

## **Workers, Schools and Women: Some Recent Writing on the History of British Columbia**

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predominantly rural still in 1851 and 1861, was captured and controlled by the agents of a "nascent capitalism". They provide the broad outlines. We await the details.

COLIN READ

Workers, Schools and Women:  
Some Recent Writing on the  
History of British Columbia

BRITISH COLUMBIANS, SOMETIMES PERVERSELY, revel in being known as rather peculiar. Political culture in Lotus Land is characterized as bizarre and unconventional, workers are portrayed as militant and radical, and life west of the Rockies is perceived as a world unto itself. However, some of the best recent work on the history of British Columbia suggests that this portrait is overdrawn, arguing that provincial workers were inclined towards labourism rather than revolutionary socialism in the early 20th century, that education in the province followed national trends, and that British Columbia women were not out of step with the rest of Canada in terms of institutional and ideological development. Examining the past from a social perspective, broadly conceived, writers are locating the British Columbia experience in the context of national processes. The emerging perspective emphasizes the similarity of the development of British Columbia with Canada as a whole rather than the province's uniqueness.<sup>1</sup>

The best example of recent historical scholarship is Robert A.J. McDonald and Jean Barman, eds., *Vancouver Past: Essays in Social History* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1986), a collection of essays published to celebrate the centenary of the city of Vancouver.<sup>2</sup> *Vancouver Past* explores aspects of the social history of Vancouver and included in the collection are articles on the history of labour, women and education, reflecting the topical interests of much recent scholarship. Historians of labour and education in British Columbia have also contributed to other scholarly collections of essays. Despite its title, *Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia: Selected*

1 This essay selectively surveys the literature of the last six years. For more comprehensive bibliographic essays, see Allan Smith, "The Writing of British Columbia History", *BC Studies*, 45 (Spring 1980), pp. 73-102; Patricia E. Roy, "British Columbia", in J.L. Granatstein and Paul Stevens, eds., *A Reader's Guide to Canadian History 2 Confederation to the Present* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 161-86.

2 The contents of this book were also published in *BC Studies*, 68-70 (Spring-Summer 1986).

*Papers* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1988), edited by sociologists Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, focuses on the development of the provincial working class. *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History* (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises, 1986), edited by Nancy M. Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, contains five articles which pertain directly to the history of education in British Columbia.<sup>3</sup> These books provide a fine starting point for an examination of recent literature in these areas and more importantly, for the purposes of this essay, allow for a broader perspective on the state of historical writing on the province. It is important to note, however, a number of features which make it difficult to define trends with precision. The number of scholars studying British Columbia history is small and the historiography is relatively undeveloped. Whether future scholarship will continue to pursue the themes discussed here is a moot point. Moreover, the study of the province's past has attracted scholars from a number of disciplines, each with its own imperatives, points of reference, and body of literature. Sociologists and political scientists with a historical perspective and historians representing the various sub-fields of history maintain an uneasy co-existence in their study of the past, and because of their different orientations they tend to operate in separate spheres. As a result, the identification of trends is often linked to the priorities of a particular discipline. Despite these qualifications, an examination of recent studies in labour, women's, and education history does provide insights into the direction of British Columbia historiography.

Labour has a very high profile in both popular and scholarly perceptions of British Columbia, but the much-vaunted militancy and radicalism of provincial workers in the mines, in the bush and in urban centres has not been subject to careful historical analysis. Generalizations have sufficed at the expense of systematic investigations. An important exception is Robert A.J. McDonald's article on the Vancouver working class between 1886 and 1914. It forces a reevaluation of the British Columbia working class.<sup>4</sup> McDonald outlines the structure of the Vancouver working class, noting its composition in terms of gender, skill and occupation. Comparing Vancouver with seven other Canadian

3 Previous collections of essays with particular relevance to British Columbia include J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises, 1980); David C. Jones, N.M. Sheehan and R.M. Stamp, *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises, 1979). The history of women in British Columbia is also explored in a recent volume of essays, but the level of scholarship is not consistent. See Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women in British Columbia* (Victoria, Camosun College, 1984). See also Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds., *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia* (Victoria, Camosun College, 1980).

