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LABOUR HISTORY PSA

JUNE, 1978

BULLETIN

CONTENTS

- * Introduction: A word from Frank Fuller
- * *The Land of Cain* by Phil Resnick, reviewed by John Church
- * Announcements
- * *The Bridge Came Tumblin' Down*, a song by Stompin' Tom Connors
- * *High Steel: The Second Narrows Bridge*, lesson plan by Cheryl Seaman
- * A sneak preview of the September issue of *Labour History*

Introduction

The school year is about over and most of us will be soon leaving for a well-earned holiday. With this year-end issue of a "mini-newsletter", we are initiating a new way of communicating with and increasing the service to the P.S.A. membership.

Tom Morton is gathering and preparing this issue, which includes a lesson plan and book review. Next year we are planning three regular issues of our journal. This first will come out in September. Between each journal we will send out a bulletin or newsletter with material which we hope will be both informative and useful to you as a teacher.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Fuller,
President

Review

Resnick, Philip. *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975*, Vancouver, New Star Books, 1972, 297 pp., \$6.50, paperback.

This Marxist interpretation of development of nationalism in both English Canada and Quebec will undoubtedly confound and annoy many readers, though Resnick, Montreal-born, marshalls compelling arguments to support his thesis.

Neither class awareness nor national consciousness existed strongly in Anglophone Canada when Cartier's Cain became a "colony" of United States' imperialism at the end of World War II. In the period, 1945 to 1965, only a few members of the "big bourgeoisie" - the Walter Gordons, the George Drews, the James Coynes, the Vincent Masseys - resisted the multi-nationalist and the continentalist pressures. In contrast, the emergence of the Quebec nationalism occurred during the 1950's and the 1960's. This striving to throw off a colonial status was a petit bourgeois phenomenon.

According to Resnick, the flowering of nationalism in English Canada was a petit bourgeois phenomenon, associated with the emergence of a new group of salaried professionals, part-

icularly in the public sector. This development coincided with the waning of U.S. military power and economic and political influence in the period since 1965. With this change has come a recognition on the part of many anglophones that Quebec should be and must be entitled to decide its own future.

Several references are made to organized labour: the lack of class consciousness among English Canadian workers; the labour movement in Quebec, which by 1970 had forged "its militancy ... to a quasi-Marxist type of analysis quite unique on the North American continent."

True to his Marxist perspective, Resnick states that in both Quebec and English Canada, nationalism has produced a more radical form of class politics. Only a socialist Canada will survive on a continent shared with Quebec and the United States. "English Canada will be socialist, or it will have no reason to exist."

One is reminded of Francis Bacon's veritable maxim: "read not to believe, but to weigh and to consider." For many readers, including this reviewer, a product of a capitalist and multi-nationalist educational and literary environment, Resnick provides much "to weigh and consider."

John S. Church

LABOUR STRUGGLES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA National Study Conference

AUGUST 22 - 28, 1978

CULTUS LAKE UNITED CHURCH CAMP, CHILLIWACK

COST: \$50.00 per person

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High Steel: the 2nd narrows bridge

by CHERYL SEAMAN

One of the most exciting units I have taught on Canadian working class history focussed on the building of the Second Narrows Bridge in Vancouver in 1958. I wanted the children to learn about the nature of work on high steel, about the issue of safety on the job, and about strikes.

First, we watched "High Steel", a National Film Board production about the Mohawk Indians, who are well-known for their skills on the narrow beams hundreds of feet in the air. The film portrays the skill and danger involved in this work very well. It is also valuable because it is one of the few media items I have seen which depicts Native Indians as human beings who work, sleep, eat and play.

An account of the collapse of the Second Narrows Bridge is given in "Disaster: Tales of Heroism and Hardship in the Face of Catastrophe" by T.W. Paterson. This could be read to or by older children - I paraphrased it and showed the photographs to my primary class. Paterson describes the ordeal of individual workers:

"Frantically he struggled in the surging blackness, fingers clawing for a hold, until he was able to poke his head through a diagonal."

And a narrative:

"While I was waiting, I could feel the water rising fast. The water was around my shoulders when the cutting torch came. I was afraid I would drown. It was a living hell."

And, finally, a description of the rescue operation:

"...police and pleasure craft of every description raced to the scene to recover smashed men from the debris. Hours passed, the number of rescue vessels growing to

sixty-four as, ashore, police and construction officials laboured on a list of those working on the span when it fell. Skin divers, their rubber suits almost melting them in a record 81 degree heat, plunged again and again into the hazardous eight mile an hour current."

For the lesson, I also used photographs from the *Urban Reader*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January - February, 1976.

"The Bridge Came Tumblin' Down" by Stompin' Tom Connors tells the story in six verses, and the children in my class hung on every word. Though I intended to play the song a few times for listening, they requested it continually until they had learned every word. Several tell me they sing it to their parents when they drive over the Second Narrows Bridge.



The children were very moved by the danger on the job and by the death of twenty-three men (18 during the collapse, four in earlier mishaps, and one skin diver who died searching for bodies). We had lively discussions about safety conditions on work sites (many knew of incidents at their parents' workplace), on strikes, about whether or not they would like this type of work, and, of course, whether or not women could do the work.

Marjaleena Repo, who gave me the idea for this unit, took her children to the bridge. From underneath you can get a

High Steel/cont'd

good sense of the enormity of the structure. At the car level there is a plaque listing the names of the 23 men who died.

There are survivors of this collapse. An excellent project would be to have the children interview them.

RESOURCE MATERIAL USED

1. *Disaster: Tales of Heroism and Hardship in the Face of Catastrophe*, T.W. Paterson. Solitaire Publications, Box 4092, Postal Station "A", Victoria, B.C.
2. *My Stompin' Grounds, "Stompin'"* Tom Connors. Boot Records Ltd., P.O. Box 331, Postal Station "U", Toronto, Ont. Distributed by London Records.
3. *Singin' About Us*, Bob Davies, editor. James Lorimer & Co., 35 Britain Street, Toronto, Ont.
4. *Urban Reader*, Vol. 4; No. 1, January - February, 1976. Social Planning Department, Vancouver City Hall, 453 West 12th Ave., Vancouver, V5Y 1V4. This issue contains excellent historical photos with directions for mail order copies.



Sneak Preview

To whet your appetites, here are some of the items you can look forward to in the September issue of *Labour History*, the P.S.A. journal.

- * Interview with Syd Thompson, President of local 1-217 of the International Woodworkers of America. Mr. Thompson came to B.C. in 1932 from Ontario and was unemployed until 1940 when he joined the army. He was involved in many of the activities organized by unemployed people during the "hungry thirties", including the On-To-Ottawa Trek in 1935. He lived and worked in relief camps all across Canada.
- * Recollections of the Regina Riot, 1935 by a woman who lived in Regina when the "Trekking" arrived on their way to Ottawa.
- * Book Reviews: *Right Hand, Left Hand* by Dorothy Livesay; *The Dirty Thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression* edited by Michiel Horn; *Recollections of the On-To-Ottawa Trek* by Ron Liversedge, edited by Victor Hoar.
- * Bibliography of related materials
- * Lesson Plan
- * And much, much more!