

**LABOUR ISSUES AND THE LABOUR MARKET
AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS :
AN INSTITUTIONALIST AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

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Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

In this paper for the URPE 1999 conference on the theme of gender and feminist political economy, amongst others, I would like to develop on theoretical and methodological issues related to our work as feminist economists, relating it to other theoretical perspectives in economics. As I was very much inspired by institutionalist economic thought, I thought it useful to review the history of economic thought in the specific field which is of interest to me, that is labour economics, in order to try to determine whether there were any similarities or possible acquaintances between a feminist perspective in labour economics (in theory and methodology) and some specific theoretical school in Economics. The reflexion on this started at the time of my Ph.D. (in 1989) and was pursued throughout different research endeavours, although the latter were not necessarily centered on the issue of feminist economics. In this perspective, it has benefitted from exchanges with a few colleagues, particularly Diane Bellemare and Lise Poulin Simon.¹

The field of labour studies in economics is quite wide, and as there are of course different theoretical and methodological perspectives, there is a risk of superficiality in trying to cover them all. I have therefore chosen a more limited approach. I will develop on general theoretical and methodological issues which have confronted me and some female colleagues with whom I have worked with in different research projects in Québec (just North of the border !). Feminist economics in the US is probably quite well known by URPE members, but Canadian and more particularly French-Canadian or Québec feminist works in economics is surely quite little known, not to say unknown. The elements presented here are to be seen as a “work in progress”; they build in part upon some thoughts developed with colleagues with whom I worked with over recent years on work and employment issuesⁱ, and also on personal work done on women’s work organisation and innovation. The latter relates to work done within the Center for research on science and technology at UQAM and work subsidized by the Social Sciences Research Council, which I want to acknowledge here.ⁱⁱ

This paper is built upon two main dimensions, that is the reference to a strand of theoretical thought, the institutionalist perspective, and more precise reference to feminist perspectives and to my own methodological choices within this theoretical approach. I will thus start with a presentation of the institutionalist perspective of the labour market, reviewing the institutionalists of the 30's and 40's onto the more recent perspectives based on internal labour markets in the 70's and 80's, as this is clearly the methodological strand to which I think most feminist economists are closest and can adhere to, as I do. My approach to research will be situated in the context of this tradition, which favours the paradigm of the social institution, or social construction of markets, and especially of labour markets, over that of the free market or of “laissez-faire” policies. I will try to situate/compare feminist perspectives in economics with this strand of theoretical thought.

This will lead to a discussion of the methodology used in research throughout all the paper. Contrary to much research on labour markets in the traditional economic discipline,

¹ I would also like to celebrate the life and work of my colleague Lise Poulin Simon, a Québec feminist economist who has left us in August 1995, after a courageous fight with cancer. I did my master's thesis under the co-direction of Diane Bellemare and Lise Poulin Simon and worked on different research projects with them throughout the 80s and until 1995, when Lise left us and Diane went on to new responsibilities in the Québec Public Service. I would like to thank them both for the pleasure of working with them all that time.



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

feminist economists in Québec and elsewhere often opt for case studies, which are not necessarily the most common method used for labour market analysis, although they are in my view extremely important to highlight differences between men and women's work. While statistical analysis is more frequent for labour market studies, the following pages will indicate that case studies and analysis of the "real world" often appear more appropriate when studying labour from a gendered perspective, or an institutional perspective for that matter. Let me first go over quickly three elements which explain my choice of reference to institutionalist thought and my feeling of proximity between feminist and institutionalist thought.

First, I think that the feminist approach is generally more adductive than hypothetico-deductive. In this sense, as the research develops, actors who are part of case studies (women who are interviewed for example on work, on family and on work-family balancing) can play a certain role in contributing to define more precisely the theoretical hypotheses on which the research rests. Furthermore, there are reciprocal relations between theory and hypotheses on the one hand, and analysis of cases on the other. There are often questions which force us to go back and forth between empirical analysis and logical or theoretical analysis. In my view, this methodological choice is also appropriate, if not essential, when doing comparisons between men and women's situations, as I have done for work status and working time issues for example. The institutionalist perspectiveⁱⁱⁱ supports such methodological choices and therefore constitutes the scientific basis on which can rest feminist methodological choices. Nevertheless, this choice also has its constraints and difficulties, particularly in terms of trust-building, objectivity and ethical issues.

