

undeniable; yet Newton, so critical of sociological analysis, fails to penetrate beyond his own preconceptions of "the poor Indian" to see the tremendous vitality and strength that has enabled Haida culture to survive, to endure, to persist. Changes in social order do not necessarily reflect social disintegration and decline but may, on the contrary, indicate the incredible adaptability and flexibility of human culture, enabling it to survive in the face of devastating and oppressive conditions imposed by other cultures.

Where Newton does attempt "analysis," in his discussion of Haida myth, he entangles himself and the reader in a confusing and muddled interpretation that can hardly be called enlightening. If *Fire In the Raven's Nest* is meant for the lay reader, Newton is unfair in expecting that reader to sort out Tsimshian and Athapaskan themes from Haida ones, and to comprehend the presumed relationships of complex Haida mythological elements to both the geography of the Queen Charlottes and the "movement of stars and planets" without at least a chart of the heavens and some explanatory diagrams. Newton states that "since this book is not a technical study I have not outlined my method nor its detailed results." (p. 4) One doubts that there was either method or result in such a subjective "study."

Newton's temerity in claiming that his analysis is based, in part, upon Levi Strauss' *Mythologiques* does not make this dull and over-priced little book any more comprehensible.

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Pillars of Profit: The Company Province 1934-1972, by Martin Robin.
Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1973. 351 pages, illus., \$12.95.

One of the peculiar attributes of the scholar is his ability to find joy and delight and beauty in the most prosaic of subjects, lifting the ordinary and commonplace to the highest levels of abstruse appreciation. What, then, might we expect as the product of an academic and the most delightful parade of political characters and events ever to grace or disgrace the political stage of this or any other country: a feast of fascinations, surely? Alas, no, *Pillars of Profit* demonstrates that other ability of the academic, that of being able to reduce even the Venus de Milo to a commonplace assortment of numerical dimensions and other dusty attributes.

Pillars of Profit is the second half of Professor Martin Robin's political history of British Columbia. It opens with the excitement of Duff Pattullo's "Work and Wages" victory in 1934, groans its way through the two coalition governments, gives grudging admiration to the pyrotechnics of the Bennett decades, and winds up with the excitement of the Barrett N.D.P. victory in 1972. In response to critics of his first volume, the author gave us to understand that his purpose was not to meet the needs of the academic profession and that the ordinary canons of scholarship were not all that relevant to his work. Critical and popular history seemed to be the standard suggested.

Nobody will ever fault the author for not taking a stand. On every page he makes it clear that, rather like plagues of spruce budworm, the rapacious capitalists have had their evil way with the province's natural riches and working people. Few if any politicians of the right or centre of this picture ever bothered to notice enough even to disapprove, let alone change the situation. Session by session these politicians had the legislature enact bills and approve development programs, the details of which we are given in case after case. To Liberals, Conservatives, and Social Creditors these programs represented progress in economic development: tidal waves of foreign money poured in to open up the hinterlands of the Cariboo, the Trench, the Island, and the Kootenays, all of it providing jobs and prosperity for British Columbians. For the men of the left, however, the money wave represented exploitation, economic colonialism, immoral profit-taking, and rapine on an imperial scale.

The major difficulty with his critique is that Professor Robin seems to lack a comprehensive vision of the world. He is puzzled by the "company province" and by its people: they simply do not make much sense to him and he is somewhat at a loss to explain why it is. He appears happiest, in a way, with Pattullo reign. At its beginning, the voters were tired of the Tories and the Depression, not yet ready for the socialists, and the reformist Liberal looked just about right for a time. Pattullo survived so long as he confined his quasi-socialism to the distributive side of politics and did not try to interfere on the regulatory side too much. When he did, he got into trouble, began looking old and tired, and was deposed.

The author does rather a better job than most have done in detailing the differences between the Liberals and Conservatives of the Coalition period. It is probably the most satisfying part of the book, and a fair bit of it is attributable to his able characterization of the state of the C.C.F. throughout this period. Robin understands and depicts well the faults

and problems of the left in the way that only a supporter can do. For this we are in his debt. Unfortunately, the closer we come to the present, the less penetrating and satisfying is his analysis of the socialist party, a development which may be associated with his personal involvement in it.

