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CIVILIZATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE:  
AN ANALYSIS OF SOME SELECTED ASPECTS  
OF THE WORK OF HAROLD ADAMS INNIS

by

Joseph Georges Roger Albert  
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1975

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Department  
of  
Sociology and Anthropology



Joseph Georges Roger Albert 1980

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

May 1980

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Civilization, Science and Culture: An Analysis of Some Selected

Aspects of the Work of Harold Adams Innis

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## ABSTRACT

During the past decade, the work of Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952), has undergone a considerable revival, and selected aspects of it have been appealed to in order to support current paradigms in the social sciences, particularly in political economy. The selection of elements of Innis' work for this purpose is based on various interpretations of him as either a staples theorist (taken from his work up to 1940) or a communications theorist (from his post-1940 work), and as an ardent Canadian nationalist throughout his career. However, there is substantial evidence in his work to suggest that these interpretations are misleading and draw attention away from the main thrust of his contribution to social science. At a time when Innis' work is being increasingly mined to support various points of view, a critical analysis of his entire contribution becomes essential. This is the task of this thesis: to ascertain whether or not certain isolated features of Innis' work retain the distinctive significance attributed to them by various interpretations when considered within the context of his whole contribution.

In order to address this problem, a careful reading of the greater part of Innis' work has been undertaken, taking special care to identify those features which provide it with a sense of unity and coherence. Furthermore, because Innis declared a profound indebtedness to the work of Thorstein Veblen, the American economist and philosopher,

a fairly detailed reading and analysis of Veblen's contribution has been undertaken in order to understand the intellectual interest that his work held for Innis. Finally, the current interpretations of Innis' work have been analysed, evaluated and assessed within the framework of the whole of his work including his intellectual debt to Veblen and institutional economics.

This study concludes that Innis, far from being a specialist within certain fields, was first and foremost a "civilization theorist" interested in tracing the development of Western civilization, which he defined, after Veblen, as a complex of growing and decaying habits of thought and life (institutions). Beyond this, he was concerned with promoting the survival of Western civilization which, he felt, depended on a balanced development between force and intellect. Throughout his entire career, he was guided by the notion that the optimal condition for the development of all organisms, including civilization and its institutions, is one of balance. For Innis, the balanced approach to life, and its study, requires avoidance of all types of extremes. In the social sciences, this means avoiding emphasis on the conclusions of research--including presumably his own in the so-called staples and communications studies--and concentrating instead on the search for truth. This perspective entails opposition to those biases which endanger the search for truth, including extremes of nationalism and monopoly in business, commerce, politics and the social sciences, and the promotion of "culture" and criticism as balancing mechanisms. Thus, drawing upon Innis as a support for various theories or dogmas reveals not only a misinterpretation of his research, but also a misunderstanding of his method.

DEDICATION

To my daughters, Marika and Arianne



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The sustained critical and editorial comments of Gary Rush and Noel Dyck were invaluable in the preparation of this thesis. John Whitworth's graduate course on Veblen helped me to clarify my thoughts on Innis' relationship with Veblen. Vi Ellingson, in addition to typing the final draft, provided valuable editorial suggestions. Carolyn (my spouse) provided the support and solace required during the most difficult times.

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## INTRODUCTION

Harold Adams Innis (1894-1952) was one of Canada's most outstanding, influential and prolific scholars during the first half of the twentieth century. His numerous and far-reaching published works include studies of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the fur trade, the cod fisheries, mining and settlement patterns, pulp and paper, newspapers and publishing, communications, nationalism, empire and the state of the social sciences.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after his death on 8 November, 1952, a flurry of obituaries, eulogies and a few critical reviews of his work appeared in the journals.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, for almost twenty years, his work was virtually ignored; there appeared in the journals scarcely one article per year that even mentioned his name. Innis' work seemed destined for oblivion; the broad, historical approach which he advocated was being decisively replaced by American structural-functionalism as a dominant mode of analysis in many of the social sciences.<sup>3</sup>

However, there occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s a resurgence of the broad historical approach, in conjunction with widespread disenchantment with the normative a-historical approach of structural-functionalism. It was accompanied by a growing anti-American nationalism in Canadian social science and the increasing adoption of political economy as an alternative to the more conservative methods of analysis in the social sciences. Along with the heightened interest in communications studies, these factors set the stage for a renewed interest in the work of Harold Innis.