4 "Working Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia", *Vancouver Past*, pp. 33-69.

cities, he concludes that, for the most part, the structure of its working class was not particularly peculiar. In assessing militancy and radicalism McDonald emphasizes the similarities between Vancouver workers and workers in other Canadian urban centres. The main thrust of McDonald's argument is that Vancouver has too often been seen as merely an adjunct of the British Columbia resource hinterland and that generalizations about the province as a whole are not applicable to Vancouver. Vancouver was a complex urban environment with a diverse working class. The political behaviour of the Vancouver working class, which tended to be labourist, and the city's strike record had more in common with Toronto and Saint John than with the hinterland mining towns of Rossland and Nanaimo. The urban process, not hinterland resource industries, defined the shape of the Vancouver working class.

McDonald is not alone in moving beyond the traditional emphasis on individual unions, radical political action, and strikes to adopt a community perspective. Allen Seager's study of the working class in New Westminster from 1900 to 1930 also looks at workers in an urban environment.<sup>5</sup> Like McDonald, Seager notes the complexity of the urban work force and the inappropriateness of making blanket generalizations about a provincial resource proletariat, and he too stresses the significance of labourism. Moreover, even in the hinterland labourism was an important force, and characterizations of the provincial workforce as overwhelmingly radical and revolutionary in the early years of the century must be reevaluated. In an examination of coal miners in the Kootenays and on Vancouver Island, Seager probes the subtleties of unionism and political action in a radical constituency, placing political activism in a complex historical reality.<sup>6</sup> Gordon Hak's study of Port Alberni and Prince George in the years from 1911 to 1933 also exposes the significance of labourists in hinterland community settings.<sup>7</sup> The community approach highlights the fact that the British Columbia workforce was not made up of just miners, lumber workers, and fishermen but included tradesmen and a growing white collar labour force. Rennie Warburton and David Coburn sketch the development of this important but little studied segment of the provincial work force in the years from 1881 to 1981.<sup>8</sup> Warburton has also looked specifically at teachers over the last century, locating them in the working class and in the context of class struggle.<sup>9</sup>

5 "Workers, Class, and Industrial Conflict in New Westminster, 1900-1930", in *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 117-40.

6 "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-21", *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), pp. 23-59.

7 "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George, 1911-1933", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXX, 4 (December 1989), pp. 519-42.

8 "The Rise of Non-Manual Work in British Columbia", *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 220-39.

9 "The Class Relations of Public Schoolteachers in British Columbia", *Workers, Capital, and the*

Despite a tendency to explore urban, community settings, the traditional focus on strikes and unions in the resource industries has not been abandoned. This is good. The histories of loggers, sawmill workers, fishermen, and miners are very incomplete and much work remains to be done. Considering their importance to the provincial economy, forest industry workers have been woefully neglected. Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam's *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madeira Park, B.C., Harbour Publishing, 1984) makes a strong contribution to our understanding of the lumber workers, despite its focus on union politics at the international level and its concern with the issue of communism and anti-communism. Gordon Hak examines the history of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, the first province-wide organization of loggers, in the years from 1919-1922, and the important loggers strike on Vancouver Island in 1934,<sup>10</sup> while Jeanne Meyers has produced a fine study of the Fraser Mills strike of 1931, tracing the links between the striking mill workers and the broader community of Maitlandville/ Fraser Mills.<sup>11</sup> Miners have also received attention in recent years. Besides the work of Allen Seager, Jeremy Mouat has written on the 1891 strike in the Vancouver Island coal fields,<sup>12</sup> Lynne Bowen has contributed another popular history of the Nanaimo area, providing much information but little cogent analysis,<sup>13</sup> and Paul Phillips has written a useful account of the provincial mining industry in the years before 1920.<sup>14</sup> Sociologists are the most active in looking at workers in the fishing industry. James Conley weaves theory and historical data together to produce a stimulating account of class interaction in the fishing industry between 1900 and 1925,<sup>15</sup> and Alicja Muszynski has produced a number of articles on workers in the fish canning industry, where work, ethnicity and gender intersected.<sup>16</sup>

*State*, pp. 240-62.

