

with the unpaid homemaker and child-rearer than the low-paid industrial or retail worker. She raged when she was patronized as a woman, and one may suspect that patronizing is what she would have called the current policy of the Ontario Ministry of trying to persuade school boards to appoint more women principals.

There are some areas of her life that it might have been interesting to see further developed. She was brought up a Presbyterian, was early influenced by the Latter Day Saints, which gave her some trouble in politics, and taught United Church Sunday School. Professor Crowley begins each chapter with a marked passage from her bible, but gives us little more. She revered J.S. Woodsworth but there is no indication that her socialism derived from the social gospel. But Canada was a long way from secular in the twenties or even the thirties; religion was important to most people and could be a political minefield. Another was "temperance." Owen Sound, in a neighbouring constituency, was the last place in the province to abandon "local option." Another matter that might have been discussed was her health. Many of her ailments were quite specific, but modern medicine might throw more light on her collapses from overwork.

To succeed in a man's political world a woman had to be twice as good; a left politician in conservative Canada had to be twice as good; so a left-leaning female politician had to be four times as good! Despite her occasional tantrums and depressions, despite her verbal indiscretions and

her frequent debilitating bouts of ill health, Agnes Macphail made that level with capacity to spare. She will deserve another biography in thirty-five years, when there are new values and different questions. I hope Professor Crowley writes it and I hope he gets a better production job. Some of the misprints are quite fun, but, call me old-fashioned if you will, I would like to see "coop" revert back to being "co-op."

Tom Miller
Thunder Bay

Richard J. Altenbaugh. *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990. Pp. 339. \$39.95 U.S.

Although not without successes (e.g., the Pittston strike), it is clear that the American labour movement has felt beleaguered for the past decade or so. Ten years ago, for instance, unions represented almost one-fourth of the workers; today, they represent barely one-sixth. At least in part this has been a result of the rhetoric and policies of the Reagan Administration, which, while extolling the virtues of "the American worker," accelerated the erosion of organized labour's strength and influence. Indeed, what is particularly noticeable in Michael Moore's recent film, *Roger and Me*, is

the virtual absence of substantial resistance by national and local labour officials to the closing of General Motors factories in Flint and surrounding areas.

And yet during the last twenty years, as Clyde Barrow has pointed out, labour education has witnessed a renaissance of sorts, with the number of programmes and centres almost doubling. Moreover, labour studies within academic circles have also proliferated; the recent focus on the working conditions of teachers is indicative of this trend. While the combination of increased activity and scholarly attention to the education and plight of workers may seem "ironic" during the recent downturn in the fortunes of the American labour movement, it can also be viewed as in fact directly related to the setbacks experienced by organized labour.

The weakened state of the labour movement, along with its relatively conservative stance toward anti-war and civil rights movements and the exaggeration and caricature of this conservatism by the popular media, has helped to shape our view of workers in the United States. Consequently, it is perhaps difficult for many of us to imagine a time when labour colleges and extension programmes were initiated, not primarily for the purpose of assisting individual workers to better their own lot and in essence rise out of the working class, but rather to provide the labour movement with well-informed leaders and activists who would promote a radical transformation of the social order for the benefit of all workers. (One prominent participant, A.J. Muste,

called the schools and programmes "the instruments of a militant labor progressivism." Another supporter, Arthur Gleason, referred to them as providing "training in the science of reconstruction.") Similarly, it may be difficult to imagine the education of workers being organized not just by the institutional apparatuses of the university and the union, which is overwhelmingly the case now, but by grass-roots labour activists and their supporters. Historical work can help us with such "imaginings," that is, with helping to counteract our tendency to reify current social and educational realities. Relatedly, as Raymond Williams suggested, some of the best sources of counter-hegemonic practice may in fact be historical in nature.

In *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s*, Richard J. Altenbaugh provides rich documentation of three prominent American residential labour colleges of the twentieth century, educational institutions founded on the belief that workers could and should play a leading role in the promotion of economic and industrial democracy (i.e., the eradication of capitalism and the realization of the Cooperative Commonwealth). Despite the subtitle of Altenbaugh's book, this is not really an extensive investigation of all (or many) of the "labor colleges" that existed during this period. After all, as Richard Dwyer estimates, there were over 300 labour colleges and programmes of many different kinds during the post-World War I decades (e.g., party schools, trade union colleges, independent residential labour colleges, and university-affiliated summer

schools). *Education for Struggle* instead focuses primarily on the establishment and evolution of the Work People's College (1904-41) in Duluth, Minnesota; Brookwood Labor College (1921-37) in Katonah, New York; and Commonwealth College (1923-41) near Mena, Arkansas.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in studying past radical educational experiments of any kind, and grass-roots American radical activity in general, is the relative paucity of data available to the researcher. It is often necessary to rely heavily on the radical press, which Joseph Conlin contends is only a fully reliable source of information before the devastating split in socialist ranks in 1919-20. Fortunately, in the case of these three labour colleges, Altenbaugh was also able to make excellent use of important archival sources and interviews with several former participants, as well as being able to draw on previously written accounts of the schools. His treatments of the three colleges are a bit uneven, in the sense that he tells us much more about one of the schools (Brookwood) than the other two. But by weaving together discussions of all three, he helps to clarify the most important aspects of American workers' education during the 1920s and 1930s, including its intersection with the politics of the left and the politics of the labour movement, even if the histories of the individual schools themselves (especially Commonwealth and Work People's) remain somewhat sketchy.

