

Culture



Helen BUCKLEY, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. 209 pages, \$34.95 (cloth)

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Volume 12, numéro 2, 1992

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081004ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081004ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)

2563-710X (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Fisher, A. (1992). Compte rendu de [Helen BUCKLEY, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. 209 pages, \$34.95 (cloth)]. *Culture*, 12(2), 95–96. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081004ar>

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Helen BUCKLEY, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. 209 pages, \$34.95 (cloth).

By A.D. Fisher

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Buckley's book is about Indian policy in Canada. It is written for the non-specialist. It is designed to give both temporal and topical dimensions to federal Indian policy and its effect on Treaty Indians from the prairies. Buckley's goal is to point to where Canadian government policy went wrong and to discuss what the effects of these failures have been. These include dependence by Indians on the federal government and the increases in social welfare payments. These are the source of the lack of purpose in Indian lives and their lack of jobs (pp. 7-8; 140-141). She also sees "a hundred years of exclusion" as another piece of federal program failure (p. 142).

The book is divided into six chapters. An introductory chapter, two historical chapters, two chapters on programs and prospects and a concluding chapter in which she says, "self-government is the change that would break the pattern" (p. 167).

The break will come when Indian nations confront the federal government — especially the departments of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Supply and Services Canada, and Treasury Board — and force a new relationship out of them. As Buckley says, "the government hangs on to its powers, lacking a rationale or sense of direction, and by its very presence blocks the key change that is needed if solutions are to emerge" (p. 164). From the political perspective the rationale of government is to remain in power. For the bureaucrat direction is unimportant as long as he/she retains control. It is hard to imagine *any* Canadian government giving a bunch of Indians "self-government" so that they might break the political or bureaucratic pattern. The book reports: "band councils are just fancy cheque writers for the federal government," and ". . . we are more truly a branch office of the Indian Affairs Department than we are a tribal government" (p. 141) to show how government has forestalled Indian self-government so far. The Minister says that in 1990-91 \$4 billion dollars was spent by INAC on Indians (p. 167), but most of it didn't hit the reserve targets. It was used up managing and planning Indian lives. The rest was run through the cheque writers of Band

Councils and doled out in band-aid programs. Self-government that would break the pattern means taking the \$4 billion out of the hands of the Minister and Treasury Board and putting it into Indian hands.

Buckley doesn't discuss the implications or the politics of such a key change. She discusses cost benefits, the relationship of Indian claims to change, and benefits to Canadian society from change (pp. 171-173). This all seems slightly off the mark to me. I would have liked to have seen the task(s) of future Indian beneficiaries more clearly.

However, clarity is not *Wooden Ploughs to Welfare's* strong suit. For example, the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry is used to illustrate a "deep well of good-will" in the Canadian population. The idea is that Canadians accepted the findings of "spokesperson" Justice Berger with good will. There is nothing about the political and legal background of the earlier caveat victory by the Dene. There is nothing about the true spokespersons who were in the Dene communities nor about Berger's courage to hear them. The important story of the Pipeline Inquiry was in the Mackenzie Valley, not in Canadian public opinion. Confusion is added to this discussion of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry by referring to it as the "Alaska pipeline" (pp. 117, 128), footnoting it as the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (pp. 117, 184), and then indexing it as both (pp. 203, 207).

There are other errors and confusions. Peigan is spelled "Piegan". Conversely, the big, faded, white roadside sign on the Peigan Reserve at Brockett says "Peigan Indian Nation." On the map (p. x) there are four dots locating Indian reserves in southwestern Alberta. Two of these are labeled "Blackfoot" and two "Piegan." There are only two Indian reserves in southwestern Alberta, the Blood Reserve and the Peigan Reserve (unless you count the Timber Leases). On the map, the Bloods are located just southeast of Calgary where the Blackfoot Reserve is.

