

EDITORIAL

Issues bearing on work and welfare are central to any modern society, but they have a particular inflection in British Columbia. In an economy long based on primary resources and on brawny work in isolated camps, wage work in British Columbia in the late nineteenth-century, and through most of this, has been predominantly male. Until recently the population was not demographically balanced. Jobs for which it was understood that only males were suited had drawn men disproportionately to the province, and the whole provincial culture is inflected in their direction. These were difficult circumstances for women seeking work outside the home, especially when (as in the salmon canneries) hiring practices were racialized. The work environment produced other difficulties for men. Accidents and job-related illnesses were common parts of their working lives, employment was often intermittent, and a great many men drifted from job to job until, eventually, they were too old and infirm to work.

These circumstances lie behind the articles in this issue of *BC Studies*. Brian Egan and Susan Klausen show that in the forest town of Port Alberni the old Fordist alliance of business and labour produced some jobs for women in the plywood mills, but that with the collapse of Fordism (see *BC Studies*, no. 113, Spring 1997) such work is largely gone. At the moment, a flexible labour market ill-serves the women of Port Alberni, for most of whom employment has reverted to poorly paid clerical and service-sector jobs. Megan Davies deals with the cast-offs of an aging labour force, the elderly, homeless men whom she calls "lonesome prospectors." She situates these men in the provincial economy and considers the systems of welfare that emerged to assist them. For most such men, old men's homes were a last resort, but a resort nonetheless when working lives

were over and no other support was at hand. The lonesome prospectors of the future, Davies suggests, will be divorced mothers, and she wonders what support they will have as state welfare diminishes. This leads to Lynne Bowen's article on self-help societies in the colliery town of Nanaimo. Unlike many resource towns in British Columbia, Nanaimo was a city of families of largely British stock, and the "friendly societies" associated with the British self-help movement found fertile ground there. Bowen describes these societies and the development and eventual demise of the sickness and accident funds associated with them.

Forum explores recent changes in child welfare legislation, particularly following Judge Gove's Inquiry into Child Protection. At issue are the respective roles of community, parents, and state, and the nature of the support for children that each can reasonably be expected to provide. Some half the children in foster care in British Columbia are Native, a sorry fact reminding us that issues of work and welfare in British Columbia are also associated with colonialism.

The editors