- 10 "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922", *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989), pp. 67-90; "Red Wages: Communists and the 1934 Vancouver Island Loggers Strike", *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 80, 3 (July 1989), pp. 82-90.
- 11 "Class and Community in the Fraser Mills Strike, 1931", *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 141-60.
- 12 "The Politics of Coal: A Study of the Wellington Miners' Strike of 1890-91", *BC Studies*, 77 (Spring 1988), pp. 3-29.
- 13 Lynne Bowen, *Three Dollar Dreams* (Lantzville, B.C., Oolichan Books, 1987). This is a companion to her earlier book *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember* (Lantzville, B.C., Oolichan Books, 1982).
- 14 "The Underground Economy: The Mining Frontier to 1920", *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 35-54.
- 15 "Relations of Production and Collective Action in the Salmon Fishery, 1900-1925", *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 86-109.
- 16 "The Organization of Women and Ethnic Minorities in a Resource Industry: A Case Study of Unionization of Shoreworkers in the B.C. Fishing Industry, 1937-1949", *Journal of Canadian*

Any account of labour in British Columbia must take into consideration the issue of race. The tension between whites and Asians is an important theme in the development of the provincial working class. Peter Ward's provocative and speculative 1980 article on the relationship between class and race remains at the forefront of the debate.<sup>17</sup> Ward's assertion that race, not class, formed the fundamental division in British Columbia society before 1930 and his explanation of racism in terms of social psychology have drawn criticism. Jin Tan, in a fine article on Chinese labour in the years from 1858 to 1885, criticizes Ward for ignoring the politics of race and power and illustrates the ways in which the Chinese immigrants made sense of their situation and responded in an environment in which they had little room to manoeuvre. The essay stresses that while capitalism did not induce prejudice, it is imperative to understand how capitalism fashioned class relations and a segmented work force.<sup>18</sup> Gillian Creese, too, argues that class and race must be set in the context of the development of capitalism in British Columbia, a process which embodied the interaction of working-class organization, ethnic solidarity, and an ethnically segmented labour market. Creese notes that Asians were not unwilling union participants and that the relationship between whites and Asians changed over time and according to circumstances. After the First World War and during the Great Depression there was evidence of racial solidarity, fuelled by particular economic conditions, the growth of radical labour politics, and increased Asian militancy.<sup>19</sup> Race was not an independent, immutable entity but rather was structured

*Studies*, 19, 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 89-107; "Class Formation and Class Consciousness: The Making of Shoreworkers in the B.C. Fishing Industry", *Studies in Political Economy*, 20 (Summer 1986), pp. 85-116; "Race and Gender: Structural Determinants in the Formation of British Columbia's Cannery Labour Forces", *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13, 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1988), pp. 103-20; "Major Processors to 1940 and Early Labour Force: Historical Notes", in Patricia Marchak, Neil Guppy, and John McMullan, eds., *Uncommon Property: The Fishing and Fish-Processing Industries in British Columbia* (Toronto, Methuen, 1987), pp. 46-65; "Shoreworkers and UFAWU Organization: Struggles Between Fishers and Plant Workers Within the Union", *ibid.*, pp. 270-90.

17 "Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939", *BC Studies*, 45 (Spring 1980), pp. 17-35. See also W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policies towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978).

18 "Chinese Labour and the Reconstituted Social Order of British Columbia", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XIX, 3 (1987), pp. 68-88.

19 "Class, Ethnicity, and Conflict: The Case of Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1880-1923", *Workers, Capital, and the State*, pp. 55-83; "Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the 'Oriental Problem'", *BC Studies*, 80 (Winter 1988-89), pp. 24-51; "Organizing Against Racism in the Workplace: Chinese Workers in Vancouver Before the Second World War", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XIX, 3 (1987), pp. 35-46. For an early response to the work of Peter Ward, see Rennie Warburton, "Race and Class in British Columbia: A Comment", *BC Studies*, 49 (Spring 1981), pp. 79-85.