A second element which I think brings feminist economics close to the institutionalist perspective is, with the theoretical elements, the methodological choices of this group. The fact that the institutionalists have always indicated a strong preoccupation for the problems of the *real* world, in opposition to pure theory. It is not to say that this school of thought has no theoretical inclinations, on the contrary, but it is also preoccupied with validation of theory through analysis of reality and theory testing, and it is also interested in finding solutions to the problems of the real world. This also appears to me to be a clear intent in the majority of feminist economists, at least in the field of labour economics which I know best. Many are not only interested in studying gender differences in wages, work organization, work status and paid working hours, but also simultaneously interested in correcting wage discrimination, exclusion of women from so-called High Performance (and High Wage) Work Organizations, imposed part time and the like.

In this sense, much of feminist economic research has, to a certain extent, been oriented towards *problem-solving*, in relation with developing theoretical elements that can be validated (not only - nor necessarily - quantitatively) through analysis of reality. This perspective is what has brought me, as well as other female economists in Québec to develop an approach which is close to the institutionalist tradition. Again, as mentioned previously, it has to be recognised that this requires some "trust-building" with the actors of the various researches, whether it be workers, women or men, union people, managers or others. I think we have to recognize however that a feminist implication can often contribute in trust-building for research with women and union organizations.



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

A third characteristic of the institutionalist tradition is a preoccupation for the benefits of research, in terms of human progress, advancement of social protection, social security, democracy at work and other such issues; this is a preoccupation of much of feminist economist's work, which again brings us to associate feminist economics with the institutionalist perspective.

This interest for the real world and for problem-solving is largely what defines the institutionalist tradition, as well as the inductive and adductive methodology to which most adhere (less frequently is their work purely deductive). Let us note here that the institutionalist school is not a dominant school in Economics, in Sociology or in Industrial Relations, but it is nevertheless a well recognised tradition, maybe more so in Industrial Relations because of the importance of Dunlop's work, particularly his definition of the Industrial Relations System, which is a "must" for most IR students. We will now turn to the institutionalist tradition as such and develop more fully the theoretical and methodological choices made in this context, comparing them to feminist economists' perspectives, at least those of many labour economists.

1. The Institutional Theoretical Tradition

Having presented briefly this hypothesis of a proximity of feminist labour economist's work with the institutionalist tradition, it seems useful to situate our vision of feminist labour economists' work in relation with the different generations of institutionalist thought, in order to highlight similarities and differences between the generations, as well as with our own work. This will bring us to distinguish three main generations of institutionalist thought, which will be named here the First Institutionalists, the Post-war Institutionalists and the New Institutionalists.

1. The First Institutionalists

The Institutional school appeared in the last quarter of the 19th century in the United States. The first institutionalists were for the majority pragmatists, as they were preoccupied with problem-solving, as indicated previously. They were mainly searching for solutions to problems from the real world (in opposition to pure theoretical problems), and as concerns labour, society and economics, they were worried by the laissez-faire policy which was becoming dominant in Great Britain during that period. For the institutionalists of the time, the State played an essential role in all dimensions of human progress^{iv}. Many issues related to Labour Studies have progressed through the work of institutionalists in fields such as labour and union recognition, arbitration procedures, unemployment insurance, minimum wage, and other elements associated with the creation of the welfare state.^v While many of the authors of the time have been forgotten since, their vision of the world of work presents many aspects that are clearly still pertinent today, many of their theoretical preoccupations also being useful today, particularly as concerns critiques of capitalism, of the way markets operate, and the necessity for State intervention in Labour issues. In our view these are also amongst the main criticisms presented by feminist economists to the discipline.

In general, it is John Commons who is seen as the main author amongst the first institutionalists, and he is considered as the main contributor to the development of Institutional Labour Economics in particular. Historians of thought have indicated that one of the main preoccupations of Commons was to try to explain how a certain social order can



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

be created in the world. He particularly refuted neoclassical economics and their mechanistic vision of the world, as do most feminist economists. He placed Human activity at the center of his work, and analysed the human will in situations of conflict, of cooperation, of competition, of negotiation, and of regulation^{vi}, again aspects which are important in feminist economists' work.

