

TEXTBOOKS AND SOCIAL CONTROL

John Grant reviews Osborne's In "*Hard-working, Temperate and Peaceable*" - *The Portrayal of Workers in Canadian History Textbooks*, a study of the representation of "labour ... in 29 history texts commonly used in grades seven and above and published between the years 1886 and 1979 that used in English-speaking public schools in Canada."¹ The "picture drawn," Grant summarizes, "is one of struggle to overcome adversity," a "moral message" that (quoting Osborne) 'hardship is a natural way of life; ... and, with hard work and determination, it can be overcome,' emphasizing the "trials of the missionaries among the Indians, the challenge of the physical environment, the labours of the fur traders, the dangers of immigration and settlement, the virtual impossibility of railroad construction," everywhere "unremitting toil."² Osborne concludes that

textbooks say little about working Canadians (2) the new social history has not yet made a significant impact; (3) a moral message ... is clear; (4) changes in textbooks have generally made them more attractive, less moralistic and more cognizant of social history; (5) textbook topics and themes remain consistent, with attention to the Winnipeg General Strike as the most obvious innovation; and (6) social conflict is minimized.³

Grant concludes: "Osborne has provided systematic evidence substantiating what others have merely assumed to be the case."⁴

In his critique of these textbooks, Osborne cites "author ignorance ... efforts at social control ... Whiggism ... moral message manipulation for children of different social classes," as well as significant "omissions, such as ignoring the findings of the 1889 Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital (p. 12)," and, except for coverage of the Winnipeg General Strike, "glossing over social conflict in Canadian society."⁵ Osborne dwells on this last point, Grant reports, emphasizing the "potential" of the school curriculum "for either power and/or control," and that given inadequate representations of "the working class ... textbooks [could] provide a place for labour to begin to influence the school system."⁶

COMMENTARY

In his praise of Osborne's study, Grant notes that it demonstrates that textbooks, while improving over time, nonetheless remain tainted by moralism, by underrepresentation of the working class, and, overall, by an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Socio-economic improvement is represented as individualistic and

peaceful (after the quoted phrase in the book title) rather than collective and conflictual. Osborne concludes the working class and its representatives – among them labour unions - have paid insufficient attention to the school curriculum. Through textbooks, the working class and labour organizations could alter what students learn.

REFERENCES

Franklin, Barry. 1986. *Building the American Community: The School Curriculum and the Search for Control*. London: Falmer.

Grant, John N. 1982. Reviewed Work: “Hard-working, Temperate and Peaceable”: The Portrayal of Workers in Canadian History Textbooks by Kenneth W. Osborne. *Canadian Journal of Education* (7), 1, 124-127.

Osborne, Kenneth W. 1980. “*Hard-working, Temperate and Peaceable*”: *The Portrayal of Workers in Canadian History Textbooks*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

ENDNOTES

¹ Grant 1982, 124.

² Grant 1982, 124-125.

³ Grant 1982, 125.

⁴ Grant 1982, 125.

⁵ Grant 1982, 126. Social control was also a concern in U.S. curriculum studies: see Franklin 1986.

⁶ Grant 1982, 126.