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by the development of capitalism.

While historians and sociologists have been exploring aspects of race, class, and community, our understanding of the provincial working class goes little beyond the work place, the political meeting, and the union hall. However, two recent articles on the theme of housing in Vancouver draw out an important element of the working-class experience. Deryck W. Holdsworth shows that Vancouver was indeed a unique environment in the early years of the century, a place where home-ownership levels were high, urban residential densities were low, and many working-class people could own homes.<sup>20</sup> By the end of the Second World War this situation had changed dramatically, as Jill Wade documents.<sup>21</sup> Vancouver was in the throes of a housing crisis which generated popular protest. In this instance ordinary people were able to force the federal and Vancouver governments to meet their demands. Broadening the perspective on working-class life to include migration patterns, family life, the reproduction of the working class, neighbourhood and associational ties, as well as housing, would indeed help flesh out the working-class experience and contribute to our understanding of the resistance and accommodation which shaped class relations in British Columbia.

Historians of education have also produced a steady stream of articles in recent years, contributing to Canadian education history as well as our understanding of the provincial past. The educational historians, essentially a group operating out of the University of British Columbia, are intent on developing a regional synthesis in educational history as the first step in the generation of a national synthesis.<sup>22</sup> Having watched the international debate on education between moderates and radicals in the 1970s, British Columbia historians of education are more comfortable with an agenda which calls for closer scrutiny of the basics and an exploration of the culture of the classroom.<sup>23</sup>

Neil Sutherland's contribution to *Vancouver Past* reflects the classroom culture approach.<sup>24</sup> Using approximately 40 interviews with former students, Sutherland recreates the classroom experience of students in Vancouver between the 1920s and the 1960s. The result is a delightful essay which recaptures the flavour and texture of student life: their dress, the physical features, smells, and

20 "Cottages and Castles for Vancouver Home-Seekers", *Vancouver Past*, pp. 11-32.

21 "A Palace for the Public": Housing Reform and the 1946 Occupation of the Old Hotel Vancouver", *Vancouver Past*, pp. 288-310.

22 J. Donald Wilson, "Introduction: Schools in the West", in *Schools in the West*, p. 11.

23 See Chad Gaffield, "Back to School: Towards a New Agenda for the History of Education", *Acadiensis*, XV, 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 169-90. Gaffield also locates the British Columbia literature in a national context.

24 "The Triumph of 'Formalism': Elementary Schooling in Vancouver from the 1920s to the 1960s", pp. 175-210.

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daily routines of the classroom, teaching methods, the idiosyncrasies of teachers, and discipline. However, Sutherland does not merely offer an interesting descriptive outline. He uses the information from his informants to argue that despite the progressive ideas offered in the well-known Putman-Weir Report on education in 1925 and the revamping of the curriculum in provincial schools after 1935, very little changed at the level of the classroom. The more traditional teaching approach of 'formalism' persisted in the classroom throughout the period under study.

Sutherland's colleague, J. Donald Wilson, also champions the culture of the classroom approach in his recent work on rural schooling in British Columbia during the 1920s. One article examines almost 700 questionnaires submitted by rural teachers in 1923 and 1928, offering insights into the reactions of teachers and parents to the operation of rural schools.<sup>25</sup> The essay is readable and entertaining, but the impressionistic attitudes of the transient rural teachers do not fully probe the interaction between parents and teachers or the character of rural communities. Too little is known about the teachers to put their comments in context, and rural communities are treated as an undifferentiated mass. It is important that studies of British Columbia move beyond the Lower Mainland but the diverse nature of the rest of the province must be acknowledged beyond paragraphs which ricochet through the province at an alarming speed, making brief contact in the Kootenays, the far north, the Sechelt Peninsula, and the Cariboo.

