worker as a free agent militated strongly against effeminizing him by legislating state protection. The developing discourse of legislative and judicial protection for irrational, unfree agents — women and children in factories and (in the American context and to a limited extent) slaves — only served to reinforce the resistance to positive change for white males. These men, striving for political equality and reluctant to undercut their case, also tended to cling to the myth of free agency.

These powerful impediments were eroded only very gradually, as part of the broader transition in thinking that moved away from a focus on moral failure demanding individual solutions towards a diagnosis of intractable social problems requiring government intervention. Bronstein charts the early attempts from the 1830s of utilitarians like Edwin Chadwick to bring in no-fault workers’ compensation legislation; that of factory inspectors like Leonard Horner to recast male mill workers as deserving of protection; and the important breakthrough of the 1850 Mines Inspection Act, a weak measure but significant in that it introduced the notion of safety regulation and inspection into a male-dominated industry. Only in the 1870s, however, in the wake of the 1867 Reform Act that gave some working men the vote, were labour representatives in parliament with the support of the newly formed Trades Union Congress able to put the issue of no-fault compensation squarely on the parliamentary agenda. The final outcome, the Employers’ Liability Act of 1880, was a temporary, compromise measure, pushed through by Gladstone’s government in the face of much parliamentary opposition and employer hostility.

Bronstein is a surefooted guide through all of this. Her detailed contrasts with the somewhat different and delayed pattern of response in America provide very useful clarity and perspective; it is a pity she has failed to do the same for continental Europe, especially as she makes repeated comparative reference to (but gives no information about) the no-fault models of compensation to be found there at an earlier date. The securing of a more predictable workers’ compensation scheme was undeniably a good thing, but Bronstein’s final thoughts, on the downside to such progress, are underdeveloped and rather enigmatic, and some lengthier reflections on post-1880 developments in Britain and elsewhere would have been revealing. Yet, caveats aside, this is a well-researched, perceptive, fluent, and valuable contribution to the literature.

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As the importance of the Athabasca oil sands grows steadily in contemporary economic and political spheres, a growing number of focused, academic studies have emerged that examine this important resource. Developing Alberta’s Oil
Sands represents one of the more ambitious of these projects; it “attempt[s] to present the reader with a single-volume history” of the entirety of oil sands developments (p. xiv). Expanded and refined from the author’s PhD dissertation written while at the University of Ohio, the study provides a comprehensive political and economic discussion of oil sands development from rudimentary endeavours in the early twentieth century to the current slate of mega-projects. Paul Chastko examines the interplay between various states (Canadian, Albertan, and American), the oil industry, the scientific community, and the international petroleum market. What emerges is a valuable and easily accessible narrative of the sands’ development.

The first section, comprising three chapters and dealing with the period 1920–1945, discusses in detail the political and economic forces surrounding early attempts at development. Of particular importance are Dr. Karl Clark and Sidney Blair, the early mishaps of the various pilot plants, and the often-tumultuous federal-provincial relationship — all set against the backdrop of the provincial quest for control over natural resources. The second section, an expansive six chapters dealing with the post-1945 period, emphasizes the provincial government’s desire to see the sands commercialized, the nature of corporate investment in the oil sands, their role in the larger North American energy market, and their relationship with the emerging environmentalist movement. Particularly informative are the sections that discuss the sands in relation to the OPEC-driven price shocks and the massive commercialization of the sands that occurred under Premier Ralph Klein. Chastko’s work is noteworthy for its significant inclusion of the American influence in the saga of oil sands development — his study represents one of the first properly historicized works to incorporate American (and international) sources into the discussion. The reader occasionally wonders, however, whether this came at the expense of Canadian sources. Peter Lougheed’s papers, as well as those of some federal government departments, are noticeably absent, while an over-reliance on Hansard is apparent.

One of the main themes throughout the book pertains to the tepidity with which corporate entities approached investment in the sands. Chastko engages in lengthy discussions surrounding the “required conditions” for direct investment and the many handicaps that held back substantial investment. This focus on corporate attitudes towards the oil sands leads to certain problems, most noticeably in the last chapter examining environmental issues. Chastko demonstrates a visible sympathy towards the oil companies, especially in relation to the federal government. A worrisome tendency to frame environmental concerns as minor and misguided becomes apparent. As just one example, we can look at the sources examined. Chastko quotes a National Post article that laments “the remarkable ignorance about the importance of hydrocarbon energy to Canada’s economy” on the part of citizens evaluating the Kyoto Accord (p. 236), a Fraser Institute report, and an editorial by Gwyn Morgan (then CEO of Encana). A single document from David Suzuki is presented in response, while other organizations protesting oil sands development (like the Pembina Institute, Greenpeace, and the Sierra
Club) are ignored completely. Also absent from the final chapter is a serious discussion of the general desirability of exploiting the sands, the potential and massive consequences of development for the Athabasca River watershed (the third largest in North America), or the possibility of a Florida-sized strip mine in northern Alberta.

Another problem with the work deserves mention. The early sections, which discuss dominion-provincial relations, embryonic separation processes, and the Clark-Ells clash, do not contribute much to an understanding of early development of the oil sands above and beyond the discussion presented in Barry Ferguson’s *Athabasca Oil Sands: Northern Resource Exploration, 1875–1951* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1975). Similarly, the chapter analysing the “search for markets” under Premier Ernest C. Manning echoes the work of David Breen found in *Alberta’s Petroleum Industry and the Conservation Board* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1993). Finally, the discussion surrounding Lougheed and the Syncrude deal of the mid-1970s, while produced with the benefit of hindsight, does not move the discussion substantially beyond what is found in Larry Pratt’s *The Tar Sands: Syncrude and the Politics of Oil* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1976).

This tendency towards overlapping historiographical foci is not in itself overly problematic; indeed, it is symptomatic of the limited number of interpretive frameworks and methodologies that have been applied to the oil sands. *Developing the Oil Sands* is a solid study, nevertheless, and one of its most significant contributions lies in demonstrating the need for new approaches to the topic. The political and economic history of the oil sands is now (relatively) comprehensive. The topic begs for new questions. Labour history could potentially examine the massive influx of workers and their relationship with the large corporations and governments undertaking massive extraction projects. Cultural and social inquiries can examine the social relations shaped by the oil sands in Northern Alberta. Gender history can explore the interesting gendered understandings of, and relationships to, the oil sands. Ethnohistory can build on the growing number of studies that examine the relationship of local First Nations groups to the resource. Urban history can analyse and critique the transformations taking place in Fort McMurray and the problems of regional governance. Finally, environmental history can examine the relationship with the natural world and conservation schemes that have emerged during the oil sand’s development.

Chastko’s work stands as an important contribution to the historiography of the Alberta oil sands. It brings up to date the discussions of political and economic forces surrounding the resource’s development. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of academics and the curious public interested in economic development, Canadian politics, and the petroleum industry.

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