I can relate my own work and many feminist's work on labour issues, on men and women's work organisation and on workers' gendered influence on work organisation, on HRM and its impact on workers, very easily to Commons' work.^{vii} It refers to human activity, women's activity, whether individual or collective, and is often related to the negotiation of working time, technological or organisational change, to various forms of cooperation or conflict observed in firms or within the family (when work-family balancing is the issue) in relation with these issues. Institutions and institutional change are also highlighted as important by most feminist economists, and here again, Commons' work is amongst the first to consider institutions as a central dimension of economic and social activity.^{viii} The institutions to which Commons refers are the corporations, unions and political parties which, according to his views, were to be the main forms of institutions in the XXth century. Of course, analysis of institutions generally refers also to the collective action of the people composing the institution at a given time, and here again we can refer to much feminist work on collective action of men or women and its impact on wages and working conditions.

Commons also places an important emphasis on collective action. In his writings, he indicates that collective action can control, liberate and expand individual action; this is important with regards to neoclassical economics, which leave little place, if any at all, for collective action. Commons considers that the accent on the exchange of goods in neoclassical economics is not appropriate, while analysis should, according to him, be centered on transactions. This concept of transaction - which we will find in Williamson's work in more recent years - is seen by Commons as presenting the advantage of highlighting the fact that individuals have conflicting interests. Here again, we can find interesting inspiration and connexions with feminist work. Feminist economics is very critical of the neoclassical perspective, tends to be centered on transactions, as well as on the idea that collective action can extend individual action.

Commons identifies three types of transactions: bargaining, managerial and rationing transactions, the specific nature of a transaction depending, in each case, on the rules that apply in the specific case, as well as the legal status of the participants. Commons' analysis of transactions is quite detailed and complex, which certainly did not serve his very original ideas, but it nevertheless is quite pertinent for socio-economic analysis, and particularly for feminist labour issues. Let us just recall that bargaining transactions are carried out by equals before the law, even if in reality they might not be perfectly equal in economic power; the object of such transactions is the exchange of property rights. Managerial transactions refer to orders given by superiors to subordinates; their object is the creation of wealth, as it occurs generally in firms. As can be seen, these are often the center of attention in research in Labour Economics and can contribute largely to explanations of employment discrimination against women, as well as wage discrimination, amongst other feminist issues. Finally, to complete Commons' perspective, rationing transactions are those which relate to legal or political superiors who determine the distribution of costs and benefits resulting from the creation of wealth. These can concern unions and their representatives in their roles related to distribution of costs and benefits amongst their members of different



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

groups, firms or constituencies, which of course is useful in the analysis of the gendered distribution of costs and benefits. As can be seen, Commons' analysis appears useful in defining the object and method of feminist work in Labour Economics, and maybe other fields of feminist economics as well.

My own work on comparisons of women and men's work as concerns the debate on the "end of the division of labour", on gender differences in "bargaining power" related to organisational change, on the innovation process and its differentiated impact on men and women, or on the adaptation of men and women's employment systems to economic change, can be seen as referring to the analysis of various types of transactions (mainly managerial and rationing), as well as to the study of collective action and the role of institutions in different forms of change (technological, organisational, etc.). I therefore feel a proximity between feminist and institutionalist perspectives, and think they could probably be developed further, each one possibly enriching the other.

The methodology advocated by Commons is related to his theoretical vision, which we described above. Commons writes that a methodology will be chosen in order to identify differences and similarities in the different types of transactions or rules observed, as well as in relationships between the parties and the whole (individual vs collective interests or actions, for example). Thus, Commons shows a preference for abduction rather than deductive methods. Commons also rejects the neoclassical approach which tries to identify universal laws that would apply in all situations, without of course rejecting the idea of trying to develop a general understanding of socio-economic change; rather, he advocates historical and diachronic analyses that refers to a specific time and place and considers these analyses are most appropriate in developing a global perspective. In this, again, I feel feminist approaches can clearly be related to Commons' institutionalist approach.

It is interesting to note that Commons seems to favour interdisciplinary analysis as he writes that "no method of investigation, however scientific, can have all the answers to the puzzles of human progress". This also brings us to adhere to his vision, as feminist economists' work often blends labour economics and sociology of work, amongst other disciplines, and often relies on different methods of investigation, considering the purely quantitative to be somewhat limited in explanatory capacity (quantitative and qualitative methods; questionnaires and interviews, as was the case for our research on men and women's work organisation and division of labour, amongst others). There is of course a challenge in trying to do this: theoretical references and methodology are not always easy to reconcile in an interdisciplinary context and this is often the object of debates between feminist economics and the traditional discipline; these are fruitful debates however when they do occur, which is rare.