The main title of the book is well chosen because it is evident that not only did the colleges educate their students for the "struggle" of fundamen-

tal social change, but throughout most of their histories they also engaged in a momentous "struggle" to survive. Exacerbating the typical fiscal and other practical problems that plague such educational experiments, two of the schools experienced debilitating doses of both internecine battles and harassment from a variety of outside forces. For example, Brookwood, because of its growing popularity and its critical stance toward the hierarchy and policies of the mainstream labour movement, was eventually undermined by the increasingly conservative (and defensive) leadership of the American Federation of Labor. Commonwealth experienced constant threats from investigating committees of the Arkansas state legislature and from groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the American Legion, which served to drain the money, energy, and interest of radical and liberal supporters. The third college (Work People's) seems to have suffered in large part from its close affiliation with a militant labour organization, the Industrial Workers of the World, that over the course of several decades experienced a precipitous decline within the ranks of labour. This served to isolate the Minnesota labour college from its Finnish radical constituency and to narrow considerably its base of support.

Altenbaugh is insightful in his analyses of the schools' histories, their relations with left and labour cultures, and what he refers to as the "ironic twists" of their efforts. Of the latter, the ones that make the most sense involve accusations by conservatives that the schools were dens of "red" iniquity, when in fact no "den" could

have held together all the squawking leftists involved for any significant length of time; and the relatively independent nature of the three schools assuring a high level of academic freedom at the same time that it contributed to their financial and political vulnerability. Less convincing of these "ironic twists" is Altenbaugh's point that the labour colleges were on the descent at the same time that industrial unionism was on the ascent. This may be less of an irony than an indication of the propensity of the American left to "rush to revolution" and downplay the long-term strategies of educational institutions. In addition, Altenbaugh suggests that "success...was never a serious prospect for either the socialist movement or the labor colleges." Presumably, this is because "bourgeois society expects ideological conformity and views non-conformists with suspicion, if not outright hostility" and because "the power of state coercion serves as the ultimate mechanism to ensure compliance with bourgeois hegemony" (pp. 265-66). This is an overly fatalistic argument that presupposes a reductive view of hegemony (which the author seems to argue against in his introductory chapter), a perspective of the state as absent of contradictions, and a kind of all-or-nothing conception of "success."

Some of the most interesting sections of the book focus on the teaching methods, curriculum, and social relationships of the three labour colleges. It is fascinating, for example, to learn about the various informational (background) and instrumental ("tool") courses offered by the colleges, as well as their use of drama,

field work, and informal programmes such as summer sessions, youth camps, correspondence courses, and even a "museum depicting the decline of capitalism" (p. 127) to supplement the formal curriculum. However, what is unclear is whether or not the schools truly "avoided traditional, authoritarian teaching methods and relied heavily on progressive, democratic pedagogy" (p. 4) because such lecturing and rote learning "is anathema to radicals" and participants recognized that it serves "as a form of oppression" (pp. 129-30). Available documentation may be part of the problem here but the history of leftist education is replete with examples of the transmission of radical tenets being viewed as acceptable educational practice. It would be surprising if none (or even so few) of the educators involved in these colleges, many of whom had no formal educational training, adopted a more traditional approach. Indeed, on occasion Altenbaugh provides hints of evidence that contradict his own conclusion. For example, when discussing briefly the many students at Work People's College and Brookwood for whom English had to be taught as a foreign language, he mentions that as a result "teaching methods were traditional or innovative, depending on the subject matter and the abilities of the students" (p. 131). Elsewhere he states that "many classes included lectures, like Brookwood's 'History of Civilization' course," quotes Fred Thompson of Work People's College as admitting that he lectured "every once in a while," and describes a dean of faculty at the same college as earning "a

reputation as a taskmaster in the classroom" (pp. 133-35 and 144).

The larger point here is that the book could have given more attention to another sense of "struggle," that is, the struggle to develop curriculum and pedagogy best suited for the labour colleges. Was it simply the case that "the ideology of the labor colleges and the backgrounds of the students dictated the classroom pedagogy" (p. 132)? Did students in fact respond in the actual classroom in the participatory way that was desired? If not, did teachers tend to abandon the discussion method for the lecture format? Were creative curriculum materials readily available for non-traditional teaching? In his recent study of the Highlander Folk School (1932-62), John Glen informs us that the staff perceived Commonwealth College as too doctrinaire; were there no arguments within Commonwealth itself (besides those that emerged during a student strike in 1932) over the educational approach that was taken? These are important questions, I think, that could be addressed more clearly.

But such concerns should not serve to obscure my high regard for *Education for Struggle*. It is a wonderfully detailed, insightful and well-written account of a significant chapter in the histories of American education and American radicalism. It reminds us that the current debates about the canon are hardly new, that more than half a century ago groups of American workers and their supporters established their own labour colleges, extension programmes, and other educational activities to contest those

knowledges and values of American culture (including public schooling) that serve to reproduce the inequities of working-class life. Although they may not have been successful in attaining their goals, their efforts help us to clarify the political nature of education and to imagine the possible. Finally, it is important to remember, as Altenbaugh argues, that "while the outcome was disappointing, the cause was not" (p. 268).

Kenneth Teitelbaum
State University of New York at
Binghamton

Donald G. Wetherell with Irene Kmet. *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945*. Regina and Edmonton: Canadian Plains Research Centre/Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, 1990. Pp. xxiv, 432, illus.

For several years Western Canadian historians have known that a book on the history of leisure in Alberta was in preparation. This is it, and a one-word reaction to it is—"satisfactory." Students of the history of education will not discover in it very much information on their own subject. Still, they should find *Useful Pleasures* stimulating and, well, useful.

The authors waste little time defining their subject. They seem comfortable with a description of