

Compte rendus / Book Reviews

BEAULIEU, Michel S. — *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011, Pp. 299.

In *Labour at the Lakehead*, Michel Beaulieu examines the social history of the Canadian Lakehead in the opening third of the twentieth century, a period marked by the region's prominent role in the wheat economy and turbulent social relations tied to conflict between workers and employers in the extractive resource and transportation sectors. Demographically, the influx of thousands of immigrants from Finland, the Ukraine, and other points contributed to a rich and contested cultural fabric in the district surrounding present-day Thunder Bay and the former twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William.

Beaulieu's study fills a lacuna in the historiography of Canadian labour and the left, as well as in the history of Northwestern Ontario, noting that the Lakehead "interestingly complicates one of the major narratives of Canadian history – that of western exceptionalism – by raising the example of a region that was simultaneously *western* and *eastern*" (p. 5). The book engages the challenging dynamic between ethnicity and class, particularly with respect to Finns, and provides rich empirical insight into the development of ethnic, socialist, and labour organization at Lakehead. Material on the activities of the Industrial Workers of the World, Communist Party of Canada, and Finnish Organization of Canada in the 1920s is particularly valuable, connecting the histories and trajectories of once-influential working-class institutions.

The book's principal weakness is its analytical reliance on a theme that has been well-trodden by other historians of Canadian labour and the left: solidarity and fragmentation. While this theme may accurately describe the ebbs and flows of left-wing organization in the region, it makes it difficult to distinguish the history of the Lakehead from developments elsewhere. At times, the book seems to follow a familiar national narrative, interspersed with local detail, rather than striving for a narrative rooted in local and regional events. For example, discussion of the pre-1914 Socialist Party of Canada and Social Democratic Party, the Great War, and the Winnipeg General Strike are adorned with references to the Lakehead, rather than rigorously interrogated for local and regional meaning. This inclination toward a national narrative is particularly striking with respect to the One Big Union, which was influential among loggers in the region and which arguably suffered its greatest internal setback during a 1920 convention at Port Arthur. The latter event is given relatively scant attention in the book. There are other episodes where the reader is left wanting more, for example, in Beaulieu's treatment of a 1909 freight handlers' strike, a 1929 lumberworkers' strike, and violent demonstrations of the unemployed in the 1930s. Each of these episodes has the potential to ground a book that spans several decades and myriad organizations, personalities, and factions.

Labour at the Lakehead is strongest in the latter chapters, particularly those focused on the Communist Party of Canada and the role of Finns and Ukrainians in ethnic federations of the party. In this respect, Beaulieu provides a valuable, original regional case study that complements and builds upon previous works by Rodney, Angus, Manley, and Radforth. It strengthens our understanding of the dynamic ways in which union organizers and Communists sunk roots in immigrant communities, particularly those existing in resource hinterlands such as the Lakehead, and how these ethnic loyalties intersected and shaped

the class experience, forging solidarity among group members while simultaneously contributing to conflict with workers of other ethnic groups as well as with the national leadership of organizations such as the Communist Party. According to Beaulieu, “each ethnic group, in the relative ‘privacy’ of its language, was likely to develop its own distinctive vocabulary of socialism” (p. 7). Indeed, by the late 1920s, Finns would account for roughly 60 per cent of the Communist Party’s 4000 members; the party leadership “almost obsessively began focusing on increasing the total number of English-speaking members” (pp. 125, 133). Rich detail on Finnish leaders such as Alf Hautamäki, as well as conflict between ‘red’ and ‘white’ Finns in Northwestern Ontario, reveals the explanatory potential of a narrative that combines rigorous empirical research with a theory connecting ethnicity and class.

Alongside the focus on unions and political parties, Beaulieu paints a picture of the rich cultural milieu nurtured by Finns, Ukrainians, and Anglo-Canadian socialists at Port Arthur and Fort William and in more remote logging and mining camps. This milieu included vibrant union and community halls, active child and youth organizations, annual May Day parades and demonstrations, summer camps, restaurants and social services for group members, and reading circles, mass meetings, and similar educational events. The Finnish Organization of Canada “provided a cultural, social, and often economic centre for Finnish Canadians” (p. 143). However, for several thousand of these Finnish workers, setbacks in union and party organization, combined with repression at the hands of employers and police, spurred a search for more utopian alternatives. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Lakehead would witness a mass migration of Finns to the autonomous socialist republic of Keralia, a process driven “perhaps in equal parts by cultural nostalgia, a utopian impulse to finally live in a socialist society, and a sharp sense of alienation from a rejecting and unemployment-ridden Canadian society” (p. 169). For other Finnish and non-Finnish workers, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was emerging as “the socialist political party of choice” by the 1930s (p. 206).

In sum, *Labour at the Lakehead* is a valuable study that enriches our understanding of ethnicity, labour, and the left in Canada and Northwestern Ontario during this important period. Notwithstanding its limitations, Beaulieu has provided a book that connects the disparate trajectories of once-vital institutions of the working class, in a phenomenon he aptly describes in the conclusion: “the unique symbiosis of Communists and Wobblies at the Lakehead – the inadvertent, often explosive yet paradoxically functional unity of seeming opposites that make this region such as fascinating and puzzling zone for the left” (p. 201).

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BIANCHI, Serge (dir.) — *Héros et héroïnes de la Révolution française*, Paris, Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2012, 509 p.

L'héroïsme sous la Révolution française est un vaste sujet dont il peut être difficile de saisir toutes les nuances. Entre grands hommes, héros et martyrs, les définitions varient, même si tous ces termes se sont côtoyés et furent même parfois attribués simultanément à un personnage. La période révolutionnaire fut à la fois prompte à proclamer de nouveaux héros qui pouvaient servir de modèles à l'ensemble de la France de par leur courage et leur