It is also interesting to highlight the fact that Commons did not separate positive science and normative science, i.e. the analysis of what is and the analysis of what should be. This also brought him to focus his work on real, concrete problems. In his endeavour, he contributed largely in finding solutions to problems, for example in establishing legislations on minimum wage, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance and the like. Again, feminist economics is very much oriented towards problem-solving, and this clearly places feminist economics in the realm of institutionalist economics, although this is not often recognized.



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

2. The Postwar Institutionalists

In this group, the main author is John Dunlop who, as we mentioned earlier, developed the analysis of the Industrial System, an analysis that still remains an essential reference in IR today. Other known authors are Kerr, Myers, Lester, Reynolds. All of them have in common an interest for labour issues, as well as the concept of a *system* of IR, and the study of the relations between the different *actors* of this system.^{ix} Here again, the proximity with much of feminist work in labour economics is quite evident, all the more so since systemic approaches have had quite some success over recent decades.

The Postwar institutionalists were particularly preoccupied with making neoclassical theory of labour markets more realistic. They rejected the idea of a unique equilibrium of the labour market, considering that many possibilities exist and that it is difficult to determine a specific outcome. To a certain extent, these authors are close to Commons, particularly in the sense that they are interested in collective action and in the rules and transactions which result from such action^x.

Amongst other things, Postwar Institutionalists highlight the fact that social factors, amongst which the need for equity, always influence the functioning of markets. This is a particularly interesting perspective from the point of view of feminist economics, which appear to be very much centered on the problem of equity, if not equality between men and women. The Postwar Institutionalists also contributed importantly in the analysis of labour markets, particularly in the identification of the balkanization, dualization or segmentation of labour markets^{xi}, in the identification of rules that govern the allocation and remuneration of work within firms, that is the concept to which we now refer to as internal labour markets or IR subsystems.^{xii} These concepts are amongst the most useful to highlight the particular situation of women in the labour market, as the concept of segmentation not only highlights the existence of different segments in the labour market, but also the concentration of women in some of these segments, particularly what is called the secondary labour market, composed mainly of the precarious, low-paying, unstable jobs, where we find a majority of women, some young men, but very few men aged 25-55. (Tremblay, 1997)

Here again with Postwar Institutionalists, we find a certain plea for interdisciplinary analysis; this interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach is seen as essential in order to give a more accurate and realistic description of the functioning of the labour market, and particularly of the situation of women in this labour market, as well as in domestic work.

In terms of methods, these authors mainly used inductive methods, often based on personal contacts with various socio-economic actors. In this sense, again, many aspects of their methodological approach are similar to Commons' perspective. Rather than the hypothetico-deductive approach of the neoclassics for example, the Postwar Institutionalists use an inductive and adductive approach. In feminist economics work, this is also important; particularly, research partners are seen as competent actors in this perspective. This means that they have the possibility to contribute to the research in all aspects: hypotheses, questionnaire development, analyses, etc. They do not always choose to be involved fully, but certainly the possibility is there, which is of course generally not the case with econometric analyses and such deductive type of work as can be found in the traditional economic science.



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

The Postwar institutionalists stress economic factors, for example the importance of the institutions and economic environment of the firm, and this is surely one of the elements which clearly differentiates them from other schools in Labour Studies, Sociology of Work and Industrial Relations, particularly from the Human Relations school, which received much attention at the time. Here again, our own background in economics brings us to consider the economic environment of firms and economic conjuncture in general as an essential element of analysis in studying gender differences. Following the Postwar Institutionalist, we reject any vision centered on the firm as a separate element from the socio-economic environment and also consider such analysis to be essential in understanding conflict and change within the firm, whether it concerns women's issues or more general organizational or technical change for example.

Following this postwar institutionalist tradition, feminist economists are generally preoccupied with the end-users of research, as well as similar preoccupations which brought Research Councils in Québec and Canada to define specific "partnership programs", brought us to develop research partnerships with various socio-economic actors, i.e. with the groups to whom our research can be useful, amongst which women's groups, depending on the specific theoretical preoccupations of the projects.