Not all historians of education study teachers, pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom dynamics. Jean Barman's contribution to *Vancouver Past* is political and urban history, but it is also very relevant to provincial educational history.<sup>26</sup> Barman carefully examines the censuses and civic electoral returns for school trustees in Vancouver from the end of World War One to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. Dividing the city into nine geographical areas, she gives detailed demographic profiles of each area in terms of sex, birthplace, ethnic origin, and religion. She then looks at school trustee aspirants, evaluating their success by focusing on the variables of gender, occupation, and political affiliation. She concludes that while neighbourhood voting patterns did tend to be consistent, there were also times when Vancouver voters spoke with a common voice, overcoming divisions between the working-class East Side and the more affluent

25 "The Visions of Ordinary Participants: Teachers' Views of Rural Schooling in British Columbia in the 1920s", in Patricia E. Roy, ed., *A History of British Columbia: Selected Readings* (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), pp. 239-55. Another article which reworks the same material is J. Donald Wilson and Paul J. Stortz, " 'May the Lord Have Mercy on You': The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s", *BC Studies*, 79 (Autumn 1988), pp. 24-58.

26 "Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver: Residential Differentiation and Civic Voting Behaviour", pp. 97-141.



West Side and between capital and labour. Barman has also looked more specifically at the role of the working class in contributing to change in the educational system. In a study of schooling in Vancouver during the 1920s she shows that city working-class leaders, who were reform oriented, pushed for change at the political level, calling for more schools, better schools, and increased accessibility for working-class children.<sup>27</sup> Working-class leaders were active participants in educational reform and, with the support of middle class allies, they did achieve gains. However, while Barman shows that education was not only a middle-class enthusiasm and that seeing education as an imposition on the working class is much too simplistic, it is less clear who the working-class reformers represented and how working people hoped to use the school system.

Barman's *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1984) is also sensitive to the broader cultural and historical milieu. This study of provincial, non-Catholic, private schooling emphasizes the existence of the British as a distinct ethnic group, which was proportionally large in comparison to other Canadian provinces, and traces the course of private schooling in the context of social and economic change in the 20th century.<sup>28</sup> In a more recent article she analyzes the emergence and implementation of a consensus for free, non-denominational schools in 19th century British Columbia, seeing these developments as a response to social and economic conditions.<sup>29</sup>

In studying classroom dynamics and exploring aspects of institutional and legislative developments in provincial education,<sup>30</sup> historians of education are making a contribution to our knowledge of education in Canada. However, with the exception of Jean Barman, their work does not intersect with the work of others probing British Columbia's past. The role of education in reproducing the labour force, the connection between social change and educational change, and notions of class relations and gender are themes which are noticeably absent. The historians of education operate in a rather insular world, linking the British

27 " 'Knowledge is Essential for Universal Progress but Fatal to Class Privilege': Working People and the Schools in Vancouver During the 1920s", *Labour/Le Travail*, 22 (Fall 1988), pp. 9-66.

28 See also Jean Barman, "Ethnicity in Pursuit of Status: British Columbia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 18, 1 (1986), pp. 32-51.

29 "Transfer, Imposition or Consensus? The Emergence of Educational Structures in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia", *Schools in the West*, pp. 241-64.

30 See L. W. Downey, "The Aid-to-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia", *Schools in the West*, pp. 305-23; Thomas Fleming, " 'Our Boys in the Field': School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia", in *Schools in the West*, pp. 285-303; Thomas Fleming, "In the Imperial Age and After: Patterns of British Columbia School Leadership and the Institution of the Superintendency, 1849-1988", *BC Studies*, 81 (Spring 1989), pp. 50-76; John Calam, "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools", in *Schools in the West*, pp. 75-97.

Columbia experience to the history of Canadian education rather than locating the province's educational past in the context of the development of British Columbia. Historians of labour and women, however, are also negligent in drawing out the implications of the education process in their work.

