

Dunsmuir (Robert, the elder, “went out of his way to treat his men fairly” on occasion, she believes, while James was a tidier but more tyrannical employer). All things considered, the nineteenth-century coal industry *looks* like a rare, working model of something like the staples theory of economic growth; why and how was this so? Members of the enlightened bourgeoisie who may pick up *Three Dollar Dreams* for a quick read will go away with a knowledge of their sophistication in matters of “industrial relations,” but the coal owners of the nineteenth century yield to no one in such matters as successful turning to account of Canadian federalism: Bowen includes marvellous vignettes of the tryst between Dunsmuir and John A. Macdonald which signalled the rosy dawn of regional accumulation in the 1880s. The coal owners also possessed a finer sense of the value of commodities; Dunsmuir robbed the miners of their dust and slack and manufactured it into coke. Their maritime activities — industrial Vancouver Island had what Cape Breton nearly always lacked: a reliable fleet of ships — make us bow *our* heads in shame, and we clearly need to know more about mining-related arts and crafts of industry such as Dunsmuir’s Albion Iron Works in Victoria. But why did neither the English nor the Dunsmuir survive long past the *fin de siècle*? What was the fatal flaw that ensured that the miners’ fight for “a three dollar dream” would some day bring lasting benefits to the whole of the working classes, with one exception — the coal miners themselves?

Simon Fraser University

ALLEN SEAGER

Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers, edited by Rennie Warburton and David Coburn. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1988. Pp. 288. \$28.95.

Conventional wisdom has it that if class is an operative process anywhere in Canada it is in British Columbia. Not all conventional wisdoms are wrong, but few escape revisionist assault. In a 1980 article in *BC Studies*, Peter Ward decided to take on conventionality and argue that race, not class, was the fundamental cleavage in the social structure of the west coast. His article was a conceptual chaos, noteworthy for its capacity to misstate fundamental theoretical positions — such as that of Edward Thompson — and reconstruct and appropriate them for his own purposes. Useful as something of a straw man, the essay did serve notice that it was important for those aligned with the primacy of class to restate with rigour

their reasons for according utmost importance to the social relations of productive life, and the attendant domestic, cultural, and political forms that both emerged out of such class relations and could shape the contours that class took in its historical development.

This eclectic collection of essays is haunted by the ghost of Ward. To be sure, not every author addresses the argument that race is of more significance in understanding the social structure of British Columbia than class, but many do. In the absence of much in the way of shared concerns, methodologies, or interpretations, these essays are loosely gathered around some rather broad themes, encompassed in the collection's title: workers, capital, and the state. There is room here for historians and sociologists, political scientists and economists, as well as for those embracing a modified Innisian staples approach and those gravitating toward a more orthodox Marxist stress on capitalist development.

What provides the book with its direction, however, is rejection of the Ward hypothesis. In their Introduction Warburton and Coburn take direct aim at Ward, declaring that they "strongly disagree with those who maintain that class struggle is not as important as, for example, race, or that it no longer occupies the central position it once held in earlier phases of the province's history" (p. 3). The editors sidestep quietly a parallel feminist argument — that gender divisions are more fundamental than those of class — while paying due homage to the significance of gender relations. They then proceed, however, virtually to ignore, except at the most abstract level, the concrete relationships of class and gender.

At least one author, Gillian Creese, who writes on Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the 1880-1923 years, gestures toward the importance of gender relations, but her point is made rather mechanically: "The radical nature of trade union and political organization documented by Phillips and others is the history of white male workers, and much of it was explicitly racist and sexist in content contextualized in terms of the struggle between capital and labour in the province" (p. 72). Aside from the problem of just what exactly this sentence means, there is an identifiable contradiction between Creese's critique of the historiography and her implicit call for a history attentive to gender. In the absence of any research into family relations among an ethnically segmented work force, the views of women workers themselves, the ways in which working-class fathers and mothers, in conjunction with the state educational system and other institutions of the hegemonic order, raised their children to think in racist/sexist or emancipatory notions of the world, or the social character of working-class neighbourhoods and communities and how they came into being,

