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Wayne Roberts

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presence of the C.P.R., and other factors have shaped the urban landscape, and illustrates the point with detailed maps which are an invaluable aid to those unfamiliar with Calgary's topography.

As with the preceding volume in the History of Canadian Cities Series, the text is enhanced by a fine selection of photographs and other illustrations assembled by Edward Cavell, curator of photography at the Archives of the Canadian Rockies. There is as well a series of statistical tables drawn from the Census of Canada and other sources, and an extensive bibliography. Calgary: An Illustrated History will be welcomed by all who have an interest in Canada's urban past.

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Piva, Michael J. The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921. Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 1979. Pp. xviii, 190. \$9.00 paper.

Until very recently, the life of most Canadian workers has been nasty, brutish and short. In 1974, Terry Copp published his The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929. Michael Piva's follow-up study of Toronto confirms that poverty and its grim harvests of insecurity and deprivation haunted the lives of Toronto's blue-collar workers, skilled and unskilled alike, from 1900 to 1921. Although Piva's conclusions are based exclusively on Toronto evidence, he feels that Toronto enjoyed so many locational and structural advantages that "if anyone benefitted from economic growth, it should have been Torontonians" (p. ix). Thus, Piva carries forward one of the basic revisionist arguments posed by Copp--that the prosperity attributed to the Laurier years was the exclusive experience of the upper class. If Copp and Piva are correct, those who scorn Marx for his projection of continuing working class degradation under advanced capitalism are advised not to start smirking too soon.

It's a bad correlation, and even worse joke, to say that poverty is caused by lack of money. It is possible to see the systemic determinants of poverty, and its relation to the class system of capitalism, when poverty is directly related to working class wage levels, and when abnormal incidents in the cycle of poverty are integrated into the fabric of normal working class experiences. Although Piva seems to do this unconsciously, he identifies poverty with the problems of the proletariat (in Toronto, an overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant proletariat), and not with marginal elements of the disinherited lumpen-proletariat or with superexploited female or immigrant substrata of the

working class. Piva locates the source of poverty, not in the habits and horrors of a minority underclass, but in the wage levels and annual earnings of the mainstream working class.

The second chapter, dealing with real wages, is the core of the book. On the basis of his calculations from 1921 census and labour department data, Piva concludes that the "average annual earnings of blue-collar workers represented 63.5 per cent of what was required to support a family" (typically of five members) at minimum levels of health and decency (p. 38). After two decades of rapid economic growth, workers had been unable to advance their standard of living, either relatively or absolutely. On the contrary, Piva argues, "only one conclusion is possible: workers did not benefit from the wealth they toiled to produce [and] increased production did not help to improve the lot of the blue-collar worker. Instead workers were very poor, and they became progressively poorer as the years passed" (p. 58). Piva uses this chapter on real wages to document continuous and widespread poverty among Toronto workers, and to sustain his revisionist thesis about inequality during the Laurier years. This is, however, a subsidiary argument, for the pattern Piva traces is grimmer than this. Workers did not simply remain poor, Piva insists, they became "progressively poorer."

This second assertion, one which should have remained subsidiary, acquires a disproportionate importance in the book as a whole since it determines Piva's subsequent assessment of all the forces affecting working-class life. Unfortunately, this supposed trend of declining real incomes cannot be documented in a meaningful way. Piva does show that real incomes in 1921 were lower than real incomes in 1900, but this in itself is not definitive. The cut-off dates of 1900 and 1921 are both arbitrary and weighted to yield an incorrect impression. They do not conform to the life cycles of working class families or to the organizing cycles of the working class movement. Presumably the dates were chosen for Piva by Canada's census and data gatherers—1900 was the first year in which data were systematically collected, and 1921 was the year of a census report containing excellent material on working class wages and incomes. But as opening and closing dates for a study of tendencies in working class living conditions, the dates have no more justification than, say, 1896 and 1911, years that might be chosen arbitrarily by a political historian with federalist obsessions, or 1907 (a recession year) and 1927 (a boom year), years that might be chosen by someone wishing to portray an advance in working class standards of living. Surely, working class historians must develop time frameworks which relate to the dynamics of the working class, not to their own convenience.

In 1900, the union movement in Toronto was in the midst of a massive offensive. As early as 1898, an irreverent printer had urged his fellow workmen to take advantage of the new conditions of prosperity and labour shortage by grabbing their employers "by the short hairs." Employers did not begin to marshall their forces for a counter-offensive, and they lacked the means to enforce a counter-offensive, until at least

1902. Thus, the year 1900 cannot really be taken as a "base" year for analytical purposes. It was not a "base" year, but one year in a four-year cycle of labour organization which broke the standards of nineteenth century wage levels. By contrast, 1921 was one of a cycle of "down" years for Toronto workers.

Nor should declining levels of real wages be related automatically to a declining standard of living of working class families over the 20 year period. All of Piva's calculations are based on real earnings of male wage earners supporting a family of five, but this convenient measure does not conform to the reality of working class life. A working class family was at its poorest when all the children were young, but at its wealthiest when all its children were working but still at home. Thus, the young families of five in 1900 could have either five wage earners or only one dependent by 1921. For this reason, workers' families would not have experienced the decline projected by Piva's statistics; on the contrary, they would have experienced an improvement. A similar feeling of improvement would also have been widespread among post-1900 immigrants. This sensed experience of improvement may well have been illusory, but it was not unreal. The trend Piva uncovers, then, is more statistically correct than true to life.