Recent literature on the history of women in British Columbia ranges from traditional examinations of prominent women and women's political organizations to discussions regarding birth control and childbirth. In *Vancouver Past* Veronica Strong-Boag and Kathryn McPherson examine the institutionalization of childbirth in the years from 1919 to 1939. They argue that although women in Vancouver were much more likely to give birth in a hospital in the late 1930s than in the 1920s and that there was a major decrease in maternal mortality during the 1930s, there was no necessary causal relationship between these two trends.<sup>31</sup> Rather, they argue the positive correlation was between increased hospital care and the drive by male doctors to control the area of childbirth. In contrast, Norah L. Lewis is less critical of the increased institutionalization of the birth process in the interwar years, and attributes the declining maternal mortality rate to the greater participation of physicians in childbirth in a hospital setting.<sup>32</sup> As well as contributing to the larger debate over the increased medicalization of childbirth and its implications in depriving women of control over their bodies, writers have also addressed other aspects of the reproduction process in the British Columbia context. Angus McLaren, Arlene Tigar McLaren, and Mary F. Bishop have examined the themes of birth control and abortion, noting changes in perception and behaviour over time and drawing out the importance of left-wing women in spreading the birth control message.<sup>33</sup>

The role of left-wing women and their ability to exert control is put into a political context in Irene Howard's fine study of the Mothers' Council of Vancouver during the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> Howard notes that while the Mothers' Council was closely associated with the unemployed men's organization, the Relief Camp Workers' Union, and included women from the Communist Party and the

31 "The Confinement of Women: Childbirth and Hospitalization in Vancouver, 1919-1939", pp. 142-74.

32 "Reducing Maternal Mortality in British Columbia: An Educational Process", in *Not Just Pin Money*, pp. 337-55.

33 Angus McLaren, "The First Campaign for Birth Control Clinics in British Columbia", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 19, 3 (1984), pp. 50-64; Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, "Discoveries and Dissimulations: The Impact of Abortion Deaths on Maternal Mortality in British Columbia", *BC Studies*, 64 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 3-26; Mary F. Bishop, "The Early Birth Controllers of B.C.", *BC Studies*, 61 (Spring 1984), pp. 64-84; Mary F. Bishop, "Vivian Dowding: Birth Control Activist 1892-", in *Not Just Pin Money*, pp. 327-35.

34 "The Mothers' Council of Vancouver: Holding the Fort for the Unemployed, 1935-1938", in *Vancouver Past*, pp. 249-87.

Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, it also pursued independent goals in pressuring government and contributing to public debates. As well as showing the internal dynamics of a political women's movement, the essay explores the complex relationship between maternal feminism and socialism. Another recent article on left-wing women is Susan Walsh's study of two socialist women, Dorothy Steeves and Grace MacInnis, who were feminists and active members of the CCF.<sup>35</sup> While Steeves and MacInnis shared a broad general outlook, they were at odds personally and with regard to ideology and tactics. The left in British Columbia was a complex landscape.

The best recent scholarship in women's history is concerned with the reproduction process and the activities of left-wing women, but this barely scratches the surface of the experience of women in British Columbia. A 1984 collection of essays, *Not Just Pin Money*, edited by Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, brings together a wide range of contributors, including historians, sociologists, educators, undergraduate students, graduate students, and archivists. Geared for a general audience the book touches on many themes, especially ethnicity, class, and the relationship between women's groups and the state. The quality of the essays is very uneven but the sense of commitment is strong, and the discussions of the historical experience of native women, Chinese women, East Indian women, and British gentlewomen, as well as the activities of women as students, members of volunteer organizations, and unionists suggest many areas that need careful historical analysis. Moreover, if historians of women, education, and labour in British Columbia decide to collaborate, then questions regarding child rearing, socialization, family, work, and the lives of women in hinterland regions will also demand attention.

The writing of British Columbia history is moving in new directions, but much remains to be done. Recent work has concentrated on the period from 1900 to 1939. Historians of labour, education, and women have perceived this period, with its rapid economic and population expansion, the emergence of many government and social institutions, and the flowering of the reform impulse, as the most interesting and have given little attention to the 19th century. Without a better understanding of the pre-1900 era it is difficult to ascertain the character of the first decades of the 20th century. To what extent were the initiatives of the 1900-1939 period rooted in developments which occurred in the early years of the province's history? At times it seems as if economic and social change in the early 20th century so completely transformed the province that the earlier period is irrelevant to the history of modern British Columbia.

