

In Canada as in England, the number of young people under 16 years of age in the work force increased significantly over the last decade. In my university classes, the average age of students who began working for wages in and out of home in the 1980s was 10.5 years. In households where both parents work, domestic chores once carried out by adults have been assumed by children. Like their British counterparts, child workers in Canada are subject to exploitation by employers who disregard the laws governing underage employment. Rather than moonlighting for pocket money, however, child earnings appear to make a significant contribution to the households.

Although the present situation needs further investigation, child labour appears to be linked to the growth of the service sector of the economy which employs many youngsters, the recession of the past decade, the increasing number of households headed by underpaid females, and changes in the concept of childhood which over the last thirty years or so suggest that adult/child roles are less distinct and more homogeneous than they once were.

While today's child workers share some resemblances to their counterparts in the past, child labour at this time holds neither the same place nor the same value that it did in the nineteenth century, and attempts such as this one, which pivot on a search for modern attitudes in the past, are faulty. Like other topical subjects, child abuse lends itself to sensational treatment by those who seek to reform society. Although it is clear that Rose had the best

interests of children at heart, this book lends itself, be it ever so slightly, to the sensationalist charge. It will no doubt shock those unfamiliar with child oppression in the past, while those who have read fuller and more detailed accounts may find the overgeneralized and bleak summaries troublesome. The comparison to the present, however, should alert readers to the changing nature of childhood in our society and new forms of exploitation which have developed in the last decade.

Juliet Pollard  
Malaspina College-University

**Donald Fisher.** *The Social Sciences in Canada: Fifty Years of National Activity by the Social Science Federation of Canada.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991. Pp. 115. \$19.95.

The social sciences have attained a place of prominence within Canadian higher education, and have been recognized as deserving of support by state agencies. They have been much less successful in capturing the imagination of the educated public. The names of Canadian social scientists are hardly household words, and the products of their labour, aside from monumental works such as John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic*, are generally only familiar to a relatively narrow band of cognoscenti. Even less is known about the organizations that have made social scientific re-

search in Canada possible, and the way in which these institutions have developed over the course of the last fifty or so years.

Donald Fisher's *The Social Sciences in Canada: Fifty Years of Social Science Federation Activity in Canada* is a commendable effort to help fill this yawning gap in our understanding. The book adeptly traces how institutions working on behalf of increased funding and support for social sciences in Canada have evolved out of the original Canadian Social Science Research Council (CSSRC) that had been founded in 1940. Particular attention is given to the lineages of the Social Science Federation of Canada (SSFC), the organization which invited Fisher to prepare the volume to commemorate fifty years of its activity. The book traces how the SSFC, in confronting the issues of co-ordination, representation, and independence, has gradually moved away from its early emphasis upon the funding and co-ordinating of "basic" research towards one of planning new initiatives and lobbying the federal government.

Drawing on a wealth of archival material, Fisher is able to illuminate how the various interests representing social scientific research, through subtle (and sometimes acrimonious) negotiation, were able to generate structures and strategies to further their goals. A good deal of attention is given to how the advocates of social scientific research steered a sometimes wavering course between the Scylla of pure investigation and the Charybdis of applied research. The book is particularly valuable as a concise survey

and chronicle of how the institutions supporting social scientific research in Canada have emerged and developed in relation to shifting national priorities.

Fisher's text, nevertheless, can be called into question on a number of counts. The overall story that he wishes to tell is not entirely clear. While the book nominally places the SSFC at the centre of its narrative, the organization—as known by its current name—only dates from 1968. Given that Fisher begins his account with the establishment of the CSSRC in 1940, this means that he must somehow show how the current SSFC was prefigured by a series of earlier organizations playing comparable roles. This exercise is not entirely successful, as the range of functions and activities of these institutions varied in kaleidoscopic fashion. This implies that the lineage Fisher traces from the CSSRC through to the SSFC is disputable, if not entirely arbitrary. (I was told by someone closely familiar with the SSFC that the only real continuity between it and the earlier institutions was through the Aid to Scholarly Publications programme). Very possibly, Fisher's concern to provide the SSFC with an account of its history led him to overdraw institutional continuities to the neglect of ruptures and disjunctions.

