

A note must be added about the sources used in the writing of this book. Political papers, government documents and reports, and newspaper accounts were used very extensively. It is therefore hardly surprising that the political and promotional dimension receives most attention. Company minute books, stock records, legal files and correspondence apparently suffered the fate common to the records of other companies taken over by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and are therefore no longer available for historical research. The banks with whom the promoters and politicians had extensive dealings also seem unwilling or unable to reveal anything of their clients' affairs. The rural people whose communities the railway served have left few records, and we are left with a record of affairs as they were perceived by the promoters and politicians. Professor Young has used his available sources very well, but the speeches and letters of politicians and the scribbles of newspapermen are rarely impeccable historical sources. It is unfortunate that they could not be checked against other relevant source materials. The fault, however, does not lie with Professor Young. He has given an excellent account of promoters and politicians in action in Quebec.

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DAVID J. BERCUSON. — *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978. Pp. xvii, 300.

Canadian academics — whether they know it or not — have a great deal riding on the success of this book. As an admirable experiment McGraw-Hill Ryerson decided to publish two editions of the book — one for a popular audience, at what is known in the business as a long discount, to encourage general book stores to handle it, and the other for a more scholarly audience, at the usual short discount which means that ordinarily only university or specialised book stores would stock it. Except for the price — \$12.95 for the hard-cover trade edition, and \$6.95 for the soft-cover college edition — the two editions are identical.

Should this marketing strategy succeed, and the trade edition score respectable sales, then a whole new reading audience might be opened up for Canadian academics. Should other publishers emulate McGraw-Hill Ryerson, for the first time scholarly books might become readily accessible to much of the Canadian book-buying public.

To introduce this merchandising innovation no better book could have been chosen than David Bercuson's *Fools and Wise Men*. It is a finely crafted work, sensitively written, telling a compelling — and extremely important — story in a way designed to appeal to a large audience. Avoiding the traditional academic pitfalls of becoming bogged down in details and long, dreary footnotes, Bercuson graphically describes the conditions and milieu which both created and destroyed the OBU. We can almost hear the plaintive cries of the oppressed and cowed immigrants, the confused babble of various syndicalists and socialists, and the fiery, revolutionary clarions of Western loggers and coal-miners, the three key elements of the OBU.

If Canada, as Margaret Atwood and others keep telling us, is a nation of victims, then the history of the OBU is the quintessential Canadian tale. No group was more consistently victimized and made up of such "losers" as the OBU. The horror of their lives is poignantly illustrated by Bercuson. The squalid housing,

starvation wages, abominable working conditions, coupled with the everpresent threat of mutilation, or even sudden death in the mines and logging camps all combined to produce in the West in the immediate post World War I period Canada's most militant labour movement. Men and women who had escaped to Canada to realize their dream of freedom from want and oppression found they had escaped neither. Disillusioned, heartbroken, bitter, with little to lose, they were ripe for the root and branch rhetoric of such OBU orators as R.B. Russell and William Pritchard.

Launched at undoubtedly the most radical union convention in Canadian history, the Western Labor Conference in Calgary in March of 1919, at which resolutions calling for the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a full proletarian dictatorship were virtually unanimously adopted, the OBU came into being at just about the time the Canadian government was sending in troops and machine guns to put down the Winnipeg General Strike. And even though the OBU had not yet officially come into existence, the collapse of the strike ensured its destruction. As Bercuson argues, correctly I think, the Strike and the anti-Bolshevik feeling of the period "assured that the government would never allow the OBU to become a potent force in Canadian life" (p. 104).

More controversial is Bercuson's conclusion that the OBU was doomed because of its inherent inconsistencies and internal contradictions. He argues that its apparent opposition to industrial unionism, its pre-occupation with general strikes and its rejection of electoral politics were contrary to the best interests and wishes of its membership. The OBU, he states, might have survived "had it been a truer reflection of the needs and desires of western workers" (p. 262). And it would, he continues, have "shaken Canadian society to its very roots if it had given further form and direction" to its radicalism (p. 263).

It was precisely because of this, it seems to me, that it was doomed. It failed because it was not permitted to succeed. Success would have destroyed the type of Canada which government officials, businessmen and union leaders had a vested interest in preserving. It was not so much internal weaknesses and disension which undermined the OBU. It was the unholy alliance of government, business and labour which killed it. Even if the OBU had been united on its ends and means it would not have survived. Governments passed legislation restricting its activities; industry refused to bargain with it; and international unions raided it and made deals with employes to cripple it. Against such a combined opposition the OBU had no chance. By 1921, less than two years after its creation, it was already something of a fossil, and though it survived as a handful of small, relatively impotent unions in Winnipeg for the next thirty-five years, it was for all intents and purposes an irrelevant organization.

For historians of the Canadian West, the left and the labour movement, this is an indispensable book. But more than that; its subject matter and its readability should attract for *Fools and Wise Men* a wide readership. I can think of few better ways to introduce someone to the drama and colour which is Canadian history but which has too often been drained from our history books than by buying him or her a copy of this book — preferably *the trade edition!*

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