

immigration: from the politicians, the Trades and Labour Council, the Ministerial Association, the Women's National Council.

One of Hugh Johnston's most original contributions is to tell us what happened after the *Komagata Maru* left here. The treatment given to the Punjabis by their "own" government, the British Rāj in India, is even sadder than their reception in Canada. Treated as if they were dangerous criminals, fired on by panicky police officers when they disembarked, some were killed and others imprisoned. The lesson which many of the voyagers had already discussed, that "good" government is no substitute for self-government, was driven home. Gurdit Singh himself, then 56 years old, abandoned his life as a businessman to throw himself into nationalist politics. He became a minor celebrity, met Mahatma Gandhi, and lived to see India become independent. The incident that changed his life was soon swallowed up by greater crimes and became, in India as in Canada, only a footnote to the history of our times. For the British, surely the chief sinners in this squalid little tale, it is not even that. Such an attitude helps explain why Britain today makes such heavy weather of its coloured immigrant workforce from the Commonwealth countries, although surely she is more honest than her continental neighbours who deny their desperately needed "guest worker" labour force the rights of immigrants.

Johnston does not present us with any conclusion, and perhaps we do not need one. His well-told story speaks for itself. And the problem is not concluded, but still unfolds in the everyday contacts between Indians and other Canadians in our communities, workplaces, schools, shops, and playing-fields. We can try to write our own conclusions in the attitudes we bring to such contacts.

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*In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, ed. by Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess. Victoria: Camosun College, 1980.

This fine book about early British Columbia women is part of an interesting tradition. None of the seventeen contributors to *In Her Own Right* were engaged in paid work as historians at the time that their book was published. They are exploring their own past and writing their own histories as students, as political activists, or, in one case, as an oil company executive. They have published their own book through the

auspices of Camosun Community College in Victoria; Val Mieras, a Camosun College student listed with the authors among the contributors to the volume, took responsibility for typesetting, layout and printing. Their book begins with a well-crafted essay by Gillian Marie arguing that women ought to be written into British Columbia's history and then offering practical advice to the first-time researcher undertaking historical investigations which include her own past. The rest of *In Her Own Right* is a heterogeneous assemblage of biographical sketches, reprinted documents, theoretical discussion, and research essays by seasoned and less experienced writers. The people who produced this book plainly share with the members of the British History Workshops the belief that present-day political experiences can impel, and ought to be informed by, research about the past. Their book is very much like the volume *Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930*, produced in 1974 by a group of Toronto feminists, and published by the collective Canadian Women's Education Press.

At times these distinctive origins, distanced from the historical profession and influenced by present-day concerns, weaken *In Her Own Right*. Jackie Lay has difficulty integrating her evidence about the women and girls of the brideship *Tynemouth* into her narrative, and her commentary on the limitations of her sources is clumsy. Nora Lupton's "Notes on the British Columbia Protestant Orphan Home" deal briefly with the 1870s and the 1960s and leave the reader wondering what happened in between. Alexandra Zacharias describes the atypical role of the British Columbia Women's Institutes as an instrument of state policy, without reflecting upon either the implications of so strong a government tie or the influence of provincially appointed urban socialites on the executive of an organization intended to serve farm women. Similarly the essays of Diane Crossley on women's reforms after the extension of the suffrage and Michael Cramer on the campaign for the vote do not rise sufficiently above the detail of the events to set them in context or make sense of their consequences. The biographical accounts are often in the notable women genre, charting the domination of enduring character over transient circumstance. While the skills required to uncover the past ought not to be either mysterious or inaccessible, and the best history is written in something close to the language of common speech, it takes time to learn how to recreate the fullness of former times from the stray bits left behind, and the inexperience of many contributors to *In Her Own Right* shows.

This book succeeds best in the discussion of radical and marginal women, perhaps because it is here that the distinction between the priorities of the present and the presumptions of the past is most great. The contributors who inquired into the club women and maternal feminists of Victorian British Columbia were exploring a fragment of the past firmly integrated into the dominant culture by the middle of the twentieth century. The investigators who found themselves uncovering equal-rights feminists, pantheists and unionized waitresses, laundresses and shop clerks were forced to confront a past which had been lost in the intervening years and to jettison their many expectations contradicted by the evidence. Such bemusement is fuel to good work. Marie Campbell incisively questions the role of class and male domination in the union movement, pointing out the costs to working women of union men's deference to middle class female reformers. Roberta Pazdro, in presenting a picture of Agnes Deans Cameron which will be a useful western counterpart to Deborah Gorham's portrait of Florence Macdonald Denison, does not hedge about ideological and personal differences which divided British Columbia women and left Cameron, a school principal who disagreed with the National Council of Women's focus upon domestic science, turning in crisis to socialists rather than feminists for support. Deborah Nilsen's analysis of the origins of Vancouver prostitutes and the nature of police regulatory activity shows how middle class fears, and the labour market of a port city, provoked the selective enforcement of vice laws.

There are conspicuous gaps in this book, as its editors acknowledge. There is no treatment of rural women, save through the eyes of ill-informed urban observers. There is no discussion of Doukhobor women, of the Scandinavians, the Russian Mennonite immigrants of the interwar years or the Dutch Reformed families who arrived after the Second World War, nor of any immigrant group save the British. Racial discrimination is dealt with briefly as counterpoise to sexual discrimination in Campbell's essay on unions, but the peculiar British Columbia interplay among class, race and gender clearly requires further elaboration. Nonetheless *In Her Own Right* is a useful contribution, and the feminists of Camosun College are to be commended for their energy and determination in bringing it into print.