

Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English — *Canada, 1900-1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

There are at least two good reasons for writing a new general history of Canada, besides naked lust for royalties. One is to try to tell a familiar story more lucidly or more imaginatively than any existing account. The other is a desire to raise the level of historical understanding to a new plane by drawing together existing research and offering new insights that have hitherto been lost in the minutia of specialized studies (One of the most inspiring examples in recent years is Eric Hobsbawm's masterful three-volume history of the western world from 1789 to 1914.) Why Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English decided to write this sequel to their controversial *Canada Since 1945* is not entirely clear. There is no dearth of overviews of early twentieth century Canadian history, since J.L. Granatstein et al. devote more than half their survey history to the same years, and two of the best volumes in the Centenary History series (by Craig Brown/Ramsay Cook and John Thompson/Allen Seager) cover most of the same period. Nor can it be said that Bothwell, Drummond, and English have breathed new life into their subject with more colourful or inspiring prose. Then perhaps this trio had something new to say, a fresh perspective on the first five decades of "Canada's century."

There is certainly good reason for attempting a new synthesis of this period. Over the past 20 years, dozens of historians have been digging into almost every conceivable nook and cranny of early-twentieth-century Canadian society, and a huge body of new research and reconceptualization has emerged, especially in social and regional history. Unfortunately, Bothwell, Drummond, and English ignore, belittle, or reject most of it. In their preface they dismiss the new social and economic history as too arcane and "everyday life" as an irrelevant subject for students and general readers. Instead they announce their well-known, peculiar preference for politics and the economy that shaped their first book. As the chapters unfold, the familiar biases re-emerged: politics means the view for Parliament Hill (the provinces are largely ignored until the 1930s and 1940s), and the economy means the impersonal market forces that can only be appreciated, it seems, by citing endless strings of almost indigestible (and often undigested) production statistics. On the whole, moreover, these authors do not see classes or social structures within Canadian society and do not share the critical perspective on Canadian social and economic development that animates most historians of farmers, workers, women, immigrants, native peoples, social reformers, and even, occasionally, businessmen. As they declared in the opening line of their first book, "Canadian history is a success story." Despite their barbs at "present-mindedness" in the book, then, writing the book was a politically motivated project. Bothwell, Drummond, and English wanted to take up cudgels for traditional political history married loosely to neo-classical economic history, and to deliver some sharp blows to those with a less comforting perspective on Canadian history.

It would be a mistake, however, to focus purely on political biases. I can respect the work of people I disagree with if it is well done. By the new standards of an evolving profession, this book is simply not good history. It does not make a serious effort to address most of the new writing on the period (sometimes it seems that the authors may not even have read much of it). More important, it does not respond to the challenge implicitly posed by social historians to show the interconnections and relationships between various spheres of life in a country like Canada — in short, to write a full history of society. It is true that those same social historians have generally had far too little to say about politics and the state, and much more hard thinking is needed on how to contextualize some of the major themes in old-fashioned political history within a broader social history. But the Bothwell-Drummond-English approach is to treat politics as preeminent, largely autonomous, and reflective of individual leadership styles, and to reduce what social historians do to "background" in a few rambling, loosely structured chapters. Overall, their book lacks thematic or analytical unity. What is the rationale for choosing this time frame? What gives the period its coherence?

Most social historians would answer: industrial capitalism. However uncritical of capitalist development, these historians have almost always found the fundamental explanations for changes in Canadian society within the economic sphere, often simply using the catch-phrase "industrial-

ization". In fact, the years 1900-45 roughly correspond to the second major phase of industrialization in Canada, which brought corporate organization, a more integrated national economy, stepped-up centralization and urbanization, and a transformed work world. It is hard to extract this larger picture from this book, despite the fact that Drummond's expertise in economic history gives the book its major claim to be saying something new. His view of economic development stresses growth and prosperity (despite some occasional unemployment and declining real wages), but minimizes the role of the new institutions that controlled the commanding heights of the economy in this period, the corporations, and the corporate barons who controlled them. Larger social and economic structures (other than the "market") remain indistinct or invisible.

Drummond's impact on the book is indeed even larger, since much of what passes for social history is contained within his chapters on the economy. And those brief passages are as annoying as the omissions. Drummond and Co. seem to have drawn most of their conclusions from the decennial census tracts and the odd DBS volume. We are presented with Canadians in the aggregate, and many of the new, much more thoroughly researched insights into the dimensions of class, ethnicity, or gender are ignored. The discussion of early-twentieth-century immigration, for example, misses completely the phenomenon of "sojourning," which has become so central to the analyses of historians of ethnicity and immigration in the period. There is not a whisper about the emerging historiographical consensus that the domestic sphere was the crucial framework for women's lives; indeed women get little attention at all in a book so focused on "public" life. And the profoundly disruptive changes in management and technology that affected hundreds of thousands of workers is passed over in the stream of statistics on production, productivity, and real wages. Perhaps even more troubling is the neglect of social movements of all kinds, which have attracted so much of the new research in recent years. For pre-World War I period, the authors knew they could not ignore all this work; so they lumped it all together in a curious chapter entitled "Drink, Labour, Public Ownership, and Corruption, 1900-14," and then picked apart the "present-mindedness" of what they took to be the dominant analyses. Predictably the historians of women and of workers get the hardest knocks. Modern feminist writers, it seems, have been too hard on the likes of Nellie McClung because they have highlighted the ideological limitations of that early feminist movement; surely presenting such an analysis is not the same as prescribing a different political agenda for those early women activists, as Bothwell, Drummond, and English contend.

