

A Personal Tribute

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Joseph Hugh Tuck, 1929-86:

A Personal Tribute

ON SEPTEMBER 16, 1986 Memorial University's history department lost its charter labour historian when Hugh Tuck died at the age of 57. The loss to his colleagues, to his discipline, and to his community is considerable, but the full extent can only be measured when those who had contact with him are able to determine for themselves the scope of his contribution.

A native of Niagara Falls, Ontario, and the son of a struggling shopkeeper who also died prematurely, Hugh's first venture into post-secondary education as an engineering student at Queen's was cut short by a lack of interest, but the

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experience left him with an appreciation for matters technical and mechanical as well as a contempt for those who enjoyed the benefits of privilege which that university symbolized in the early 1950s. Both sentiments shaped his later interests and attitudes.

Equally influential in moulding Hugh Tuck's perspective on the world around him were the years he spent as a production chemist for Cyanamid, Canada. While he acquired an appreciation for accuracy and precision, the plant also taught him the implications of mass industrialization known only to those who have experienced it first hand. While the job may have been "clean" and not as physically demanding as some, it still took its toll on the spirits of those who worked there because it was boring and yet rigorous because of the deadlines imposed by those "above" who had neither knowledge of nor appreciation for what others were doing.

During leisure time outside the plant Hugh competed internationally as a designer of gas-powered model airplanes and he pampered a series of British sports cars he acquired, but he was not content so he returned to university, this time to Sir George Williams in Montreal to study history. He found both the discipline and institution more in keeping with his temperament.

As a late arrival to historical study his dedication was that of a convert with the result that he moved from strength to strength: he added an M.A. from Dalhousie to his bachelor's degree, and from there he proceeded to the University of Western Ontario for doctoral studies. In London he joined the enthusiastic and talented stable of graduate students fortunate to be studying under the caring direction of Professor D.G. Kerr. There Hugh honed his skills as a researcher and writer, while acquiring an appreciation for high standards of scholarship and an interest in labour relations on Canada's railways, a subject which dominated his scholarly work for most of his career.

Like so many new scholars of the period, Hugh completed his Ph.D. dissertation on unions in the railway running trades before World War I while preparing lectures and grading mountains of undergraduate exams and papers. Despite the fact that a decade has passed since it was completed, the work stands alone in the field, and the frequency with which it has been cited by those working on related subjects shows that its importance will endure. The same high quality holds true for his published work (a list is appended) which shows his grasp of the complicated nature of the industrial relations process in Canada, no doubt derived in part from his lengthy personal experience in industry. Hugh was eager to shed his teaching and administrative responsibilities next year to return to a manuscript in progress, but it is a work which we shall never see.

While Hugh's field of study, labour and working-class history, was the leading edge of the profession when he came to Memorial in 1970 because its practitioners were so few in number, because of his age he identified himself with an older generation of scholars. As a consequence he avoided first-name familiarity with students, preferring to gain their respect through the time and

effort he devoted to their written work. He also shunned publicity and self-promotion, believing that one's work should stand on its own merits, and that it did not need to be recycled repeatedly for maximum exposure.

Two other characteristics identified him with an earlier variety of academic. The first was his belief that since history involved the total human experience, historians should read as widely as possible. Consequently, his personal library was as eclectic as any I have seen with hundreds of volumes and periodicals on subjects ranging from science fiction through photography, classical music, jazz, woodworking, and gardening to extremist movements in Canada and the United States, and he drew extensively from these to spice his conversations and lectures.

His second link with his predecessors was his sincere commitment to his adopted community which he expressed in a variety of ways over sixteen years. When necessity demanded, he participated actively in reform politics or he worked behind the scenes for organizations dedicated to civic improvement. However, his most lasting contribution to St. John's was in the less frantic world of horticulture. The expertise he developed through research and experience was truly awesome, and because of his willingness to share knowledge, publications, and plant stock he touched a group which was dedicated to making this city greener and more beautiful. The tributes which were voiced after Hugh's death showed the depth of their loss. Meanwhile, as his colleagues struggle with stopgap measures to fill the void which he left with his passing they are also continually reminded of his contribution and the fact that around him was created a centre of excellence in Canadian labour and working-class studies which attempts to perpetuate the principles he espoused.

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Significant Publications

- "Union Authority, Corporate Obstinacy and the Grand Trunk Strike of 1910," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1976, 175-92.
- "W.C. Van Horne and the 'Foreign Emissaries': the CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (1980), 73-87.
- "Canadian Railways and the Unions in the Running Trades, 1865-1914," *Relations Industrielles*, 36 (1981), 106-31.
- "The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (1981), 63-88.
- "Cape Breton: History and Tradition," *Acadiensis*, 11 (1982), 109-17.