Creese's statement is a rather easy ideological condemnation. It is an interesting indication of how specific feminist sensibilities can actually silence women as historical actors and impose upon them a subordination that is as mythological and presentist in its construction as it is grounded in anything approximating historical reality. For surely it is absolutely wrong to claim that the radical nature of labour politics and organization was simply the history of male workers. It is as if the miners' wives did not exist and were not walking picket lines and discussing alternatives, as if women and children played no role in the class struggle. It is as if families were somehow abstracted from political economies, as if commodities and services were not mediated by relations cut to the very bone by a social life ordered and articulated, not only by the harsh subordinations imposed by capital, but also by the reciprocities and ambivalences of same-class male-female experience. Surely feminists should be capable of grasping the totality of class formation to understand that virtually nothing is an entirely male preserve, even if that is the way it has been presented by historians blind to the role of women, families, and the reproductive realm.

Both Allen Seager and Jeannie Meyers attempt reconstructions of such many-sided processes of class formation in their studies of New Westminster class conflicts (1900-1930) and the important Fraser Mills strike of 1931. Each author demonstrates the possibilities of class solidarity as opposed to the fragmentations of race, and both are attentive to the importance of community-based class struggles that drew men, women, and non-white/ethnic sections of the working class together. Seager, along with Michael Kew ("Making Indians"), raises the critical issue of the state's role in constructing race and class, offering a suggestive sentence: "There are also excellent reasons to believe that the census category of 'labourer' in British Columbia was in part a racial category into which low-status Asian immigrants were habitually structured, literally as well as figuratively" (p. 119). His conclusion that in New Westminster the "Oriental Question" was nothing more than a managerial nightmare of labour indiscipline is more than a little one-sided in its refusal to confront the extent to which workers internalized and incorporated the ideological content of capital's racism, structured into the rigid segmentations of a labour market orchestrated according to skin colour. But it is nevertheless a useful corrective to much discussion of working-class anti-Orientalism and ethnocentrism, in which the material moorings of racial differentiation are lost in a maze of voluntaristic explanation.

There are other diverse essays included in this volume. They range in their focus across a broad spectrum of topics and chronological periods,

encompassing discussion of early state formation, collective action among salmon fishery workers in the opening years of the twentieth century, public policy in the forestry industry, and workers' control at B.C. Tel in the 1980s. A closing essay addresses the long history of class relations among the province's schoolteachers. Little seems, at times, to hold these discrete analytic forays into the province's history together. Warburton's conclusion on capitalist social relations in British Columbia goes some distance toward resolving this problem, but a much-needed interpretive coherence is still lacking.

The book ends with a statement of purpose: "The dissemination of knowledge about the episodes examined in this volume is intended to be a small contribution to the education of those involved" (p. 285). Warburton wants the workers to learn from their history. It is an admirable aim, easier, however, to proclaim than to put into practice. University of British Columbia Press seems to have read this last line, taken it seriously, and tried to create a form that, in their vision of the process whereby class consciousness is instilled subversively in the working class, corresponds to the content and purpose of the book — for they have packaged it so that it appears as if wrapped in a grey paper bag, suitable for sale under the counter at your local class-struggle outlet.

Queen's University

BRYAN D. PALMER

Beyond the Blue Mountains: An Autobiography, by George Woodcock.
Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988. Pp. 300. \$24.95 cloth.

Beyond the Blue Mountains is the second volume of George Woodcock's autobiography, covering the period from his return to Canada in 1949 to his retirement as editor of *Canadian Literature* in 1977. Even those acquainted with Woodcock's career will be struck by the fullness of his life during these years and the prodigious extent and variety of his accomplishments.

Woodcock's opening account of his attempt to combine subsistence farming with an intellectual life offers a foretaste of the determination with which he addressed life throughout this period. In pursuit of this immigrant dream he built a cabin in the forests of Vancouver Island not once but twice. His attempts to live by his writing in the Canada of 1949 were equally quixotic, though royalties, radio talks, articles, friends, and, eventually, fellowships enabled him somehow to survive and carry out his