This is surely seen as quite appropriate and defensible in the Canadian context, as these partnerships are becoming more and more important in the global financing of research in Canada and Québec. With governmental cutbacks in many fields including education and research, it is interesting to note that partnership programs are of increasing importance. However, it may be preoccupying to note that other types of research may suffer; previously, there was probably not enough preoccupation with potential end-users of research and with society's and women's interests in general - given the fact that we are speaking of public funding - , but as we all know it is also essential to maintain funding for "free" or pure theoretical research also, in feminist research as in other fields.

3. The New Institutionalists

The New Institutionalists include authors such as Michael J. Piore, Peter B. Doeringer, Paul Osterman and others. These authors have mainly been known for developing the analysis of internal labour markets and segmentation theory. This refers to the idea that there is not only one labour market, as proposed by traditional neoclassical economics, but that the labour market is composed of segments. The different segments do not necessarily work in the same fashion. This recognition is of course fundamental when analyzing the labour market from the point of view of women. The recognition of the multiplicity of segments and of the fact that they function differently can contribute to the explanation of women's situation in the labour market, as concerns job segregation, women's wages, etc.

As was mentioned earlier, these subjects had been the object of institutionalist thought previously, but it is surely Doeringer and Piore's book (1971) on Internal labour markets that marked a clear break with the neoclassical perspective, and fostered much research on this theme. My own doctoral thesis (1989) was very strongly influenced by the work of Doeringer and Piore, as well as Osterman, who developed work on internal labour markets later on (1984, 1987), and looked particularly at the service sector. As my work was on women in the



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

banking sector at the time, Osterman's work was of course of interest. Other institutionalists from this more recent generation took up work on the capitalist system in general (authors such as Gordon, Reich, Edwards and others) as well as on the specific nature of the labour market (vs other goods and capital markets) and labour market institutions.

Inter-sectoral and international comparisons have been the object of research done by these New Institutionalists, by Osterman and by Piore amongst others. These comparisons helped in highlighting the diversity of internal labour markets and in defining the specific characteristics of the American labour market institutions, as well as internal labour markets. The importance of institutions in shaping differences of situation and access to advantages is clearly an important contribution of these New institutionalists, a contribution which is also important for feminist works.

If these institutionalists' work cannot be seen as having delivered a full alternative economic theory, as is also the case for feminist economics, it certainly stressed the flaws of the dominant neoclassical theory, as well as the need for a new, more realistic labour market theory, that can take into account gender, race, age and other differences in the *Homo Oeconomicus*. Again, collective behaviour was stressed by these institutionalists in opposition to individual behaviour, and institutions were highlighted as an important independent force acting in all labour market issues, whether it be the internal or the external labour market. This perspective is surely the most appropriate for Labour studies as well as for feminist labour economics as it highlights systemic forms which create differences and disadvantage, beyond individual market forces.

The Institutionalists often stress the importance of social embeddedness of labour issues and the like, as well as of decision making processes and, in general, the importance of *processes* as such, while the neoclassical tradition tends to look only at results^{xiii}. When looking at the process of organizational and technological change for example, this approach leads us to look at attitudes and behaviour of the different actors, conflicts which can arise, negotiations and compromises which can develop, etc.^{xiv} This can lead not only to the observation of differences, but to the explanation of how the gendered differences are actually constructed. As concerns employment and the labour market, this leads to analysing processes of societal negotiation, cooperation and institutional compromises between actors (some with more power than others), rather than centering the analysis on end results^{xv}.

In conclusion to this brief review of institutionalist thought, and the possible connexions with feminist work, we would like to again stress the fact that in line with this school of thought, our methodological approach is generally based on abduction, that is an iterative process which brings us to regularly confront our empirical case study or statistical research results with our initial theoretical hypothesis or assumptions. In line with the institutionalist tradition, feminist economists' analysis of "reality" often rests on case studies, but also on statistical analysis, international comparisons, and sometimes a certain historical review.

Again in line with the institutionalist paradigm, feminist's work often is concerned with concrete problems, to which partial solutions may be proposed following the research^{xvi}. To a certain extent, the problems of interest contribute in defining the theoretical elements to be



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

retained (internal labour markets, innovation theory, etc.) and an iterative process between theory and analysis of reality, through the different methods mentioned, leads to observations, conclusions and eventually solutions to the problems studied. As can be seen, our research method and our theoretical inclinations are very close to the institutionalist line of thought.