The attack on labour historians is just as wrong-headed and shows a limited and deeply flawed understanding of the early-twentieth-century labour movement (from the discussion of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act in particular, it is evident that they never looked at or completely misunderstood Paul Craven's *An Imperial Umpire*). Because of their failure to consider the dynamics of the changing workplace, the authors repeatedly reduce workers motivations for organized resistance or protest to the size of their pay packets alone. Most labour historians now know that life was never so simple. Throughout the book, the authors are also eager to minimize labour's impact. It is plainly wrong to argue that Laurier "wasted little time in [his] correspondence worrying about what labour leaders wanted."

The Liberal party actually spent a lot of time cultivating labour leaders, especially at the provincial level (which is not discussed here) but also through the extensive network that Mackenzie King established through the new Department of Labour. Before the war the impact of organized worker resistance to their employers' assaults was uneven, but certainly significant in particular industrial communities, especially the hot spots of militancy and radicalism, the mining towns. And anyone who has read the daily press or even the Borden papers in 1919 could not agree that the urban working class posed no threat to the Canadian political system after the war. The workers' revolt was serious and troubling to businessmen and the state and had to be destroyed by aggressive two-pronged campaigns of repression and co-optation; it did not simply wither and die out of "exhaustion." This book similarly reduces farmers movements to merely political irritations caused by wartime grievances that soon faded. The unwillingness to consider provincial politics, where these movements made their greatest impact, helps to obscure their real importance.

The absence of the provinces from the picture creates other problems. National consciousness was generally much weaker than regional consciousness in Canada, except perhaps during the world wars (and at all times, of course, in Toronto). Most Canadians active in public life had much deeper commitments to their provincial or regional contexts than to national projects. Some of the most important political issues were fought out at that level. And some of the most important alternatives to national economic development strategies were posed at the provincial level. The thrust of most recent writing on regional history has been to suggest that the old framework of national history cannot capture these important dimensions of our past, and that a new conceptualization is necessary to recognize the parallel dynamics of region and nation-state. Bothwell, Drummond, and English remain unmoved by these pleas. Their book acknowledges such major phenomena as French-Canadian nationalism and Maritime Rights only as they affect federal politics. As in their earlier book, they disparage "provincialism."

Good general histories are damnably hard to write. Perhaps that is why so few historians have dared to redo the work of Creighton, Careless, McInnis, or McNaught. This book, however, is not a model for new synthetic writing in Canadian history. Twentieth-century Canada still awaits its historian.

Craig Heron
York University

* * *

Caroline Brettell — *Men Who Migrate, Women Who Wait: Population and History in a Portuguese Parish*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. xv, 329.

Jan Lucassen — *Migrant Labour in Europe 1600-1900: The Drift to the North Sea*. London: Croom Helm, 1987. Pp. 339.

Caroline Brettell and Jan Lucassen have undertaken the daunting task of studying the migration of Europeans over the long term, each from a unique perspective that has yielded an exciting and innovative work. Anthropologist Brettell carefully lays out the connection between the unusual household and labor force designations of rural northern Portugal and the centuries-old traditions of male emigration. There women were the agricultural workers, women could inherit land, and the family home was bequeathed by parental choice — often to the spinster daughter who cared for her parents; this situation responded to and freed men for emigration. This emigration was temporary in intention, if not in actuality; it carried the men first to Brazil, subsequently to Spain, and most recently to France. While Brettell studies a sending area over the centuries, Lucassen focuses on entire migration systems that provided the North Sea coast, primarily Holland, with temporary labor from western Germany. Lucassen traces the rise and fall of these systems between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and links the ability of men to participate in those migrations with the configuration of home agricultural and industrial work that allowed them to depart for specific reasons.

Brettell's study of the parish of Lanheses, twenty-five hamlets in Northern Portugal, emphasizes the continuing role of emigration as a survival strategy and the impact of emigration on family history and demographic change. Her study rests upon parish registers beginning in the seventeenth century, household lists beginning in the nineteenth century, electoral rolls, and interviews with the people of Lanheses. This range of sources enables Brettell to reconstruct the social and economic context of changes in marriage, celibacy, marital fertility and illegitimacy in the parish. She traces changes in the impact of emigration as patterns of movement changed, tracing emigration from its sixteenth-century roots in the Portuguese empire through the peak of Brazilian emigration in the 1870-1914 period, the growth of migration to Spain and southern Portugal which came to dominate twentieth-century movements, and emigration to France since 1960.