In chapters three, four, and five, Piva presents information on other dimensions of working class poverty: unemployment and relief, working conditions, and public health and housing. The three chapters also constitute an indictment of the "progressive" record of reform. Philanthropists and employment agencies harassed the unemployed or indigent workers, but provided few jobs. Factory legislation was a dead letter; improvements in factory conditions only took place under the auspices of "welfare capitalists" when such improvements were in the interests of capitalist efficiency. Workmen's compensation, for instance, one of the few legislative gains of the era, was initiated by capitalists interested in promoting a cheap, predictable, accident insurance programme, Piva maintains. Other improvements, such as slightly reduced hours, brought mixed results since the pace of work also intensified. Housing and public health reformers were inspired by social Darwinist or welfare capitalist visions, and failed to address the inequality and poverty that lay at the root of problems in these areas.

Although Piva's indictment of the progressive record is well-taken, and helps resolve certain debates about the intentions and effectiveness of this amorphous movement, his depiction of reformism and of reformist achievement is one-sided. It is too much "history from the top down," too emphatic about ruling class hegemony, and not enough "history from the bottom up," appreciative of working class political presence. It assumes that the reformist record reflects only the voluntary, long-term self-interest of an all-powerful ruling class. But the ruling class was also the unwilling donor of certain concessions wrested by a rising working class movement. It is true, for instance, that certain

capitalists accommodated to the principle of state-financed workmen's compensation. But they opposed the workmen's compensation bill that was eventually won through persistent labour pressure. Union lobbyists successfully insisted on a scheme which held capitalists solely responsible for accidents and which was financed entirely by corporate contributions. It is also true that employment agencies offered little to the unemployed. But the unemployed, from the 1890s on, were successful in gaining some employment through emergency public works financed by the city. Some remedial measures, then, revealed the potential of the working class movement to effect improvements.

Piva's neglect of the working class movement as a viable force in urban reform in these chapters is no accident. As he makes explicit in his subsequent chapter on industrial unrest, "workers were not passive; they were simply powerless." In his preface, Piva foreswore against writing on working class "culture," hoping only that his study of working class conditions could lay the groundwork for such studies. By chapter six, however, sufficient groundwork had been laid for him to at least deliver some major judgements on the working class movement. So harsh is Piva that he does not wait until the 1920s to date the decline and collapse of the union movement. He dates it as early as 1902, after which date unions were incapable of holding their own in numbers or effectiveness. The basic problem, Piva argues, was that employers opposed collective bargaining and unions were unable to overcome this resistance. For Piva, almost all strikes in the period were about the basics of wages, hours and union recognition; in a period of declining wages, workers were not prepared to strike over issues of workplace conditions. According to Piva's calculations, the great majority of these strikes failed. After 1902, employers were very well organized in their stridently anti-union Employers Association, but workers were not correspondingly well organized into industrial unions. After the war, employer anti-unionism was less brutal but more sophisticated in aiming for overall control through the pension and profit-sharing devices of welfare capitalism.

Most of Piva's judgements on the labour movement miss the mark. In the first place, unionists did fight a substantial number of battles over workplace conditions, "union recognition" was often a codeword for such battles. This trend in industrial conflict has been outlined by Bryan D. Palmer and Craig Heron in the Canadian Historical Review and does not need to be reviewed here.* In the second place, the ratio of strike defeats to victories cannot be used to measure the overall strength of the union movement, as Piva himself speculates. Machinists and moulders broke the hold of the Employers Association in all but the largest foundries, sometimes before the first day of a strike. Neither printers nor brick-

*"Through the Prism of Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-1914," C.H.R., Vol. LVIII, No. 4 (December 1977), pp. 423-458.

layers needed to strike, for no employer dared challenge their control over the workforce or workplace skills. Street-railwaymen, brewery workers and civic workers made their gains in the context of public-supported legislation or arbitration. In the third place, few Toronto unions were obsessive about craft jurisdiction. Moreover, these supposedly feeble crafts had fought the Employers Association to a standstill by 1910. For this reason, the defeats of 1919 and 1920 were more than last tangos in Toronto. Since they were accompanied by a realignment of "left-right" forces within the union movement, a realignment unfavourable to militants locally and nationally, these defeats were part of a distinct era of labour history, not simply a culmination of previous trends. This, the weakest chapter in the book, is based on an inadequate general knowledge of the labour movement.

This is a book about workers as victims, not actors; the labour history equivalent to the survival theme of Canadian literature and federalist historiography. It is a study of conditions, not life. This aspect will be particularly disappointing to urban historians who may find Piva's focus on occupational class unduly formal and one-dimensional. As he argues in his introductory chapter on Toronto: "Although the ethnic, religious and spatial characteristics of Toronto's population had an important impact on the life of the city, the single most important social division occurred along class lines" (p. 14). Thus, class relations are not studied in terms of their ethnic, religious and spatial characteristics, but apart from them. That abstracted and lifeless conception of "the condition of the working class in Toronto" is what detracts from an otherwise informative and provocative work.

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Lorimer, James. The Developers. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1978. Pp. xi, 307. \$14.95 cloth.

Throughout the 1970s one of the most consistent and reliable chroniclers of the processes shaping Canadian urban centres has been James Lorimer. (Earlier books include The Real World of City Politics (1971), Working People (1972), The City Book (1976), and The Second City Book (1977). Lorimer is also an editor of the influential City Magazine). His latest book, The Developers, focuses specifically upon the land development process. This volume is based upon both a careful synthesis of existing work in this field and a considerable amount of original research. While the post-1945 period receives the most attention in the book, Lorimer does display some feel for historical events and processes, so The Developers should be of more than passing interest to historical