

especially in showing what can be gained by obtaining research participation from one's trading partners. There have been recent Canadian/American "raw materials" studies, some of them organized by the C. D. Howe Institute and its U.S. affiliates. But these have rarely achieved such complete, unified, joint authorship as is found in the Crawford-Okita volume.

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*Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930*, by Rolf Knight. Vancouver: New Star Books, 1978. Pp. 317; *illus.*

When considering works on the history of the Indians of B.C., one is confronted with a number of distortions and misinterpretations. Among others, the operation of the institutional system of racism that has confronted Indians is not adequately described or analyzed. Also, the historical significance of the B.C. land question is usually misread and the vital Indian economic adaptations to the developing B.C. economy, especially between 1860 and 1910, are largely ignored. It is the latter of these distortions that Rolf Knight tackles in *Indians at Work*.

Knight's main thesis is that "Indian people have a long history of work in a wide range of industries" (p. 181). He sets out to "outline the history of native Indians as workers and independent producers in the primary resource and other industries of B.C. between 1858 and 1930" (p. 7), including farming, orchardry, ranching, commercial fishing, cannery work, logging, longshoring, prospecting, mining, railway construction, packing and transport services, pelagic sealing, and other forms of domestic production and wage labour. Drawing largely on Department of Indian Affairs *Annual Reports*, personal work histories and biographies, and descriptions of the B.C. resource industries, Knight attempts to provide a framework for understanding Indian social change and gives a fairly complete survey of Indian participation in the developing B.C. resource economy.

*Indians at Work* provides a much needed antidote to the pervasive myth that Indian peoples and communities withered and crumbled in the wake of European settlement. This view sees Indian history as the sad chronicle of "Stone Age" cultures disintegrating under the impact of white contact, overwhelmed by mysterious processes — sometimes labelled "acculturative forces," and unable to cope with a complex, industrial

society. Most representations of northwest coast Indians start with Indians of the ethnographic past in long-houses and woven cedar clothing; we are then projected into the present mass society where Indians are portrayed as contemporary problems in social adjustment. This perception is reflected in popular literature, mass media, educational curricula, local histories, scholarly studies and coffee-table books on Indians. Indians are treated solely as "victims" or "problems." The basic elements of the past hundred years of Indian historical development are ignored. Their struggle to create the social, economic and political bases of a viable community in the years following white settlement are largely neglected.

Knight succeeds in accumulating enough evidence to challenge the myth. One would hope that *Indians at Work* will be taken as a constructive step toward a more realistic view of the Indian past. Knight engages in some distortions of his own, however — distortions that partly stem from his reliance on imperfect secondary source material, partly from what appears to be a misreading of his own evidence, and partly from a downplaying of racism and the politics involved in the B.C. Indian land question.

In his attempt to describe the main features of Indian economic activity prior to 1930, Knight presents us with a dual structure: domestic subsistence activities and commercial/industrial production (pp. 34, 150). Such a description is too simplified and does not permit sufficient analysis of Indian economic adaptation prior to 1900 or the subsequent crisis in Indian economies. A more adequate analysis of this economic adaptation would recognize the following four levels of activity: (1) wage labour, (2) commodity production for cash, (3) subsistence production on Indian reserves and (4) traditional (albeit with novel techniques) food acquisition. Such an analysis is implicit in Knight's survey (p. 194), but it is not employed as a tool for examining the causes of the reduction of Indian participation in some resource industries or the post-1900 decline in Indian economic well-being. Still, *Indians at Work* is the best description to date of post-1858 Indian economic life.

Knight bemoans the "unprogressive and inefficient" nature of the various "cottage industries" that developed on Indian reserves and reduces the critically important hunting and fishing to the status of "domestic budgets." He implies that such subsistence activities were carried on by the very young, the aged, and those who were infirm in some way" (p. 34). This view is erroneous and is inconsistent with the statement that such activities were a "central feature" of Indian econo-

mic life (p. 34). Had he emphasized the four facets of the Indian economic response to European settlement and resource industrialization, he could have brought out the fundamental principle of the adaptation: diversification. The result of diversification was a mixed economy based partly on the Indian reserves, partly on participation in the resource economy, and partly on food acquisition. This very diversification was the basis of Indian economic success, and although it suffered from tremendous strains between 1910 and 1930, it provided the important element in Indian survival.

Another problem with Knight's picture of the Indian economies between 1858 and 1930 is the chronological framework. Although he introduces much data for a different interpretation, he concludes that "the semi-permanent unemployment and reserve dependence . . . is a relatively recent phenomenon" and that "it was initiated during the collapse of the great depression and came to fruition only within the last generation" (pp. 194-95). For Knight, the Great Depression is the watershed of Indian economic activity, especially wage labour and independent enterprise. This emphasis on the Depression and the economic forces it set in motion fails to give the proper significance to the real crisis years of the mixed Indian economies, from 1900 to the late 1920s.

Due to the dramatic increase of non-Indian population and the rapid growth of resource extraction and the transportation infrastructure, each of the four levels of Indian economic activity was under attack. In addition, restrictions on food fishing implemented by the Dominion Department of Fisheries (not the Department of Indian Affairs, as Knight has it) began to cut into this important ingredient in subsistence production between 1895 and 1905 (not ca. 1912, as Knight says, pp. 263-64). Hunting and trapping also came under regulation just prior to World War I (as Knight notes, pp. 262-63). The land base of local Indian economies — the Indian reserves — was the object of attack by a hostile provincial government, which sought a significant reduction in Indian reserve lands. Finally, during this period a complacent Department of Indian Affairs and an ineffectual Royal Commission (McKenna-McBride Commission) failed to stem the rising tide of provincial regulation of water, timber, minerals and other resources that severely damaged the diversified Indian economies.