The period after 1939 has likewise been neglected, even though the 1940s and

35 "The Peacock and the Guinea Hen: Political Profiles of Dorothy Gretchen Steeves and Grace MacInnis", in *Not Just Pin Money*, pp. 365-79.

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1950s were a time of rapid population growth, increased government intervention, and economic expansion. Politically, the province was governed by a Liberal-Conservative coalition during the 1940s, and the early 1950s witnessed the arrival of the curious Social Credit government. The Social Credit phenomenon suggests many questions about the province's history. Most basically, what did Social Credit offer British Columbians and what kind of society could produce and sustain a Social Credit government? The answers likely lie not only in the particular political circumstances of the early 1950s, or even the social and economic developments of the 1940s, but stretch back to at least the early years of the century. To date, journalists and political scientists, concerned with relating Social Credit history to current political debates, have produced most of the literature on Social Credit. The background to the Social Credit years have been less fully explored. Life in small town British Columbia, the development of local elites and their relationship to externally owned large corporations, the appeal of the Social Credit message to British Columbia women and workers, the nature of migration into the province, the social composition of the population, and the character of regional development within the province all need to be fleshed out. Social Credit offers a departure point for the investigation of many aspects of the province's past, necessitating a close scrutiny of what the party stood for and an appreciation of the social and economic context of 20th-century British Columbia. Political history becomes social history.

The lack of scholarly work on the years before 1900 and the years after 1939 makes it difficult to put much of the recent historical writing in a chronological context. Even within the 1900 to 1939 time frame, there are different emphases. Labour historians have concentrated on the years before World War I and the 1930s, times of radicalism and militancy when provincial workers had a national profile. Women's and education historians have been preoccupied with the 1920s, especially the apparently progressive era of the Liberal government. The contours and complexities of periodization deserve closer attention. But the major weakness in British Columbia historiography is a dearth of work on economic and political life. The basic political economy of the province has not been carefully analyzed. The importance of having a better understanding of the state and business is clear in the articles on the history of women, education, and labour. Writers refer to particular aspects of government policy or business behaviour, but the larger contours of political and economic development remain ill-defined.<sup>36</sup>

36 There is, to be sure, some recent work in this area. See Robin Fisher, "Regulating Fuels in the Depression: The Coal and Petroleum Board of British Columbia", *BC Studies*, 66 (Summer 1985), pp. 3-27; Robert A. Campbell, "Liquor and Liberals: Patronage and Government Control in British Columbia, 1920-1928", *BC Studies*, 77 (Spring 1988), pp. 30-53; Allan Irving, "The Development of a Provincial Welfare State: British Columbia, 1900-1939", in Allan Moscovitch

Another aspect of provincial history which deserves attention is sorting out the relationship between Vancouver and the rest of the province. Historical investigation has tended to focus on Vancouver, seeing the city as an urban place similar to other Canadian and American cities.<sup>37</sup> But, as writers acknowledge, the history of Vancouver is not the history of the province. Jeremy Wilson comments that until about 1950 British Columbia political culture was notable for its localism; people were interested in community, not province-wide issues,<sup>38</sup> suggesting that Vancouver hardly dominated all aspects of life in the interior. A study of Victoria by Peter Baskerville, which is sensitive both to local context and broader national themes, makes clear that patterns of urban development differed within British Columbia.<sup>39</sup> Cole Harris' celebrated 1986 article on Kootenay mining communities at the turn of the century offers suggestions regarding Vancouver's place in the province.<sup>40</sup> By examining the small town experience, Harris exposes at a micro level the complex relationship between a community and its resource hinterland. Locating Vancouver politically, socially and economically in British Columbia as a whole would contribute to both our understanding of Vancouver and the province.

