

An insider's look at the lives of "the boys"



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



We've all seen them. We might even BE one of them. Thomas Dunk used to be. You know the ones — they carry a silver metal lunch bucket into pulp mills or grain elevators on their way to work. They usually drive a pickup truck. They have a beer belly hanging over their belt. If you walk up to them and they know you, they'll probably say "how's it goin', eh?"

They might have bloodshot eyes

Their eyes might be a little bloodshot, from drinking one too many beers with "The Boys" the night before. Thomas Dunk has written a book about those *Boys* — the white, male, blue collar workers of Thunder Bay. Dunk is a cultural anthropologist from the Centre for Northern Studies of Lakehead University. His book, *"It's A Working Man's Town: Male Working Class Culture in Northwestern Ontario"*, probably won't be read by *The Boys*. According to Dunk, *The Boys* are not much into books. But they're not stupid, either. Instead, they value practical knowledge of how things work, and how to make a living. Dunk says his book is really aimed at an academic market — at those looking for Canadian case studies of a local culture. Dunk makes no pretence at objectivity, in the classical sense. He writes as a "participant observer" — in other words, he's writing about himself — his own people.

Dunk grew up in Thunder Bay's south end. He graduated from Grade 12 at Westgate High School, and went straight to work at Canadian Pacific Forest Products. Then he worked at copper mines in Ignace and northern B.C. Then he came home again and got a job at Canada Malting. But he didn't like the boring, manual work life and eventually drifted out to Alberta, where he got a B.A. in anthropology. Then he went to McGill and McMaster for graduate work with male working class culture of Thunder Bay as his thesis topic.

This book is an expansion on his thesis. It's based on nearly four years of hanging out with *The Boys* — at beer halls, and at lob-ball games. The book describes sports and beer drinking like any anthropologist might describe some exotic culture on a Pacific Island. The difference is that Dunk writes sympathetically — showing *The Boys* as they really are — farts, bellies and all. *The Boys* are a group of 21 friends — Dunk call them his "key informants".

Neither romanticizes or stereotypes

Dunk says he's "tried to portray elements of male working class culture and do it in a way that neither romanticizes it on the one hand, but on the other hand doesn't fall into negative stereotyping either. I wouldn't want to say they're Archie Bunkers, but I wouldn't want to deny that there are elements of their culture such as racism and sexism which are there..."

The Boys in Dunk's book are not racist, according to the usual academic definition of that word: treating people a certain way strictly because of their racial origin. Rather, *The Boys* see things native people have that they don't, like special rights to hunt or fish, or free post-secondary education, and ask "Why don't we get those things?"

The Boys are unabashedly sexist. In *The Boys'* culture, women's place is to support the male breadwinner — not only by doing all the child rearing and domestic work, but also to make *The Boys* comfortable at home, in bed, and on the baseball field. Women are NOT skilled at some things, like fixing a car or playing baseball.

Dunk tells a humorous story about a weekend mixed lob-ball tournament. The rules specify at least three women must be on each team. This forces the normally all-male *Boys* team to accept three wives and girl friends on the team. They refuse to throw the ball to female infielders, instead they chase base runners. "The Boys" just won't throw the ball to women, because they don't think females are capable of catching.

The Boys are convinced they live in a working man's town — that's where Dunk got the title for the book. But Dunk also points out that Thunder Bay is not a "working man's town" any longer — over half of the jobs in this city are in the service industries, or government — not manufacturing or transportation or the resource industry. But as Dunk points out, *The Boys* will likely be about to make that switch, because they're practical, stoical folks who will do what they have to, to make a living. If it means learning how to run a machine with a computer instead of a monkey wrench, they'll do it. The Boys, according to Dunk, will have a harder time accepting things like indian self-government, or women beside them at work.

Dunk's book is important because, in this era of "economic restructuring", there's a crying need to understand these *Boys*. Dunk portrays male working men of northwestern Ontario sympathetically but critically, appealing for fairness and radically different treatment — such as involving *The Boys* in decisions about how to make a workplace more efficient. For those purposes, I recommend this book to municipal councillors, economic development officers, or anyone else planning a new economic direction for northwestern Ontario.

Opinion

A joint release from the Canadian Labour Congress and the Action Canada Network

Never before in the history of Canada has one government created such misery and hardship as has the Mulroney government. The attack by Mulroney's government upon working people and the poor has been unrelenting and shows no sign of abating.

The US/Canada Free Trade Agreement, cuts to unemployment insurance benefits, the Goods and Services Tax, and cutbacks on health education and social assistance transfer payments to our provincial government have heaped hardship on the workers and other less fortunate people.

Manufacturing in Ontario has lost 250,000 jobs because of the FTA.

Is it possible to find a family that has not suffered a layoff or job loss in 1991?

All across Canada workers and everyday Canadians are saying "Enough is enough" of a federal government that has brought destruction and despair to this country, while protecting the interests of its friends in big business.

Like hundreds of other centres across Canada, an event was planned for Thunder Bay on Saturday, Oct. 26th. A demonstration was held at the Lakehead Labour Centre at 1:30 p.m.

"We sent big business and Brian Mulroney a clear message they cannot ignore," says CLC Recording Secretary Don Hutsul.

"We are concerned about the increasing job losses, as we are being sold out to the US, and about the decreasing quality of life, as our social programs are cut.

"Only by standing together for what is right, will we be able to turn back the Tory agenda."

**Editor's note: Mr. Hutsul said in an interview last Friday afternoon that similar events did not take place in our area because unionized workers did not have enough time off to organize.*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Chairperson and Secretary kept E.A.G.E.R. going

To the editor,
re: E.A.G.E.R.

I would like to point out that the E.A.G.E.R. group was only having difficulty getting organized in starting a paper recycling program.

Please do not take away from the fact that they have successfully organized and implemented Earth Day for two consecutive years, as well as copious amounts of research into environmental issues.

I would also like to point out that Brenda Cottrell was and still is Chairperson, and Judy St. Don also remains in the position of Secretary.

If it wasn't for these two individuals, the E.A.G.E.R. would have ceased to exist months ago.

Sincerely,
Tanice Marcella-Small
Terrace Bay

