

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 1999

Review of *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* By Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin

James Naylor
Brandon University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Naylor, James, "Review of *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* By Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin" (1999). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1555.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1555>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West. By Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1997. Photographs, further reading, index. x + 421 pp. \$24.95 paper.

The social explosion of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was the product of various combustibles, both material and ideological. In this collective biography of ten arrested strike leaders, Harry and Mildred Gutkin explore the ideas and experiences that led individuals to play prominent roles in the strike. This is an effective approach, allowing the authors to trace individually the various strands of social radicalism that crossed in the spring of 1919 and to follow their post-strike trajectories. Some of the subjects are familiar, such as future Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) leader J. S. Woodsworth. Others have received far too little attention in the past, such as John Queen who was elected mayor of Winnipeg seven times in the 1930s and early 1940s. In every case the stories are skillfully told and carefully woven together.

As disparate as these men were, they were not entirely representative of "radical thought in the Canadian West." The authors recognize this and depart from their formula to include a chapter on "Women at the Barricades." Although immigrants from the city's North End are poorly represented among the labor luminaries who stood at the prisoner's dock, the authors attempt to rectify this when opportunities arise, as in the chapter on the Anglo-Jewish A. A. Heaps, who represented this constituency in Parliament. Other currents of Western radical thought, from the Wobblies to various strains of agrarian radicalism, are not to be found here.

Nor, unfortunately, is there a clear picture of Communism, which emerged as an important working-class current in Winnipeg and across the West in the 1920s and 1930s. The authors remain firmly embedded in the cold war as they not only dismiss the Communist Party as dogmatic and static, but paint all

forms of revolutionary socialism with the same brush. Indeed, working-class political currents appear here to be timeless. The pre-World War I parties—the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Party—are depicted as embryonic versions of the CCF and the Communist Party, with the latter invariably described as “shrill.” Historians of Canadian socialism, particularly those who have been able to distance themselves from the political strife of the interwar period, have told a far more nuanced and interesting story.

Despite such weaknesses, *Profiles in Dissent* combines a scholarly attention to research with effective and engaging writing. Given the considerable research, though, it is extremely unfortunate that an editorial decision ruled out a full scholarly apparatus. While there is a short and incomplete bibliography, there are no footnotes. As a result, several of the Gutkins’ arguments rest on unverifiable evidence, and the door is slammed in the face of researchers who may wish to follow their often intriguing leads.

JAMES NAYLOR
Department of History
Brandon University