Some of the book's difficulties undoubtedly stem from its stated purpose of providing a "short structural history" of the Social Science Federation of Canada, within the ambit of "historical sociology," as championed by Philip Abrams and as exemplified by Pierre Bourdieu's work on higher

education in France. While the book is certainly short (115 pages), its claim to be in any way a structural account can be seriously contested. To be sure, it does make reference to the relationship between social science institutions and the Canadian government. But it does not examine the ways in which the structured relations between the emergent organizations and the Canadian state set the terms for subsequent policy outcomes. What is missing from his account is an analysis of how the particular positions taken by those involved in the development of social science institutions in Canada were rooted in broader ideological perspectives and inflected by more proximate political conflict. Fisher has constructed a chronicle of events which, though perhaps descriptively accurate of the published record, fails to get below the surface of the issues in question. By taking at face value the official statements of social science advocates and government officials, Fisher has largely ignored the way in which the meaning of these texts is inherently related to the contexts in which they were generated. In effect, had Fisher followed through on his intent of writing an account informed by historical sociology, he might have been able to demonstrate how the socially based perspectives of social science advocates became embodied in particular policy positions.

By focusing so narrowly on certain statements in the archival manuscripts, and removing them from both their immediate and more general historical contexts, Fisher fails to probe the ambiguity of some of the positions that were taken. He claims,

for instance, that the early years of the CSSRC were marked by a conflict between advocates of "applied" and "pure" social scientific research. Chief among those supporting the view that social scientific activity should be untainted by "practical, applied, or purposive intent," according to Fisher, was Harold Adams Innis (p. 13). A cursory glance at some of the activities of Innis casts serious doubts on Fisher's portrayal of his standpoint. Throughout his career, Innis was very much engaged in work relevant to public policy. During the 1930s, he not only had worked closely with the Canadian Institute of International Affairs to produce a volume on how the Depression might be alleviated, but had been invited by the Nova Scotia government to serve on a Royal Commission (the so-called Jones Commission) charged with the responsibility of investigating the problems of the Nova Scotia economy. The report that Innis wrote (complementary to the main text) led to some significant policy changes, including the formation of the highly influential Nova Scotia Economic Council. Innis was by no means alone in his practical involvement. Robert A. MacKay, one of the founders of the CSSRC, believed that the social scientist could not avoid being a social reformer and should "endeavour to meet the world's prevailing need." To this end, he argued that the training of specialized social technicians was necessary in order to cope with an increasingly complex society.

It is difficult to reconcile the resolutely applied orientations of MacKay and Innis with the advocacy of

“basic” or “pure” social science, as imputed to the early CSSRC by Fisher. What this indicates, perhaps, is that the dispute about the nature of the social sciences should not be framed in terms of “pure” versus “applied” research. What was at issue, rather, was how and to what extent the direction and application of social scientific investigation was to be determined by those holding political power. The terms “pure” and “applied” may indeed have been deployed by those involved in the debates about the direction of social sciences in Canada. But these notions could be understood best not as statements reflecting particular policy positions, but rather as rhetorical devices having a specific political intent.

In attributing the stance of “purism” to the early CSSRC, Fisher also misconstrues its relation to the American philanthropies that contributed heavily to the development of the Canadian humanities and social sciences during the 1930s and 1940s. Given that the CSSRC, according to Fisher, was a staunch advocate of “basic” research, detached from practical relevance, he implies that its major benefactor, the Rockefeller Foundation, had a similar commitment. This implied convergence of interests might explain why Fisher fails to explore what lay behind the Foundation decision to offer massive support for the development of the humanities and social sciences in Canada beginning in the early 1940s. He ignores the Rockefeller shift towards a “regional-continentalist” policy through which it sought to cultivate distinct cultural regions in North America that were to extend across the

border from the United States into Canada. Given that Fisher has elsewhere persuasively demonstrated the practical underpinnings of Rockefeller philanthropy, it is disappointing that he has not provided a comparable analysis of its involvement in Canadian social science.

If treated as a concise and synoptic account of an important (and previously neglected) set of issues, Fisher’s book makes an outstanding contribution. However, if taken on its own terms as a work of historical sociology, it is found to be lacking in both analytical rigour and interpretive insight. Indeed, the ambitious task that Fisher sets for himself is virtually unattainable, given the book’s brief compass. All the same, the task itself is a worthy one, and *The Social Sciences in Canada* provides a very helpful and suggestive point of departure for those wishing to examine further how the social sciences have developed in Canada.

William Buxton  
Concordia University

**John Willinsky.** *The Triumph of Literature/The Fate of Literacy: English in the Secondary School Curriculum.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1991. Pp. 240. \$47.95 U.S..

John Willinsky’s latest book provides much that will be of interest to scholars of education in general, as