

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

HUGH SHEWELL, 'Enough to Keep them Alive': Indian Welfare in Canada, 1873-1965. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, xii + 441 p.

In 'Enough to Keep them Alive', Shewell sets himself the ambitious task of examining almost a century of relief and social assistance policies developed by the Department of Indian Affairs. Eschewing stock answers regarding what he calls Indian welfare, Shewell's central premise is that welfare dependency among Aboriginal peoples is a result of more than simple economic deprivation and unemployment; rather it is an effect of pervasive attempts to erode the cultural and political autonomy of First Nations.

Shewell identifies two distinct phases of Indian welfare. The first he terms the subjugation phase, which took place between Confederation and the end of World War II, during which relief for Aboriginal peoples was grudgingly provided on a provisional basis in response to crises confronting them. The primary objective of relief was always to inculcate moral virtues of industriousness and self-reliance, while the provision of relief was underpinned by the constant fear of fostering Aboriginal dependence and concern for fiscal restraint. These unsystematic practices coalesced into a more formal policy during the interwar years as a uniform relief system that was implemented across the country.

The second period identified by Shewell, the citizenship phase, sought to integrate Aboriginal peoples into the state through the rubric of citizenship. During this time relief evolved into a form of social assistance that would employ objective research to effect social transformation and ultimately serve to integrate Aboriginal peoples into Canadian society. To this end, Department officials pursued partnerships with other federal and provincial agencies, as well as national voluntary associations, while seeking to devolve service delivery to the provinces and implement community development strategies. The primary intent of these initiatives, according to Shewell, was to perpetuate Euro-Canadian social models and to individuate Aboriginal peoples.

Researched in meticulous detail, Shewell does an admirable job of explicating the at times byzantine Indian Affairs bureaucracy and the convoluted processes of policy development and implementation. He offers no clear definition, however, for what he means by 'Indian welfare',

leaving it as a taken-for-granted historical category. Also, in the early chapters, he is overly reliant on a few sources, such as Titley's *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (1986) and Coates' *Best left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1973* (1991). As well, Shewell has a penchant for long asides on topics such as the James Bay research of Honigmann (whose important work is too readily dismissed) and the tribulations of Jules Sioui mounting an Aboriginal political organization. While interesting, such asides are too often only tangentially related to the main subject matter and the overall readability of the work would have benefited from their extirpation.

Moreover, Shewell's volume remains resolutely a history of Indian Affairs administration and policy. Aboriginal peoples thus appear as a population upon which government policy is inflicted. Despite Shewell's assertion that Aboriginal welfare dependency "is a complex form of resistance to a socio-economic order that Indian nations neither choose nor fundamentally accept" (324), one is left with little sense of First Nations as dynamic communities that sought to engage, negotiate, and challenge paternalistic bureaucratic interventions. Although Shewell does make an occasional reference to the receipt of welfare on particular reserves, this is almost always through the lens of the administrator. He does little to explain how welfare and poverty were experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Shewell does cite Aboriginal testimony before the Special Joint Committee on the Indian Act (1947-48) and should be commended for drawing on this underutilized source, but more could have been done to incorporate an Aboriginal perspective on the effects of poverty, marginalization, and dispossession. In particular, interviews with Aboriginal leaders and/or Elders would have complemented his interviews with Indian Affairs officials and provided added context. Some discussion regarding how communal values and the ethic of sharing and reciprocity fundamental to Aboriginal societies impacted how Aboriginal peoples comprehended relief and welfare programs would have bolstered the analysis. The omission is especially regrettable given that in several places Shewell comments on the cultural incompatibility of welfare programs with Aboriginal values (4,132, 324). Unfortunately, this extremely interesting observation is not further explored or substantiated.

Notwithstanding these critiques, this is a thorough work that provides a much needed examination of an area of Canadian Indian policy that has received little previous attention. It is destined to become a touchstone for scholars working on questions of Aboriginal relief and social assistance. Shewell demonstrates in some detail the administrative rationale behind Indian Affairs welfare policies and convincingly argues that social assistance, far from being motivated by benevolence, has always been deeply implicated in the state's attempts to erode collective values and assimilate Aboriginal peoples. This work can take a place beside other studies of Canadian Indian policy and administration, but, at over 400 pages, it requires a dedicated reader and would be best suited to graduate students and scholars specializing in the area.

Colin Buchanan, University of Calgary

© Canadian Sociological Association/La Société canadienne de sociologie