During this resurgence, however, there was little attempt to understand Innis' work as an individual contribution to social science; rather his work was largely called upon and mined for the purposes of legitimating and reinforcing current arguments. After 1975, Innis' work itself increasingly became a subject of interest. In 1977 and 1978, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Innis' death, his work became the focus of substantial attention. In November, 1977, a special issue of the Journal of Canadian Studies was published containing several articles relating exclusively and specifically to various aspects of his work. In March, 1978, a symposium was held at Simon Fraser University, sponsored by the Communications Department, to address the whole of Innis' work and its relevance to present-day scholarship. The commentary associated with both the special issue of the Journal of Canadian Studies and the symposium was wide-ranging and varied. Innis' methods of analysis and conclusions were assessed and evaluated. He was discussed in reference to staples and dependency theories, nationalism, the social sciences, economic history, institutional economics, political and communications theory, Marxism, political economy and classical scholarship. Much of this commentary and most of what has been written about Innis since his death either focuses exclusively on his work in the first phase of his career prior to 1940, or on his work after 1940.

In Canadian universities there are presently a number of Canadian political economists who are inclined to stress Innis' early studies in Canadian economic history and who consider him to be a staples or dependency theorist and an ardent nationalist.<sup>4</sup> Present-day communications theorists and students generally focus on his work during and after the

Second World War. With some important exceptions,<sup>5</sup> even those analysts who address his whole contribution generally accept the notion that he underwent a dramatic and radical shift in 1940 from being an economic historian interested in Canadian historical development to being a communications theorist interested in the role of communications, past and present, in the development of empire and in the monopolization of political and economic power by large business enterprises and big government.<sup>6</sup> The perspective of Innis as "intellectual schizophrenic," i.e., as having, in a sense, two largely unrelated career research interests--in Canadian economic history then in communications--results from an over-emphasis on the conclusions of his work, a danger he himself frequently warned against. It results also from consideration of his work in isolation from the institutionalist-evolutionist tradition for which he expressed implicit and sometimes explicit affinity. It results further from the piecemeal appeals to his work which isolate commentaries, statements and specific conclusions in order to reinforce particular present-day trends in the social sciences.

Throughout his career, Innis' main and overriding concern in research and study was the analysis of the growth and decay of Western civilization. In the latter part of his career he also expressed a mounting concern for the survival of Western civilization. This dual concern with the analysis and survival of Western civilization provided the central theme for Innis' work. It conditioned, throughout his career, the choices he made in regard to research topics and subjects. It determined the kinds of speeches he delivered, especially during the Second World War. And, furthermore, it was responsible for the apparent

shift of research focus that Innis experienced in 1940. In short, it dominated his research interests--in conjunction, that is, with his particular and unorthodox perspective on the role of the social scientist. Thus, civilization, and the manner in which it should be studied--both precisely defined--form the twin pillars upon which Innis built his work.

It is the main contention of this thesis that Innis was first and foremost an institutionalist interested in the growth and decay of Western civilization. However, his institutionalism is not immediately apparent upon first examination of his many published works: a careful reading must be undertaken of the greater part of his scholarly production. What is thereby revealed is that it is the method of analysis characteristic of the institutionalist tradition which imparts to Innis' work its essential coherence. Innis was, throughout his career, a confirmed admirer of Thorstein Veblen, the enigmatic American institutionalist-evolutionalist of the previous generation. He shared with Veblen views on the nature of civilization and the most efficient methods of its analysis. Innis' work is best understood when Veblen's influence is carefully considered. Thus, an understanding of Innis' work is predicated upon a careful reading of Innis' own work, but it also implies a close familiarity with Veblen.

On the basis of what has been outlined above, this thesis will demonstrate that most of the commentaries on Innis' work written since 1952 are either misleading or misdirected because of an overly narrow focus on particular aspects of his work, insufficient importance being accorded to the theoretical and methodological framework of the institutionalist tradition which form the foundation of his work, or a

casual and selective acquaintance with his work. It will further demonstrate that: although Innis dealt extensively with the production and distribution of staple commodities in his research, he was not a staples theorist, nor did he employ a staples approach; although he forcefully underlined the dependent, colonial status that Canada has experienced throughout its history, he cannot be described as being an originator of the metropolis-hinterland perspective which has gained in popularity in recent years; although he condemned American imperialism, he was not thereby a nationalist; although he undertook extensive studies in communications, past and present, he did so not because of an interest in communications per se, but because he wished to assess their impact on the configurations of political and economic power over space and time and ultimately on the survival of Western civilization; and finally, he did not undergo the radical research reorientation that is apparently the case upon initial contact with his work, but that he did move from being more or less dispassionately interested in the analysis of civilization to being passionately concerned about its survival. Further, this thesis will assess the crucial importance of Veblen's work for Innis. Having thus outlined the broad perspective of the thesis, the following briefly summarizes the chapter sections in which a more detailed examination will be undertaken.