These parallels drawn between feminist and institutionalist perspectives does not diminish in any way the originality or the importance of the contributions of feminist economists. It is in our view important to relate this strand of research and teaching, that is feminist economics, to some traditions in the economic science. In our view this should actually increase the interest for feminist economics from within the discipline.

4. Main theoretical objects of research and methodological issues

We would now like to highlight the main theoretical preoccupations of feminist research over recent years, while trying to associate these with methodological choices. As this endeavour might prove too long and complex, we have centered our analysis on the work of Québec economists, although we feel there are strong similarities with work done in Canada, in the US and in many other countries. The objective is to see if connexions between feminist thought and institutionalist perspectives can hold, not so much to identify each specific piece of work done by feminist economists (see references for some titles).

1) *In relation with the process of balkanization and segmentation of the labour market:* Much of feminists' work has been concerned with highlighting the *processes* of segregation and selection in the labour market, these processes being reinforced by the employment shortage in Québec and Canada over recent decades. Amongst other things, much feminist work has shown the existence of a process of discrimination towards women^{xvii}, a process which results partly from the job shortage, but also from traditional social values.^{xviii} This was identified often through analysis of employment data of firms, of mobility patterns followed by different employees, of interviews with managers and unions, etc.^{xix}

In relation with the segmentation of the labour market, feminists have also been interested in showing how the *segmentation* of the labour market could be analysed for different national contexts including the Canadian situation, particularly in terms of the differentiation in youth and women's situations on the labour market, their concentration in precarious jobs and the existence of a process of systemic discrimination or differentiation towards these groups. Some of our own work was on the theoretical dimensions of labour market segmentation, other work on the specific situation of some groups in this regard.^{xx} A considerable amount of work also concerned the situation of aging workers, men and women, as concerns differentiation and segmentation of the labour market.^{xxi}

2) More recently, our work has tried to show how this process of discrimination or differentiation extends to work organisation and the issue of the division of labour between men and women. Following Kern and Schumann's work^{xxii} amongst others, we analysed the evolution of the division of labour (gendered division amongst other aspects) in the context of technical and organisational changes.^{xxiii} This work has highlighted many dimensions of the gendered division of labour, particularly its persistence in many contexts where there



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

were technical and organisational changes, but also the importance and diversity of the process of innovation and redefinition of qualifications, and the fact that women are often excluded from the “new forms of work organisation” which refer to more responsibility, autonomy and team-building amongst other things.^{xxiv}

As concerns the analysis of labour market operation and employment, feminist work has contributed in highlighting the following theoretical observations:

1) The recognition of unemployment as a market failure^{xxv} and also the recognition of underemployment and precarious employment as a market failure and confirmation of the existence of a segmentation of the labour market^{xxvi}.

2) In line with institutionalist thought, we have highlighted the fact that the social utility function not only depends on market mechanisms, but also on non market values^{xxvii}. In this perspective, different research projects have led to the conclusion that participation of social actors can reveal a certain social welfare function through cooperation, negotiation and social compromise at different levels (the firm, the sector, the national level...). In line with institutionalist thought, *participation* and the specific *processes* leading to collective decisions, whether it be at the level of the firm or at the national level, are considered as important if not more important than the results^{xxviii}.

3) Feminist research has also shown the importance of actors, of their attitudes, actions, and their potential influence on various aspects of work issues, whether it be organisational or technological, as well as innovation in general^{xxix}. Feminist work on technological change has shown the importance of actors' behaviour and motivation, as well as the importance of the process of negotiation, cooperation, compromise-reaching, etc. This work also led to the conclusion that the process of innovation itself can be transformed, modeled, influenced by the actors; it is of course not always the case, but actors can therefore have a structuring effect on the processes and capacities of innovation^{xxx}. While traditional neoclassical studies tended to indicate that human resources would simply adapt -more or less passively - to technological and organisational change, our case studies led us to question these assumptions and to adopt a more open, iterative, vision of innovation and employment systems.

As we know, institutionalist works have often highlighted the importance of the motivation of actors and the importance of processes (vs results only). Following this line of thought, we consider that institutions also play a determinant role in socio-economic situations^{xxxi} and we see socio-economic activity as the result of voluntary actions, actors' strategies, and collective action resulting from the relations of conflict and cooperation between individuals^{xxxii}.