Better than previous authors too is his account and explication of the remarkable peregrinations which led to the selection of a maverick Kelowna Tory to be the first Social Credit premier for B.C. While it might not satisfy fully the professional psychologists, the author's analysis of the 1952 multi-system election returns seems carefully and persuasively done. The great organizational activity of the Socred missionaries from the Alberta government has long been known but here Professor Robin contributes a wealth of corroborating detail that should be useful (if only to scholars). If he is to get to the real kernels of this material, however, the academic reader must steel himself to deal with much chaff, some of purely fictional origin, that marks the writer's disdain for the bible-thumpers, and especially those from Alberta. Referring to the time of W. A. C. Bennett's capture of the Socreds, for example, Robin writes that:

to the chattering, gnome-like minister of the Church of the Nazarene, who packed his bags the day before and left for his Alberta home, the meeting presaged the beginning of the capture of a people's movement by a dangerous opportunist. Reverend Ernest George Hansell, the father-advisor of the vibrant Socred brat, sulked and brooded all the way to distant Vulcan where, replenished by a snatch of prayer and swill of seltzer water, he soon busied himself with other pressing matters.

Most unsatisfactory is the treatment of the Bennett decades. Its deeds and misdeeds are fully chronicled, too fully in fact, for these pages read even more like a jammed digest of thousands of newspaper clippings than do comparable books by former newsmen. Here most of all do we lack a unifying theme, theoretical framework, or scheme of interpretation. True, the Coalition had been discredited, and throughout most of the period the C.C.F.-N.D.P., Liberals, and Conservatives posed greater threats to themselves than to the Socreds, but the secret of Bennett's electoral appeal continues to elude us. Despite some examination of the Bennett shift from "a little blacktop government" for the Interior into "a big dam government" for the tycoons (which others have pointed out before), Professor Robin really fails to advance us much beyond the simple-minded boom and fear of socialism explanations of the Vancouver business pages. Indignant this account is throughout, but that will hardly do as a radical

critique of the province's recent history. *Pillars of Profit* no more constitutes real left-wing stuff than does the N.D.P.

Just as the author fails to explain Bennett's success, so does he fail to explain adequately his downfall. The book was delayed and extended to cover the 1972 campaign but it might well have been stronger without it. While it is marginally useful to have a reasonably detailed account of the campaign, this former B.C. resident still feels unenlightened about the causes of the 1972 eruption of the socialist volcano which had been threatening and trembling continuously for almost forty years without previous effect.

The book represents well the dilemma facing a number of our able but would-be radical academics. A professing socialist and ideational enemy of private capital, Martin Robin is still a university professor beset by, and responding at least in part to, all the bourgeois conformist pressures that occupation involves. In his heart of hearts, Robin knows that ignorant or self-serving and misguided politicians like Pattullo, Hart, Anscomb, and Bennett have sold the people's heritage for bits of blacktop and symbols of power without the substance. He knows it and, like a decent scholar, he lists their sell-outs on page after page: Kitimat-Kemano, Rocky Mountain Trench, Britannia and Bridge River, Cominco- and Kaiser-land, the feudal empires of the integrated forest giants, the whole Columbia River project, and so on. Capitalists made a great deal of profit from all of this and the author knows thereby that it must be wrong. Unfortunately, such are the slippery standards of our society that the academic cannot demonstrate incontrovertibly that it was in fact robbery. This central thesis of *Pillars of Profit* forever escapes proof by the bourgeois (phoney objectivist?) standards of the university professions. "It's right there. Can't you see it?" he seems to plead. Fearful that we won't, he picks up his crossbow and unleashes another quiver-full of invectives.

At heaping scorn and nastiness, the author is much experienced. He likes phrases like "headless fascist monsters" (a Winch quotation), "conditions fattened the patronage barrels and sharpened the greed of junior and senior politicians," and "the papered peace people were treated to a raft of homilies and metro slurs." A number of them he works to death and the language quickly becomes tiresome and his message badly blunted. Perhaps, though, this vocabulary is his method of rendering the book "popular." If so, one wonders what kind of audience he has in mind for sentences like these:

Why not break (the Coalition) altogether and replace the restrictive duopoly with a happy monopoly? The Tories found the oligopolous arrangement iniquitous and to their perpetual disadvantage.

Professor Robin wishes not simply to document them in unmistakable fashion, but he wants dearly to proclaim the sins of the wicked rather widely on the winds of change. He wants the working man of B.C. both to be persuaded that he has indeed been robbed and worked up into a lasting fury over the injustice of it all. Achieving these twin objectives is a difficult task. It escaped even Marx, impressive scholar and theoretician that he was, who needed Engels, Lenin, and many others. Success in the technique escapes Professor Robin as well.

Despite an inherently fascinating subject, in too many places one's primary impression of *Pillars of Profit* is that of chewing doggedly through mounds of well-sorted news clippings held together by an over-salted paste of dubious quality. To say that too often the critical line of this work goes no more than invective-deep is bad enough, but, *scandale de scandales*, Martin Robin has even managed to make B.C. politics boring!

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