

PATRIAS, CARMELA. *Jobs and Justice. Fighting Discrimination in Wartime Canada, 1939–1945*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto [etc.] 2012. x, 249 pp. Ill. \$24.95. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000114

Popular and official accounts of Canada's history encourage a celebratory narrative of a country with lengthy traditions of fairness and equality. Drawing implicit and comforting contrasts with the US, these accounts portray Canada as having welcomed newcomers in all their diversity, chosen multiculturalism over the American melting-pot, and tolerated, even celebrated, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences. Carmela Patrias's account of the institutionalized racism of the Canadian state in the mid-twentieth century, and of collective resistance, by members of disadvantaged communities, to the discriminatory employment practices of which they were the victims, challenges these comfortable assumptions and the popular and official discourses that portray Canada as a haven for those who experienced discrimination on the basis of colour, ethnicity, and racialized identity.

Any such notions are shattered by the book's detailed revelations of the quotidian contradictions between the relatively progressive-sounding wartime employment policies articulated by the Liberal government and the actual recruitment and employment practices of state officials, discriminatory practices that reflected the pervasive racism of the time, but that also met the state's need for a malleable workforce. Racist assumptions, as Patrias demonstrates, justified state officials' collusion in common-sense practices that allocated high-skilled and well-paid jobs to white workers while denying all but the least desirable jobs to immigrant, minority, and Native workers, and restricted access to specific occupations with reference to prospective workers' real or supposed ethnic and racial identities. Racist policies, including the forced evacuation and internment of Japanese Canadians and the intrusive power of federal Indian agents over the lives of Aboriginal Canadians, also enabled state officials to fill unattractive jobs with disadvantaged workers who had few choices in a period of virtually full employment when non-racialized workers enjoyed unusually high labour power.

Resistance to state-sponsored discrimination, fuelled in part by the state's own claims to be fighting a war against racism, arose from many quarters. An emerging scholarship on the history of human rights struggles has begun to document this "rights revolution", and this book's recovery of the history of community-based minority groups' organized resistance to discrimination contributes an important dimension to this history. Patrias's research details the mobilizations of minority groups, mostly independently but occasionally in concert, or in collaboration with labour unions or the parties of the left, to oppose the racist employment practices of the state and state support for the racist practices of private employers during World War II. She notes that Jews, a relatively high proportion of whom were academics, lawyers, or unionized workers, were the most prominent such group, but African, Chinese, Japanese, and Sikh Canadians, and immigrants from eastern and southern Europe also formed associations to resist state-sanctioned discrimination. Native Canadians, who were not only disenfranchised by the Indian Act but under the control of federal Indian agents, resisted as well.

Patrias's recovery of minority group involvement in the shaping of human rights discourse is an important amendment to this history, and although she deals only tangentially with the literature, a reader might draw useful parallels with other recent work. Dominique Clément observes that white, Christian men's domination of rights organizations resulted in a narrow and restrictive conception of rights that is often at odds

with the more expansive demands of the minority groups themselves. Victims of oppression, he notes, are themselves the best advocates for reform.¹ The radical divergence in minority groups' and white middle-class reformers' construction of human rights is elucidated in Patrias's examination of the prominent and influential human rights advocates of the war years, virtually all of whom were socially conservative, white, Christian, upper-middle-class men.

Canada's slow advance toward meaningful human rights legislation comes into clearer focus when we understand who defined the issues publicly. Men such as United Church minister Claris Silcox, adult educator Robert England, and literature professor Watson Kirkconnell built careers as human rights advocates, some even working as policy advisors to the state, while publicly endorsing beliefs in race suicide, white supremacy, and the inherent inferiority of Jews, Native people, eastern and southern Europeans, and other groups. Patrias explains that such authorities were "burdened" by their own class positions within the Canadian elite and the questionable scholarship of the time that purported to explain "race". I would not be so gentle. Based on her evidence, one might conclude that the state's interests in maintaining a biddable, low-wage workforce and avoiding potentially costly and controversial legislation to protect vulnerable workers were advanced by "experts" who prescribed greater tolerance on the part of Anglo-Saxon Canadians for those who were different or, they agreed, inferior, and the eventual assimilation of minorities.