Knight does take note of some of these policies, but fails to make them a central part either of his analysis or his chronology of the widening crisis. Instead of fastening on the Great Depression as the time when Indian economic activity collapses, it would be more accurate to say that

by 1930 many Indian communities had been in a depression for ten, twenty or more years. Furthermore, the central cause of this decline was neither the changes in industrial and commercial organization nor the impersonal economic forces of capitalism in crisis, but a policy of exclusion and discriminatory regulation based on race.

Of course, Indians were not completely excluded from participation in wage labour, their hunting and fishing activities were not totally abolished, nor did on-reserve agriculture, ranching and other enterprises entirely collapse, but the damage done to the diversified Indian economies between 1900 and 1930 was serious enough to create the conditions of Indian underemployment and unemployment, reserve dependence and economic deprivation. These are not "relatively recent phenomena" but stem from a time when the foundations of the modern B.C. economy were established. This time was *prior* to the Great Depression. Ironically, because Indians had in many respects already been walled off from some resource industries, and had therefore developed strategies of subsistence survival, they were better able to cope with the Depression.

Failure to realize the implication of these crisis years leads Knight to underplay the significance of the most important form of Indian political activity, the struggle to gain recognition of the British Columbia Indian land question and aboriginal rights. The upsurge of political action begins in the early years of the twentieth century as a direct response to the deepening economic crisis. But for Knight the Indian political resurgence dates from the formation of the Native Brotherhood in the 1930s (p. 198). He ignores the Allied Tribes of British Columbia and relegates the multi-faceted political activities of earlier decades to the footnotes. Such a view does not permit an understanding of the real forces at work before the Depression.

The most significant shortcoming of *Indians at Work* is its failure to give a sufficiently prominent place to racism and racial discrimination. Knight does recognize that discrimination against Indians was widespread, but maintains that "racism was not the central cause of exploitation and expropriation of Indian people but merely a rationale for such" (p. 180). But racism, as institutionalized in the policies and activities of various levels of government, business and other organizations, is fundamental to an understanding of Indian social and economic change. Racism is more than a rationale for various policies or forms of exploitation; it is the central mode of Euro-Canadian interaction with Indians. It is more than attitudes and remarks made by politicians, government agents and missionaries; it is a system of power relationships. Knight

states that “racist attitudes themselves had bases in perceived (often wrongly perceived) material interests” (p. 21). This is partly so, but there is also a psychological dimension to racism that can take on a causal force of its own. Additionally, there is a distinction to be made between racial prejudice and racism. Racial and ethnic prejudice are not restricted to Euro-Canadians; Indians too are prejudiced and have stereotypes about whites, as do other groups. But this should not blind us to the structural nature of racism which is a system of power relationships between ethnic groups. Racism is the institutional power of one dominant ethnic group to act out prejudice and ethnic antipathy. In B.C., clearly the Euro-Canadians (both the ruling elites and at various times their working class allies) have had such power over Indian people. The result for Indians has been social and economic deprivation as a group.

Knight criticizes others who have focused on racial hostility and the ethnocentrism of the Euro-Canadians and who have treated the “settler society” as a monolith. Certainly Euro-Canadian society has contained its own internal contradictions and group conflicts, but Indians, as an indigenous people under a colonial system that is racist, do have a unique structural relationship with all segments of Euro-Canadian society. We cannot dismiss the fundamental structural role of racism in Indian-white relations just because the ruling colonial elite used gunboats against Indians and the Nanaimo coal miners alike (p. 243).

Knight dismisses emphasis on racism as “sheer ideological nonsense” (p. 243) and seems to equate “settlers” with agricultural pioneers (p. 26). But settler societies take on different characteristics depending on the nature of land and resource use. The non-Indian coal miners of Nanaimo were no less settlers because they were industrial resource workers. Their status as settlers gave them a commonality of interests with B.C.’s business and commercial groups and similar attitudes and behaviour towards Indians and Indian land and resource rights. One wonders just who is guilty of ideological nonsense.

Some of Knight’s erroneous generalizations, including his characterizations of the post-1930 era, stem from an over-reliance on secondary sources and a failure to consult critical archival material. For example, though he makes excellent use of the Department of Indian Affairs *Annual Reports*, he ignores the published reports of the Department of Marine and Fisheries — an oversight that is difficult to understand considering the importance of Indian commercial and food fishing. The University of British Columbia Library holds an extensive microfilm collection of Public Archives of Canada Record Group 23 (Department

of Marine and Fisheries) that contains valuable data on the evolution of Indian participation in the commercial fishing industry and on the development of Dominion restrictions on Indian subsistence fishing. Perhaps the most important documentary source of information on Indian people since the 1870s is the Public Archives of Canada collection of Record Group 10 (Department of Indian Affairs). An important section of this collection (the "Black series") has been available on microfilm at the Provincial Archives of B.C. since 1976. It contains important material on the diversified Indian economies of the late nineteenth century and reveals the extent of the economic and social crisis of subsequent years. One could go on and on with methodological comments of this sort, for the archival materials on Indians are truly voluminous (a fact that Knight is aware of, p. 9) but these two collections seem especially important as they tend towards a conclusion different from Knight's.

Despite these criticisms, this book, on a subject so long obfuscated by myth, distortion and prejudice, is welcome. And while Knight at times assumes too flippant a style and engages in some unnecessary ax-grinding, he deserves much credit for attempting to redress a critical historical oversight. So, while *Indians at Work* could be more accurate in its characterizations and conclusions, it is a thoughtful and thought-provoking work.

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