

paint a word picture of the district before European and American settlers imposed any structural changes. Finally, on page 95, the future town of Nelson is surveyed by a visiting bureaucrat from Victoria.

Each chapter begins with a droll sentence introducing the principal character or activity about to be described. On occasion, this introduction advises those eager to find out whether plans in the previous chapter were implemented to "turn to Chapter — and return to this page later." When buildings appear on the anticipated main streets (Baker and Vernon), very early photographs are shown and the builders/settlers described in detail. The final chapter in this first volume of the history of Nelson describes a socially active centre, with school, churches, railway terminal, a sanitary inspector, and a men's club — a community rich enough to apply for, and receive, city status.

There are a minimum of footnotes (all useful). The book would be improved by the inclusion of a modern map of Nelson, which would be consulted when reference is made to a building site at the corner of _____ and _____ Streets.

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Red Flags & Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy, by Mark Leier. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995. 245 p. \$50 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

According to Mark Leier in *Red Flags & Red Tape*, labour bureaucracy is "a question of who has power over whom, rather than a conflict over ideology" (p. 34). Trade union officials, innately, are neither more nor less conservative or radical than rank-and file members, and socialist bureaucrats behave little differently from labourist ones. Instead, the one consistent belief shared by all labour bureaucrats is "that the working class must be managed, that the masses cannot determine their struggle" (p. 34). This conviction that they alone understand and can defend the true interests of the working class leads labour bureaucrats to make the promotion and preservation of their own position of power their top priority, which in turn necessitates compromise and accommodation with other social classes. Using the experience of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLIC) during its formative years, 1889-1910, as his example, Leier explores this complex interplay between bureaucracy, class, and ideology to answer the question posed by German sociologist Werner Sombart in 1906: Why is there no socialism in North America?

Leier performs this task in three stages. First, he provides a critical review of the theoretical debate on the labour bureaucracy, identifying the relative strengths and weaknesses of the divergent interpretations forwarded by Weber, Michels, Perlman, Lenin, and Lipset, as well as summarizing the

recent discussion among British labour historians on the subject. Second, he traces the structural evolution of the labour bureaucracy in Vancouver, looking at those institutions and practices that helped to strengthen the VTLC's authority over the membership while at the same time creating a body of unionists whose direct interests and experiences were once removed from those of the rank and file. He also demonstrates how the VTLC shaped the contours of union, and by extension working-class, culture in Vancouver according to its own perception of labour unity, even as it drew upon and institutionalized certain working-class traits, notably racism and sexism, that limited the scope of that unity. Finally, Leier re-assesses the struggle between labourists and socialists within the VTLC as a battle to secure bureaucratic control over the rank and file, rather than as an ideological conflict. "Although labourists had started the VTLC, the socialists were quick to make use of the early bureaucracy and to strengthen it," he concludes. "In this sense, bureaucracy may be seen as being removed from ideology, for conservatives and radicals alike worked to preserve and extend the labour bureaucracy" (p. 180).

Red Flags & Red Tape is a finely crafted, well-written work that challenges many assumptions and perceptions about Canadian labour in this period. Curiously, given the particularly bureaucratic nature of Canada's modern labour movement, Leier is the first Canadian historian to devote a full-length study to the development of labour bureaucracy. His use of this concept as an organizing principle enables him to gain fresh insight from already well-plumbed source material, mainly Vancouver union records and local newspapers, and his book is a valuable addition to existing works by Ross McCormack, Robert A.J. McDonald, Peter Ward, and others. For example, Leier convincingly demonstrates that previous labour historians have exaggerated the extent and importance of socialist influence within the VTLC in the years 1900-03, and that even when socialists did later gain control of the bureaucracy, little changed as far as the rank and file were concerned. Leier's approach to his subject also places him within the growing ranks of a "third generation" of Canadian labour historians, scholars whose works seek to combine the empirical focus of the first generation with the theoretical emphases of the second. By bringing unions back into the centre of labour history in an imaginative and illuminating way, Leier is able to cast light "on those historical divisions that helped fragment the working class" and which kept them from uniting (p. 9).

There are problems with, or weaknesses to, Leier's study, however. Three are identified here, not so much by way of criticism, but as encouragement to explore the relationship between bureaucracy, class, and ideology further and more rigorously.

First, Leier defines the labour bureaucracy's power as "the ability to make others do what they would not have done otherwise," and, as mentioned, he identifies its sources as authority and the control of information (p. 34). However, identifying and describing the structures through which power

relations operate tells us little about how effective that power was in practice, or how it was perceived by those on whom it was exercised. Leier is dismissive of the "ambiguities and turbidity" of Foucauldian analysis, but some greater discussion of the construction and conceptualization of power seems necessary (p. 186, n. 10).

Second, Leier gears his examination of labour bureaucracy to answering Sombart's question, and within the limited confines of his analysis, his arguments and reasoning appear convincing. But surely, there are far more important and overwhelming obstacles in the path of socialism than the restrictive influence of labour bureaucrats. As Leier himself admits, "When we speak of the power of the labour leader . . . we do well to remember that it is a weak thing compared with that of capital and the state" (p. 35). This does not necessarily negate Leier's approach or focus, but it does suggest that he pay more attention to the state-capital nexus that operated in Vancouver during this period.

Third and finally, even if the existence of a labour bureaucracy renders socialism an improbable objective, then what are the alternatives open to the working class? The VTLC was more democratic than it was despotic, and would surely have succumbed to the popular will of the membership had large numbers expressed serious dissatisfaction with the rule of bureaucrats at the time. "If bureaucracy is to be eliminated," concludes Leier, "it will only be done when a revolutionary movement decides to do so, as part of a larger movement against economic and political oppression" (p. 184). This is little more than a reiteration of Rosa Luxemburg's recommendation to the German labour movement in 1906, when she too accused union officials of "bureaucratism and a certain narrowness of outlook" (*The Mass Strike, The Political Party and the Trade Unions*. Colombo, Ceylon: Young Socialist Publications, 1964, p. 72). Leier's own alternative suggestions to bureaucracy — the anarchist movement, the IWW, the 1960s' student protest movement, and the resurgence of left-wing politics in the former Soviet Union — hardly inspire hope. Further, none of these movements was without its own element of bureaucracy, lending more support to Robert Michels's maxim — "Who says organization, says oligarchy" — than Leier concedes.

Such doubts are raised in the spirit of advancing discussion on the role of labour bureaucracy in Canada. *Red Flags & Red Tape* is an important book and marks a significant advance in our understanding of the relationship between trade unions and the working class. That it leaves many questions unanswered leaves the door open for future debate.