The evolution of human rights discourse has been complicated not only by the influential role played by social conservatives, but also by ruptures among social progressives over the participation of communists. As Patrias demonstrates, community-based human rights organizations were inevitably embroiled in this conflict which, as Ross Lambertson has recently argued, undermined and weakened the wartime and postwar rights movement.² The most effective of the community-based human rights organizations, the Jewish Labour Committee, had close ties to the social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), which, Patrias argues, was the sole parliamentary party that advocated on behalf of minority groups. It was also, by turns, fiercely anti-communist. Communists and CCFers were both active in the labour organizations that advocated for human rights, and most of the ethnic organizations were associated with either one party or the other. Had unions, social democrats, communists, and community-based ethnic and other organizations collaborated, they would have wielded considerable influence, but many liberals and social democrats regarded communists as unreliable allies or simply opposed them on ideological grounds and refused to work with them.

Patrias acknowledges this much, identifying labour and the left as "ambivalent allies", but perhaps prudently, given that the issue remains contentious some six decades later, draws no firm conclusions about this conflict. I venture to be less circumspect. In my view, Cold War anti-communism was an exaggerated response to a vaguely defined threat that advanced the interests of the state. Communists were, of course, sometimes untrustworthy allies, but the state and social conservatives, Kirkconnell not least among them, deployed anti-communism quite consciously to silence dissent, including demands for rights that seemed radical to the social conservatives who saw little need for existing government policies to change. Human rights organizations sacrificed some of their most

1. Dominique Clément, *Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937–82* (Vancouver [etc.], 2008).

2. Ross Lambertson, *Rights and Resistance: Canadian Human Rights Activists, 1930–1960* (Toronto, 2005).

engaged and politically adept activists when they excluded communists, who were genuinely committed to social justice and at least as consistent opponents of racism as the CCF. It's instructive that although unions were the most effective vehicle for advancing human rights, Kirkconnell, as Patrias observes, was as vehemently anti-union as he was anti-communist.

The importance of Patrias's central argument, that minority groups were critical to the development of human rights, is most clearly evident in the chapter on labour and the left. Although the book emphasizes the grassroots mobilizations of community-based minority groups, with the exception of the Jewish Labour Committee, most of these groups were relatively ineffective, lacking the resources and sheer numbers to exert any real influence on the legislators who framed employment policy. Minority groups were most likely to get concrete results when they pursued their demands within a union. Patrias observes that principled egalitarianism became part of union culture, and unions fought hard for equal treatment for their immigrant and minority group members, in the community as well as the workplace, publishing literature in a diversity of languages, offering special language-specific meetings, and welcoming Japanese Canadians while protesting their treatment by the state. In this, her argument concurs with Clément's, who argues that organizing in collaboration with the Jewish Labour Committee helped make labour a powerful force in the movement for human rights.

Although minority group organizing itself had relatively little impact on federal employment policies or the discriminatory practices of employers, the participation of racialized minorities in human-rights-seeking organizations was, Patrias concludes, critical to their ability to identify racism in practice and respond to it effectively. The labour movement became a powerful force against racism because so many union members were the victims of discrimination, and unions relied on their active minority members to define their anti-racist struggles. Similarly, the CCF, with a relatively large number of Jewish members, took the lead on anti-discrimination legislation, introducing a long-awaited Bill of Rights three years after they were elected in Saskatchewan. The federal government, by contrast, which failed to include members of minority groups in its policy development process, continued to collaborate with racist employers and was slow to produce meaningful policy change on discriminatory practices. This is an important observation, and Patrias's book, by recuperating the contributions of minority groups to the slow and often tortuous process of human rights activism, makes a valuable contribution to the field.

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Early September 1977, just days after left-wing terrorists of the infamous Red Army Faction (RAF) pushed the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) into its worst internal