We have of course only sketched some of our main views on the issue of the proximity of feminist economic thought with other strands of economic thought. Much work still has to be done on this, and it is to be hoped that many will pursue research on the history of economic thought, including women's economic thought, which is often neglected. The subject is however such a vast and complex issue that it is difficult to conclude on this



Labour Issues and the Labour Market as Social Constructions : an Institutional and Feminist Perspective

question. However, we find it important to look back to previous researchers, and particularly to the different generations of institutionalists, to try to clarify and situate feminist economic thought in the perspective of economic thought in general. We hope to have contributed somewhat to this, and maybe also to develop bridges between feminist economic thought in the USA and (French) Canada/Québec.

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ⁱ Work within the Research Group on Employment (GRÉCO), with Diane Bellemare and Lise Poulin Simon, over the years 1990-1994, and with Ginette Dussault during 1993-1994. Most importantly however, my work on institutionalist thought goes back to my thesis, at the Sorbonne, Université de Paris I, in 1989.

ⁱⁱ I am referring to 2 projects for which I was subsidized, one on Japanese work organisation, HRM and Management in general, its impact on work and workers and its contribution to firms' performance, and the other on the issue of the "end of the division of labour?", which refers to work by Kern and Schumann; in this last case, I compared women's jobs with those of men.

ⁱⁱⁱ Let us mention that the institutionalist group to which we refer includes many economists as well as sociologists and Industrial Relations specialists.

^{iv} McNulty, 1980: 139.

^v Again McNulty, 1980.

^{vi} Commons, 1950.

^{vii} Bellemare and Poulin Simon (1983, 1986) have worked extensively on concertation. My work on work family conciliation, differences between the way men and women handle this, as well as on working time, develops on conflict, cooperation and negotiation related to technological and organisational change.

^{viii} Commons, 1950; Tremblay, 1989, 1992.

^{ix} See McNulty, 1988.

^x See Kerr, 1988, Reynolds, 1988 and Lester, 1988.

^{xi} Kerr, 1988, Reynolds, 1988, Dunlop, 1988.

^{xii} Kerr 1988, Doeringer and Piore (1971) and Osterman (1984, 1987).

^{xiii} Tremblay, (1989, 1992c, 1995b).

^{xiv} As concerns the process of innovation for example, see Tremblay (1989, 1992c).

^{xv} Tremblay, 1995a, d,f.

^{xvi} For example, Tremblay (1993, 1993a,b,; Poulin Simon and Tremblay, 1994).

^{xvii} See Tremblay, 1992b, and concerning segmentation and segregation of the aging women workers, see Diane Bellemare, Lise Poulin Simon, Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay (1992, 1992a,b, c).

^{xviii} Tremblay (1992b, 1988, 1988a, 1991,) amongst others.

^{xix} Tremblay (1989, 1992c,d), as well as Tremblay and De Sève (1995) for example, are based on these methods.

^{xx} On theory, see Tremblay (1990) Tremblay, D.-G. (1992 b; 1989).

^{xxi} See Bellemare, Poulin Simon et Tremblay (1991, 1992, 1992a,b, 1995).

^{xxii} Kern, H. et M. Schumann, (1989). *La fin de la division du travail ?* Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme.

^{xxiii} See Tremblay, D.-G. et M.K. De Sève (1995), and Tremblay (1995) .

^{xxiv} Tremblay and De Sève, 1996.

^{xxv} Amongst others, see Bellemare et Poulin Simon, 1986; Tremblay, 1990, 1990a, 1992b.

^{xxvi} Amongst others, see Tremblay, 1994a, 1993c, 1992a,b, 1990, 1990a, 1989a.

^{xxvii} Bellemare, Dussault, Poulin Simon and Tremblay, 1994.

^{xxviii} Amongst others, see Tremblay, 1989, 1995d; Tremblay and Rolland, 1995.

^{xxix} Amongst others, see Tremblay, 1989, 1992, 1995, 1995a,c,f.

^{xxx} Amongst others, see Tremblay, 1989, 1995, 1995a,b,f

^{xxxi} Cf. Veblen in Tremblay, 1995b, 1989.

^{xxxii} Cf. Commons in Bellemare, Dussault, Poulin Simon and Tremblay, 1994.