Chapter One consists of two parts: the first part is an outline of Innis' career, included here to situate the reader and to provide background for the arguments in the following chapters; the second part is an exhaustive thematic survey of the literature on Innis.

Chapter Two addresses the widespread notion that Innis was primarily



a staples theorist.

Chapter Three argues that Innis was not a nationalist despite the fact that he is frequently considered to be one. The major focus here will be on the views of two writers in particular: Daniel Drache (1969) and William Christian (1977a). Of particular concern will be Innis' notion of culture as it relates to nationalism.

Chapter Four is concerned with Innis' alleged research reorientation, which is said to have occurred in 1940, and places it within an overall methodological context.

Chapter Five traces the evolution of Innis' thought and assesses the impact of Veblen's work on Innis. In brief, it provides a reinterpretation of Innis' work, focussing more on his analytical framework than on the conclusions of his various studies.

In the Conclusion, the importance of undertaking the present study is reiterated for three reasons. First, to encourage the realization that Innis' work is much more complex and difficult to interpret than is immediately apparent, and to thereby discourage the casual and thoughtless reference to Innis' work which is all too prevalent in recent times. Second, to assess and evaluate the flurry of recent commentaries on his work, something not possible until now. And, finally, to reintroduce into the debate on Innis' work the "Veblen connection," largely ignored or downplayed in recent literature, and to indicate its importance for understanding Innis' analytical framework.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. A substantial bibliography of Innis' published works can be found at the end of this thesis.
2. These were written mostly by his friends and close associates. See, for example, Easterbrook (1953 and 1953a), Brebner (1953), Lower (1953), Creighton (1953), Brady (1953), and McLuhan (1953). For a description of the nature of Innis' relationship to the individuals above, and of who they were, see Chapter One, Part Two of this thesis.
3. For an interesting analysis of this trend see S.D. Clark (1976:120-144). Clark was one of the first sociologists to be recognized as such in Canada, was a student of Innis', and one of his colleagues at the University of Toronto.
4. For a complete bibliography of the work of this "school" see Clement and Drache (1978). Although the new political economists are largely responsible for exhuming Innis' work, they were not the only ones to address his contribution in the late sixties and early seventies. Robin Neill, a Canadian economist, published the only analytical monograph dealing exclusively with Innis' work. It is entitled A New Theory of Value: The Canadian Economics of H.A. Innis, and is intended as a counterbalance to the new political economists and what Neill calls "naive Keynesianism" (Neill, 1972:3).
5. I refer here especially to William Christian (1977 and 1977a). Christian is one of the most perceptive of the recent analysts of Innis' work.
6. See, for example, Neill (1972) and an excellent and thoughtful analysis of Innis by Carl Berger (1976), one of Canada's most prominent historians. Their work is discussed in detail in Chapter One, Part Two of this thesis.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INNIS: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MAN AND HIS WORK

#### A Biographical Sketch

Harold Innis arrived at the University of Toronto in 1920 at the age of twenty-six to begin his uninterrupted association with that institution as faculty member in the Department of Political Economy. He brought with him the experiences of family life in the strong "Grit" and Baptist Ontario town of Otterville where he was born in 1894. He had been profoundly affected by his military service overseas during the First World War and by the injury he sustained near Vimy in 1916 which forced his early return home. His studies at McMaster and the University of Chicago were fresh in his mind. But while these early life experiences had tremendous importance for his career as a whole, the primary focus of the present sketch is Innis' career at the University of Toronto.<sup>1</sup>

Over the span of his career Innis wrote nearly one hundred and twenty review articles--some of them containing reviews of several volumes at once--of books not only in his own field of economic history, but in economics and history proper, demography, sociology, geography, law and communications. Most of these reviews were written in the early part of his career when he was concerned with establishing himself as a member of the academic community. The first and most pressing task, however, upon his arrival at the University was to prepare his doctoral thesis for publication. It was entitled A History of the Canadian Pacific

Railway, and was published in 1923. According to some critics, it was not Innis' best effort, but there is little question that the perspective and methods of analysis employed in this study were highly influenced by Thorstein Veblen and the institutionalist tradition in economic history. Veblen had a profound and lasting effect on Innis, the "official" confirmation of which arrived in 1929 (Brady, 1953:88).