Sticking with southern Alberta a little longer, Buckley says that the Bloods have several enterprises, ". . . among them a factory that has made prefabricated homes for twenty years, and which won the housing contract for the Calgary Olympic" (p. 131). Kainai Industries DID NOT win the contract. ATCO "won" the contract. ATCO not only got the contract to build temporary buildings for the Olympic, after the Games they sold the Olympic buildings and wrecked Kainai Industries' market for two more years!

I was sorry to see that Buckley missed Joan Ryan's *Wall of Words: The Betrayal of the Urban Indian* (Peter Martin, 1978), Arthur K. Davis' *Edging into the Mainstream: Urban Indians in Saskatchewan* (Western Washington State College, 1967), Peter Douglas Elias' *Metropolis and Hinterland in Northern Manitoba* (Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 1975), and Peter Worsely's "Bureaucracy and Decolonization: Democracy from the Top" (1965).

One statement is clearly wrong. When discussing the prairie Indians struggle against the Department's plan for settling them on reserves Buckley says, "on the other side, the conquered people started from a position of weakness" (p. 39). None of the prairie Indian peoples were ever conquered or defeated. Some Indian and Metis *individuals* were jailed and some were executed, but most of the Indian peoples of the now-prairie provinces were not involved in the 1885 rebellion, and none of them, as peoples, were conquered. Indians sometimes feel that the whitemen *think* that the Indian nations are conquered peoples, but *they* know they are not. The Bloods are a proud people, not a conquered people. When they again have self-government, when they have an independent fiscal relationship to INAC, when they settle "the Big Claim", they will not be getting charity as a defeated people. The closest they will come to defeat might well be in the future, at their own hands; if they cannot create a sober and caring community, educate their children, and find them jobs. This point should be clear, the prairie peoples have not been victims of conquest but the objects of colonization. There's a big difference.

Gavin SMITH, *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. 293 pages, \$38.00 (cloth).

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The issue of history, culture and consciousness is of growing concern in studies on agrarian conflicts. Gavin Smith's *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru* throws new light on this question and successfully demonstrates the value of taking local culture and initiatives as the starting points for an understanding of rural conflict and political practice among peasants.

Focusing on the case study of Huasicancha, a Peruvian highland community, Smith explores the connection existing between the political mobilization of peasants and their daily struggle for a livelihood. In particular, he examines the ways in which the specificity of local historical experience combined with the properties of domestic production determine the form of Andean resistance. Professor Smith locates political engagement in contentiousness which gives rise to a heightened internal discourse centered around the peasantry's perpetual need for land.

In this study the notion of culture and its relation to rebellion are re-examined. Smith calls for a recognition of the specificity of local culture and its role in feeding an ideology of opposition to a dominant order. Culture undergoes constant transformation. It is never fully formed but comes into being at historically specific times to turn into an instrument for action. Culture, in this sense, is often oppositional. It is conceived as a space which coalesces around the structural requirements of certain forms of production and the historical experience of political engagement. The momentum generated within that space, where memory is transformed into consciousness through the dynamic properties inherent in relations of production, becomes the source of meaning for political engagement. The author shows that oppositional culture is not distinct from class consciousness, but an expression of it. Smith expresses this insight when he states "an understanding of the specificity of cultures of opposition is an essential part of class analysis" (p 236).

Smith's approach thus reflects the intrinsic connection between culture and consciousness. These are analytically inseparable concepts which are closely related to contemporary practices and past experiences. The historical continuity of Huasicancha as a distinct social and cultural unit is drawn from its active tradition of resistance. The peasants' past history of engagement in local insurgency has provided them with their own notion of place in the historical process. This historical engagement is not just recorded in memory, but it also has practical uses. It provides native people with crucial material and personal resources fundamentally linked to their daily struggle for a livelihood.

Consequently, this work shows that past political experience acts as an indigenous mode of consciousness. The past sheds meaning on the ways people engage in political activity. It clarifies where people stand vis-à-vis their fellow members and with respect to national and global power structures