Neil J. Smelser. *Social Paralysis and Social Change: British Working-Class Education in the Nineteenth Century.* Berkeley: University of California Press and Russell Sage Foundation, 1991. Pp. xii, 499. $43.75 U.S.

This is an important book, especially for historians of education in Britain, or, more particularly, the United Kingdom. As indicated in its subtitle, the author focuses on the evolution of varying systems of elementary education not only in England and Wales (the more usual focus), but also in Ireland and Scotland. A comparative excursus is also made to New York, where similar problems found their own specific solution. The book is in fact a comparative study, seeking out and attempting explanations for similarities and differences in overall development. As such, it strikes a new chord in an area where much has been written in the past and more recently.

Neil Smelser leapt into prominence thirty years ago. What the dustcover of this book describes as his "classic work," *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution,* was published in 1959 and made an immediate impact. In that work, the author, primarily a sociologist, tackled a crucial historical topic, and with very fruitful results. The book was widely recognized as a pathbreaker, and Smelser was indeed mentioned as one of those from other disciplines who now enriched the new concern with social history in Eric Hobsbawm's famous *Daedalus* article of 1971 ("From Social History to the History of Society"). Smelser's "return," in this volume, to the same historical arena—Victorian Britain—must therefore be widely welcomed.

The present book has the distinction of being selected as a "Centennial Book" by the University of California Press. This means that it is one of "one hundred distinguished books" to be published between 1990 and 1995, each bearing this special imprint implying that each is an "exemplar of the Press's great publishing and bookmaking traditions" as the press enters its second century.

Smelser's new book is, then, heralded (as it were) with the sound of trumpets. This surely will reach across the Atlantic and help those, in these benighted islands, to understand a little better how it is that the objective of educational reform has been, historically, so difficult to accomplish, and why the struggle to free ourselves from long-standing, debilitating, even paralyzing fetters has proved so very hard.

Social Paralysis and Social Change, an ambiguous title if ever there was one, is deliberately chosen as appropriate to this challenging study. The author seems to be saying,

yes there has been social change, but only within certain very definite, indeed determining, parameters. The changes that took place, forced by external circumstances, have been minimalist at each stage—incremental only, above all undisturbing of traditional textures, institutions, interests. At the start, Smelser outlines the really important, indeed "primordial" features of British society, each of which profoundly impregnates the heavy soil where new initiatives must germinate. The generic meaning of the term "primordial" is given as "constituting the beginning or starting point, from which something else is derived or developed, on which something else depends" (in this case education). Such features refer to "fundamental cultural values and beliefs that are the first premises for organising and legitimising institutions, roles and behaviour" (p. 39).

The first of these is the imagery of hierarchy and class—"the most evident and powerful organising principle of nineteenth century British society was that of social hierarchy," writes Smelser, "a principle historically rooted in the monarchy, the feudal tradition, the peerage, and the agriculture squire system" (p. 41). Its corollary was segregation on class lines—a common and variable phenomenon, but one which "reached a kind of extreme in British society in the nineteenth century" (p. 45). The second primordial imagery is that of religion, seen as central to the life of society—the Church of England was "by law established" and intimately linked with the class hierarchy (p. 55), though Smelser emphasizes that this establishment was weakening through the nineteenth century. The third background phenomenon, he says, is that of regionalism, "with special reference to Ireland, Wales and Scotland" (nationality might be a better description in these cases), but Smelser also finds more specific regional differences (Cornwall, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland) which, however, are not explored.

These "primordial" parameters set the pattern for the analysis, though, of course, in a period of transition from oligarchic rule to representative democracy. There is, then, scope for the emergence of public opinion and so the need for political management of change. Within this general pattern, Smelser articulates a specific theoretical model—a "process-model" which focuses on the identification of "truce points and moments of change" (the titles of two early chapters). Truce points (generally, crucial decisions, or non-decisions) lead to new outcomes (expected and unexpected). Smelser examines closely the social, political, and religious movements leading to specific outcomes. The "model" is defined (in Chapter 2), but is not mechanistically adhered to. In fact, Smelser's analysis of developments in England hardly differs in any fundamental (or critical) way from generally received interpretations by educational historians of the past. It provides, however, a modern interpretation by a highly intelligent author closely familiar both with primary sources (Smelser claims to have read *all* Parliamentary papers produced in his period—a considerable feat!), and secondary sources (Smelser is clearly

familiar with, and cites, most historical interpretations published during this century, both as books and journal articles). In this sense this is certainly an authoritative work.

