

Book Reviews

Essays in B.C. Political Economy, edited by Paul Knox and Philip Resnick. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974, 81 pp., \$2.00.

Collections which draw together papers presented under amorphous conference panel headings rarely hang together with any degree of cohesion or manage to sustain treatment of a subject area. Knox and Resnick's collection of material presented to the first Conference on Socialist Studies held at UBC in early 1973 provides no exception to the rule. This is not surprising given that the editors find a place in just eighty pages for everything from substantive essays on political economy to poetry. Taken collectively, these contributions, which are proffered unpretentiously as "exploratory forays into socialist analysis of British Columbia," provide a disjointed introduction to both approach and subject area. Individually, they vary greatly in what they have to offer.

Resnick's essay, "The Political Economy of B.C.: A Marxist Perspective," deserves to be read along with other introductory essays on B.C. politics. The insights he derives from his version of a Marxist framework are hardly so compelling as to convince the unconverted that this is the perspective to make all B.C. history fall into place. But the skeleton of an approach which should impel and guide further work is set out along with some worthwhile ideas on the historical behaviour of the B.C. business class. The main thesis, derived from the metropolitan-hinterland perspective, is that B.C., to an extent which makes it unique among Canadian resource hinterlands, is oriented to a plurality of metropolises. A second perspective, emphasizing "the class relations that evolve in the production of certain staples," is left largely undeveloped even though our appetite is whetted with the assertion that the resource basis of the B.C. economy fosters "antagonistic class relations of an almost classic Marxist variety."

It should be emphasized that Resnick deals solely with the province as a resource hinterland of extra-provincial metropolises, and not with metro-

politian-hinterland tensions within the province. So there is no speculation here on the role of metropolitan-hinterland divisions in reinforcing or undermining a politics of class division in the province. Neither is consideration given to the question of whether Vancouver has been purely an intermediate sub-metropolis as opposed to a centre for an important independent bourgeoisie.

Attempts like Resnick's to sketch encompassing generalizations about B.C. will remain tentative, spotty and limited in scope until a more healthy body of empirical analysis is built up to provide nourishment. The merits of an inductive-deductive division of scholarly labour are demonstrable but, in terms of priorities, it seems clear after reading an essay like Resnick's that we need intensive case studies of the relationships between business, society and politics more than we need analytic frameworks or broadly stroked interpretations.

The two papers based on undergraduate research projects at UBC both involve an overeagerness to arrive at pre-set conclusions. But there is enough substance in these endeavours to suggest that important gaps in knowledge about B.C. politics and society could be filled if efforts were made to edit and collect good undergraduate essays on B.C. topics researched at universities and community colleges.

In the first and best of these essays Reid and Weaver explore the evolution of the forestry tenure system up to the 1950's. The historical sketch they contribute is useful. They also make a good try at building a circumstantial case for the argument that the large, integrated forestry operations played a crucial role in both the initiation of the first Sloan Commission and the determination of its recommendations, the most notable of which laid out the system of perpetual yield embodied in the Forest Management Licence scheme. There can be little doubt (evidence of certain atavistic responses like those noted in the "Celanese Adventure" aside) that the integrated firms saw the Sloan proposals as compatible with their interests as they launched their large-scale pulp and paper operations. Such is not to demonstrate, however, that the FML innovation was not much more widely perceived as an optimal solution to the problem of meshing sustained yield with a system where public ownership of the land was retained. On the other hand, as Reid and Weaver suggest, the idea of perpetual yield had long been paid lip-service, and it was not until the forestry giants came to perceive this system as advantageous that it was put into practice.

Addie, Czepil and Rumsey close their piece on "The Power Elite in B.C." with apparent satisfaction at having both demonstrated the exist-

tence of a small, cohesive, controlling economic élite and revealed the means by which this élite influences actions in the political sphere. Were these goals attained, there would indeed be grounds for self-satisfaction, and all the more so since the whole exercise can be reported in just six pages. Most readers will wish for a more thorough presentation of evidence before making up their minds.

About the attempt to show how an economic élite extends its influence to the political sphere little need be said. Addie *et al.* fail to enlighten us in this area where the truth, for all its apparent palpability, remains most elusive and difficult to demonstrate. As for showing the existence of a cohesive élite, it is a pity that more time was not spent reporting the results of what was apparently a major investigation designed to explore the area. We are left with conclusions based on information contained in three short paragraphs.

In the first, reference is made to a corporate "conglomerate" involving four of the top five logging firms and four of the top seven mining companies operating in B.C. More details are needed before most readers will be satisfied that their own conception of a "conglomerate" obtains here. In the second, results of a study of interlocking directorships involved in the top twenty-six B.C. companies are reported. These results, which among other things show that 319 directorships were distributed among 275 individuals, leave in doubt the implied conclusion that there is something remarkable about the extent of interlocking directorship involved in B.C. capitalist enterprise. A third bit of research, dealing with the incidence of "interaction" among directors outside of their own companies, is reported in one sentence. There are 339 incidences of interaction among 110 interacting directors. Before the reader can ponder this he is whisked off to the case of J. V. Clyne. He interacts with eleven "important" people through his directorships.

The remainder of the volume proceeds at a markedly different pace. A section on labour and, more particularly, on the place of independent Canadian unions leads off with Jack Scott's arguments against "pure and simple" unionism and prescriptions for a more ideological brand. Those who share Scott's analyses and hopes concerning the role of independent Canadian unions as vehicles for transcending Gomerism will find cause for both optimism and pessimism in the transcripts of interviews conducted by the co-editors with individuals representing both sides in the 1972-73 breakaway movements at Kitimat and Trail.

The volume's final short section on B.C. radical culture is most worthwhile. Victor Hopwood's survey of the literature of B.C. radicalism should

both inspire students of this subject and provide them with further directions for exploration. Dorothy Livesay's rambling narrative recounts some of her experiences as a writer during the Depression. Incidentally, readers would find it worthwhile to track down the essays, written by Livesay in the 1930's and referred to in her account, in which she dealt with Depression conditions in a series of small B.C. mining towns.

In the final pages of the collection, we find some efforts from poets who, the editors suggest, draw "in their own ways" on the "radical literary traditions of the province." To my eye, most of this poetry seems more representative of Vancouver's recent "counter-culture" than of B.C. radical traditions. Certainly none of this poetry has an impact comparable to that included in Livesay's talk.

Clearly the scholarship of B.C. political economy is not yet providing theory and research at a rate which would allow a volume like this to be anything but a disappointment to those hoping to discover much in the way of fertile new interpretation or important empirical analysis. It seems unlikely that the editors expected this thin volume to stand as a great achievement in B.C. political economy, and indeed it does not. But it is far from barren of ideas, and when confronted with the question of whether attempts such as this to put ideas into circulation should be encouraged, we must surely reply in the affirmative.

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Shipwrecks of British Columbia, by Fred Rogers. J. J. Douglas Ltd.
256 pp. illus., map., index. \$10.95.

Shipwrecks of British Columbia is a labour of love on the part of its author, who has been a scuba diver since 1954, and who has personally dived on many of the wrecks that he describes. His hobby as a diver led him to an incredible degree of effort to research material in every available primary source. His trail led him through more than a century of newspaper files, yellowed government reports and personal reminiscences.

Mr. Rogers has no formal writing skill, but he persisted in his determination to record the definitive history of British Columbia shipwrecks. The great mass of material that he had collected was at last brought within manageable limits, with the assistance of Mr. Les Way, and was brought to publication by J. J. Douglas Ltd.