

Bradford James Rennie, *The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

Since the 1924 publication of Louis Aubrey Wood's *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada*, scholars have been fascinated by the history of Canadian agrarian revolt. Bradford James Rennie's analysis of the development of the United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta (UFA/UFWA) is the most recent addition to this large body of literature. Rennie's contribution is noteworthy because it is the only book-length study of a provincial agrarian organization and for its explicit application of Lawrence Goodwyn's concept of movement culture to Canadian farm protest.

In *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* and the abridged *The Populist Moment in America*, Lawrence Goodwyn analysed the rise and decline of the American Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party through the lens of culture. He argued that the Populist movement of the late nineteenth century was a mass democratic mobilization in which a "movement culture" nurtured and sustained oppositional institutions and ideologies that constituted the movement. Following Goodwyn, Rennie argues that the UFA/UFWA went through three stages of movement development. The first was the formation of the movement from 1879 to 1909 in which farmers questioned existing economic and political structures and began to develop a nascent movement culture through a number of pre-UFA/UFWA organizations. The second movement-building phase extended from the UFA/UFWA's formation in 1909 through 1918, and included the development of a solid membership base, the establishment of a women's section, and the construction of a movement culture that fostered collective self-respect and produced mass commitment. And the third and final phase – the politicizing of the movement – began in 1919 and extended through the organization's success in the 1921 provincial and federal elections.

Rennie constructs his narrative by alternating between chronological and thematic chapters. Individual chapters outline the periods from 1879-1909, 1909-1913, 1914-1918, and 1919-1921, while others explore rural economy and the movement, creating and defining community, cooperation and education in the movement, and the philosophy of the post-war UFA/UFWA. The author does an excellent job of crafting his argument and marshalling his evidence. He makes a convincing case that the UFA/UFWA was a grassroots, democratic movement through which Alberta farmers sought to gain a measure of economic and political control from the elites who controlled so many aspects of their lives. And he is successful at delineating the liberal and radical ideologies that uneasily cohabited in the movement.

While the general contours of Rennie's argument are sound, key elements of it are unconvincing. The notion of a movement culture, for example, is a

powerful metaphor that can make sense of much of the UFA/UFWA's history, but it obscures the fundamental issue of farmers' class location and it underestimates the significance of the dialectical interplay of dominant and subordinate ideologies in the creation of farmers' identities and consciousness.

To be fair, Rennie does provide a sensitive and sophisticated analysis of Alberta farmers' economic position, arguing that the Alberta farm economy was more diverse than that of its prairie counterparts and that Alberta farmers relied on a mix of domestic subsistence, agricultural commodity production, and wage labour to survive. Having done this, however, he does not probe the difficult and contradictory class position of farmers. He does argue that because farmers could be agriculturalists, businessmen, and wage earners at different times or simultaneously, "barriers between social classes in rural areas were slow to emerge" (75). But he also argues that farmers were "like other business people" in that they believed increased efficiency could boost their "profits" (170). While Rennie seems to reject C.B. Macpherson's concept of simple commodity production as being too simplistic to understand rural Alberta reality, he never articulates his own alternative theory. Yet, he claims that "farmers' commitment to democracy was developed by their class experience" (9). But what was that class experience? We are never really told, though we are left with the sense that early-twentieth-century Alberta farmers were primarily "businessmen" who occasionally participated in wage labour. But what does this mean? What is the significance of a mass, democratic mobilization of "businessmen," some of whom subscribed to an explicit socialist analysis? While Macpherson's classical Marxist categories are too crude a tool to understand a peripheral society such as Alberta in its settlement period, it surely remains the case that farmers' class position resides somewhere between or apart from the bourgeoisie (including the *petit bourgeoisie*) and the proletariat. And the concept of movement culture, while useful in describing mass mobilizations, does not help us sort out this issue.

Lacking a clear sense of farmers' class position and relying solely on the concept of movement culture to order his analysis, the author lapses into a form of subjective essentialism in his discussion of ideological formation in the UFA/UFWA. According to Rennie, Alberta farmers used various cultural resources available in the broader society (including education "supported by corporations and the state" [161]) as part of their efforts to form, build, and mobilize a movement and reform society. He seems to suggest that farmers were socially autonomous agents who could choose freely which cultural resources to use in their crusade against corporate hegemony, and that these resources were ideologically neutral and easily integrated into the movement's arsenal regardless of their source. But if post-structuralist, post-modern critiques of modernist social theory have taught us anything over the past twenty years, it is that ideologies and discourses are contested terrain framed by the

power relations that define them. Dominant discourses are constantly interpellating subordinate subjects and reshaping their identities and the ideologies of subordinate organizations. And while subordinate subjects or organizations may consciously take up dominant discourses for their own purposes, their outlook and identity may be changed unwittingly in the process. UFA/UFWA members, then, may have used a variety of resources to build their movement and bolster their sense of resistance, but the dialectical interplay of ideologies in hierarchical societies suggests this was not a neutral process.

These theoretical disagreements aside, Rennie's book is a welcome addition to agrarian and Western Canadian historiography. It is the best analysis available of the rise and development of a Canadian farm organization.

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Anne Lopes and Gary Roth, *Men's Feminism: August Bebel and the German Socialist Movement* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000).

August Bebel's book *Woman and Socialism* (1879) should be read by everyone dealing with women's, feminist, or gender history. One of the most reprinted (53 times by Bebel's death in 1913) and translated books of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the study informs about the condition of and possibilities for women in Europe with special emphasis upon Germany. Before and after World War I, this book inspired many women and men to join movements of protest and to agitate for reforms. Today, despite many courses on the history of women and feminism, the book seems forgotten. Anne Lopes and Gary Roth provide a basis for its rescue from obscurity with *Men's Feminism*. Their important study finds "socialist men proved to be more consistent feminists than bourgeois women ...the socialist movement in Germany drew attention to feminist issues, like suffrage and sexual harassment, decades before bourgeois feminist groups were willing to follow suit." (31)

Lopes and Roth challenge many of the historians' conventions as they illustrate the "historiographical switching" – I would add forgetting – of lead roles. They show that the initiation of action on female equality by proletarian movements has been forgotten and attribution for such roles given to middle class reformers. This can be exemplified by the emphasis upon J.S. Mill as opposed to Bebel. The former did not touch upon people's work world and thus could not explore, as Bebel did, such crucial issues as harassment, prostitution,