The best recent scholarship on the history of British Columbia has been firmly rooted in national debates, whether it be about labourism, progressive pedagogy, or

and Jim Albert, eds., *The 'Benevolent' State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto, Garamond Press, 1987), pp. 155-74; Patricia M. Marchak, *Green Gold: The Forest Industry in British Columbia* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1983); Thomas R. Roach, "Stewards of the People's Wealth: The Founding of British Columbia's Forest Branch", *Journal of Forest History*, 28, 1 (January 1984), pp. 14-23; Mary L. McRoberts, "When Good Intentions Fail: A Case of Forest Policy in the British Columbia Interior, 1945-56", *Journal of Forest History*, 32, 3 (July 1988), pp. 138-49; Stephen Gray, "The Government's Timber Business: Forest Policy and Administration in British Columbia, 1912-1928", *BC Studies*, 81 (Spring 1989), pp. 24-49; E.G. Perrault, *Wood & Water: The Story of Seaboard Lumber and Shipping* (Vancouver, Douglas & McIntyre, 1985); Peter A. Baskerville, "Financial Capital and the Municipal State: The Case of Victoria, British Columbia, 1910-1936", *Studies in Political Economy*, 21 (Autumn 1986), pp. 83-106.

- 37 For a comparative urban profile of Vancouver and Seattle, see Norbert McDonald, *Distant Neighbours: A Comparative History of Seattle and Vancouver* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1988). For an insight into the flavour and texture of life in Vancouver, see The Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives: Vancouver 1886-1986* (Vancouver, New Star Books, 1985).
- 38 R. Jeremy Wilson, "The Impact of Communications Developments on British Columbia Electoral Patterns, 1903-1975", *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 13, 3 (September 1980), pp. 509-35.
- 39 *Beyond the Island: An Illustrated History of Victoria* (Burlington, Ont., Windsor Publications, 1986).
- 40 "Industry and the Good Life Around Idaho Peak", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVI, 3 (September 1985), pp. 315-43.

the birth process. Work on British Columbia is presented as a case study exploring large historical questions. On the one hand, this is positive. The most devastating insult that can be hurled at a British Columbia scholar is to be accused of parochialism or provincialism. By locating discussions in a national context scholars inject fresh ideas into the interpretation of provincial history and contribute to national debates. On the other hand, avoiding parochialism undermines the vigour of provincial historical writing. Education historians in British Columbia debate with scholars in Ontario about issues of common interest as do women and labour scholars. There is little internal discussion within the context of British Columbia, few flashpoints which stimulate arguments among researchers from different sub-fields and encourage new research and home-grown interpretations. Without generating provocative historical questions, British Columbia historiography will remain a rather loosely-conceived entity. If British Columbia itself is a legitimate field of study, then labour, education and women's historians can all make a contribution. A pinch of parochialism would spice up scholarship in the Far West. Furthermore, without a strong sense of localism it remains unclear whether the emerging perspective of British Columbia as a province *comme les autres* is a more accurate perception of the past or whether it mainly reflects the nature of the questions being asked, questions prompted by national trends.

GORDON HAK

### Capitalism in a Cold Climate\*

IN 1984, IN AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTORY essay to a small volume entitled *Essays in Canadian Business History* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1984), Tom Traves wrote that while business history had “not yet become an academic specialty in Canada....our knowledge of the Canadian business system [had] increased enormously” (p. 5) as a side-benefit of work in other fields. He hoped that systematic and focussed study of Canadian business would develop in its own right and not be confined to entrepreneurship and administrative studies or to either the “hagiographical or muck-raking traditions” of the past. The essays in his volume — a sample of part of what might constitute a field that could legitimately be called business history — dealt with the pre-industrial business system, transformation of the commercial economy, entrepreneurship and development strategies, the nature of the industrial firm, scientific management, banks, business-government relations, tariffs and the multinational corporation (MNC). In 1989 it appears to me that there is not yet the kind of cohesion that is the hallmark of a developed sub-field, despite a slow but steady output of works