrounding these buildings.

The Blanchettes' book gives an excellent picture of the wide range of bread ovens found in Quebec, as well as the many techniques and materials used in construction. Their field research appears quite extensive, although I doubt that any field worker is capable of asking only "neutral questions" as the authors maintain they did (p. 5). The chapter devoted to the actual construction of a bread oven in 1971 by Louis-Joseph Simard is especially valuable for it is uncommon to obtain such a detailed description of the construction of a specific structure, let