But Smelser's study differs from others in that, in a specific sense, it is more inclusive. The focus is specifically on the provision of elementary education *for* the working class by voluntary bodies and the state in the period from about 1800 to about 1870. This of course excludes any consideration of the universities, of endowed schools ("grammar" and "great"), and of private schooling for the various levels of the middle class. It also excludes serious consideration of the (sometimes heroic) efforts of members of the working class at self-education, while little is said about the whole field of private education as developed for and utilized by sections of the working class. But the advantage of this very specific focus is that it allows the author to carry through a comparative study of the religious issue (the main stumbling block for reformers) by focusing not only on England but also on the very different situation in Wales (where non-conformists greatly predominated by mid-late nineteenth century), Ireland (where the dominant religion was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic), and Scotland (where dramatic religious developments in mid-century complicated the scene). In each "region" a different "solution" was found appropriate, each specifically related to the circumstances of each country. Smelser probably makes his case about religion as a primordial feature, or "given"; through most of the nineteenth century no solution was possible in any region that was not acceptable to the most powerful religious interests. The fact that these influences waned from the 1860s appears as a condition for an acceptable solution—in England, at least.

There is, of course, no space here to follow through Smelser's interesting, and at times enthralling, analysis in any detail. As well as tackling the issue comparatively, with separate chapters devoted to each of the main countries, the author includes a useful chapter on "The Family Economy and Working Class Education," where he deals with the vital question of the child and youth labour market and its effect on educational provision, and another on "New Roles," where he uses his sociological expertise to explicate some of the problems arising from cross-class tensions and related traumas on the part of pupil-teachers, teachers generally, and inspectors. All this is illuminating and thought-provoking.

In his final chapter, "Conclusions," Smelser reiterates his "process-model," stressing the variety and complexity of educational change, its dialectical character, dispelling "any impression of linearity or directionality" (p. 348). He has little difficulty in rejecting functional theories to which he relates Marxist interpretations, though he does not carry this latter critique through in a consistent way (or so it seems to me). His conclusion is that the relation between the functional needs of an industrial economy and formal education is *indirect*, a conclusion with which I for one would strongly agree. The development of an urban industrial

economy, he says, "generates the kind of social problems that civic and political leaders *perceive* education to be able to ameliorate or solve" (p. 357). Hence the motivation for the attempts of social reformers and governments to establish school systems. More precise attention, he concludes, needs to be given to "the mechanisms by which formal education is determined by, or otherwise linked to, economic development" (p. 357). Finally, he expresses scepticism as to the effectiveness of interpretations based on the theory of the centrality of education in "nation building," recently strongly advocated.

British educational provision, Smelser concludes, was marked by "muddling through"—a characteristic, he suggests, of the country's style of political leadership and social change (p. 369). This process Smelser has precisely documented in this specific instance (elementary education). The term does not in itself explain much, he adds disarmingly. But the special pattern of primordialism in British society ensured that such an approach was the only one that was politically (or socially) viable. Reformers had to tread a delicate path "through a maze of primordial groups who regarded their own presence as inviolable and their interests as not to be violated." The aim was "to squeeze limited increments of social change by and through them without disturbing them" (p. 370). In the long run, Smelser claims, this policy "revolutionised the educational system." The road to that end was marked, however, "by a great deal of muddling through the obstacle course of primordialism and the sentiments of territoriality it nurtured."

These are the author's closing words. I hope I have said enough to show that this is an unusual book. Examining British developments, as he does, from another culture, Smelser is able to take an outside view denied to natives of these islands. That is why his analysis is so stimulating. The comparative approach also enhances the value of this study. British historians, sociologists, and policy analysts (a new breed) must be grateful for the close attention Smelser has given to unravelling the historical origins, and determinants, of a crucially important aspect of British social policy.

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Robin Fisher. *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

Biography as a form of Canadian historiography has experienced something of a rebirth over the last decade since its fall from grace in the early 1960s. However, in keeping with a precedent set by an earlier generation of scholars it is still heavily weighted towards biographies of federal politicians or national figures. Robin Fisher's *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* represents an attempt to correct this centralist bias and