

RICHARD ALLEN, ed. — *The Social Gospel in Canada*. Ottawa; National Museum of Man, Mercury Series No. 9, 1976.

The organization of an academic conference devoted to the examination of a single theme is a difficult task. It is usually impossible to obtain a number of speakers whose opinions about the central subject are sufficiently similar to give the assembly its necessary thematic unity. When the papers presented to the conference are later published, this difficulty becomes more obvious. The volume which emerges reads like the report of the apocryphal group of blind men who sought to describe an elephant after each of them had handled only one part of its anatomy. Such is the case with *The Social Gospel in Canada*, a collection of excellent papers presented to an inter-disciplinary conference on that subject held in 1973 at the University of Regina.

The collection is edited and introduced by Richard Allen, whose *Social Passion* has become the standard historical treatment of the Social Gospel in Canada. In his opening selection "The Background of the Social Gospel in Canada" Professor Allen defines the Social Gospel as "primarily a religious and intellectual movement" rather than as the product of economic or social factors. Rather than a religious response to industrialism, urbanization and immigration, he sees the Social Gospel as the end product of an evolving evangelical activist tradition which coincided with the problems of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canada instead of being caused by them. Having established this definition, however, Professor Allen freely confesses that some of his contributors "have used the term in a broader Christian and secular sense" than he himself does.

This becomes evident in the remaining two parts of the book, entitled "Living History" and "Contemporary Scholarship". It is the former that is the conference's and thus the book's most important contribution, for it consists of papers presented by five active participants in Social Gospel inspired reform. Only one of these contributors — J. King Gordon — is generally known. The others were spear carriers who performed an important service without achieving wide recognition. The papers of Beatrice Brigden, Fred Tipping, Ethel Dodds Parker and Harold T. Allen demonstrate first hand the variety of reform causes which could claim a common religious root. They also illustrate a point which Richard Allen has made effectively in *The Social Passion*, that the Social Gospel Movement encompassed a wide spectrum of political viewpoints. The social democratic left is somewhat over-represented here, but Ethel Parker provides insights into the more conservative side of the Social Gospel, particularly prevalent in the Presbyterian Church.

The five papers also give the reader an idea as to the disagreement which existed over how much was "Gospel" and how much "Social". While Ethel Parker maintains that she and her fellow settlement house workers "knew we were involved in an explicitly religious activity," Fred Tipping argues that many Social Gospellers "would have laughed to be described as such" and that he personally "was becoming more and more agnostic."

One clear theme does emerge from "Living History" however, that there was tremendous tension *within* the Protestant churches with regard to social activism. Wealthy members of his congregation tried to force Harold Allen from his pulpit because of his C.C.F. politics, and J. King Gordon found out what happened to theology instructors who challenged capitalist economic orthodoxy. Ethel Parker describes the "smouldering conflict" within the Presbyterian Church over control of its settlement houses while Beatrice Brigden remembers the hostile atmosphere of the Manitoba Methodist Conference during the Winnipeg General Strike. As Harold Allen concludes, for the Social Gospel "victory was no more complete within the church than in the social arena itself."

One reason why complete victory eluded the Social Gospellers is unconsciously presented in these papers — the fact that their backgrounds and their opinions were overwhelmingly bourgeois. With the exception of Fred Tipping, the reformers of *The Social Gospel in Canada* all came from middle class families active in Methodism or Presbyterianism. This created a gulf between themselves and the working class they wanted so earnestly to help, a gulf they were never able to cross. Beatrice Brigden, for example, concludes her presentation by stating proudly that she has never been found in “a beer parlour, a cocktail lounge, in a pool room or a dance hall, at a hockey match or a baseball game” — the very places the people she wanted to save probably frequented! Harold Allen says nothing about improving the living or working conditions of the “migrant type” farm workers he encountered at Chilliwack, B.C. Instead he reports that when he heard that “a cheap brothel” had been set up near the workers’ camp, he succeeded in having “the authorities” shut down what was probably the men’s principal source of recreation!

Although the concluding section “Contemporary Scholarship” lacks the fascination of “Living History,” the papers are useful and competent. Marilyn Barber outlines the work of Protestant Churches among East-European immigrants, pointing to the role the Social Gospel played in encouraging the churches to take up the task of assimilation. J.R. Kidd’s “The Social Gospel and Adult Education” speculates about a relationship between the two, without demonstrating that it actually existed. Stewart Crysedale contends that the Social Gospel “eludes a simple and inclusive definition” and sees it instead as a “quest for a modern ideology” to replace nineteenth century individualism. The final two selections take a more theological perspective. Benjamin G. Smillie offers a “theological critique” of the Social Gospel, concluding that the Social Gospellers failures outweigh their successes, while Roger Hutchinson places “The Canadian Social Gospel in the Context of Christian Social Ethics” using the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order as the centre of his discussion.

The Social Gospel in Canada does not pretend to provide a comprehensive history of the Social Gospel movement in Canada, nor to say the last word on the relationship of the Social Gospel to social reform. Instead it serves the important and useful function of demonstrating the complex diversity which existed within the movement itself.

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PAUL MACEWAN. — *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton*. Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert and Company, 1976.

Economic conditions in Cape Breton today present a bleak picture; the island’s future seems once more to hang on the decisions of distant governments and financiers. For more than fifty years the miners and steelworkers of Cape Breton have lived with the poverty, exploitation, unemployment and uncertainty created by the uneven development of industrial capitalism in Canada. But Cape Bretoners have never been willing victims, and the history of industrial Cape Breton is one of considerable struggle, sacrifice and achievement. This history is the theme of Paul MacEwan’s *Miners and Steelworkers*.