In 1929, Innis published a bibliography of the works of Thorstein Veblen in which he emphasized the institutionalist "method of approach."<sup>2</sup> In the spring of the same year, after having completed what many have regarded as his chef-d'oeuvre, The Fur Trade in Canada, Innis presented a paper entitled "The Teaching of Economic History in Canada," in which he argued that economic history should be the core of economics, especially in new countries such as Canada because of the fundamental differences between old and new countries in their relationship to basic economic and political institutions. This article was a part of his exhaustive survey of material concerned with the history of the northern part of North America, and it laid out in summary form Innis' conception of the economic life-history of Canada stressing the importance of trade in staple products and the cumulative changes wrought by the exigencies of the price system.<sup>3</sup>

By 1930, ten years after his graduation from the University of Chicago, Innis had completed and published two major works in economic history, A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway and The Fur Trade in Canada, written over thirty review articles of books mostly in the area of Canadian history, and had travelled extensively to familiarize himself first-hand with the geography and people of Canada. His most ambitious

voyage was down the Mackenzie River by canoe in 1924, but he also travelled to visit archives and libraries and to acquaint himself with industry and commerce. It was a most impressive record of publication and activity, but it did not end there.

Innis had also undertaken two other important projects, both of which culminated in publications in 1933: Problems of Staple Production in Canada, and Select Documents in Canadian Economic History, the latter edited and prepared in cooperation with one of his students and colleagues, A.R.M. Lower. He was, at the same time, developing a strong interest in the cod fishery and Maritime affairs--an interest sparked by the connection between the exploitation of fur and fish in the early days of European presence on the North American continent--as well as in communications. In The Fur Trade in Canada he had alluded to the crucial significance of the cod fishery for the opening of the continent and the fur trade. In a series of articles he explored the connection between the cod fishery and the fur trade and addressed the political consequences of the prosecution of the cod fishery and the fur trade with special reference to the impact of the actual physical characteristics of the staples themselves.<sup>4</sup> He travelled extensively in Newfoundland, Gaspé, the Labrador and the Maritimes in connection with this new interest which culminated in the publication of The Cod Fisheries in 1940.

But the 1930s were to present Innis with new challenges not directly related to his research to date. The Depression placed the country under a tremendous strain and the universities had no special immunity from its effects. Politicians increasingly called upon academics to "solve" problems and to come up with "expert" solutions to complex problems. This

political pressure served to inflame an already long-standing debate over the very nature of the social sciences.

Innis continued, in the 1930s and afterwards, to review books on the fur trade, transportation, government, land settlement, communication, business and many other topics.<sup>5</sup> But, in addition to these reviews and his historical studies of the cod fisheries, mining, pulp and paper and timber that he conducted during the 1930s, Innis published a series of articles dealing with the role of the social sciences, the causes and effects of the Depression and the relationship between governments and universities.

The first article he published in this area is entitled "Economic Nationalism" (1934) and was originally an address to the Canadian Political Science Association.<sup>6</sup> His argument here was prelude to the many critical and polemical articles and addresses he was to publish and deliver in the years to come. Innis argued that the social sciences, by definition, must be engaged in the dispassionate search for truth rather than in social reform and political action.

Early in 1935 Innis participated in the meetings of the American Economic Association as discussion group chairman. This placed him centre stage in a debate that had flared up frequently in the past over the scientific character of economics and the social sciences in general. A group of American economists led by R.G. Tugwell and A.B. Wolfe argued that economics must be considered a science, while Frank Knight, J.M. Clark,<sup>7</sup> Morris Copeland--all from the University of Chicago--and many other economists held that neither inductive nor deductive scientific economics were possible. (Neill, 1972:29-33). E.J. Urwick, the

Chairman of the Department of Political Economy at Toronto, argued for the "philosophical" rather than the scientific approach in the study of society. Innis largely agreed with Tugwell and Wolfe, at least in regards to the scientific nature of the social sciences.

At about the same time, the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science made its debut. The first issue contained articles by Frank Knight, Stephen Leacock, then Chairman of the Economics Department of McGill University in Montreal, and E.J. Urwick. Knight and Urwick restated and reiterated their familiar positions against the viability and possibility of a scientific economics while Leacock lamented the lack of pragmatic relevance in economics. Innis responded to these positions in a subsequent number, but in the same volume, of the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science ("The Role of Intelligence: Some Further Notes"), and in the Dalhousie Review ("Discussion in the Social Sciences"). These articles were aimed particularly at Urwick and Frank Underhill, one of the intellectual forces behind the scenes in the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.

Berger (1976:101) maintains that most of the debate between the advocates of more scientific involvement in the political process--represented by Underhill--and those who thought that scholars must deliberately insulate themselves from active participation in politics--represented by Innis--was more rhetorical than profound. Nevertheless, Innis' polemical essays and reviews served two purposes: first, they provided the basis for his criticism of the contemporary state of the social sciences, and, second, they provided Innis with an opportunity to outline his own conception of what the social sciences ought to be as well

as what they should strive towards. In "The Role of Intelligence," "Discussion in the Social Sciences," and many more subsequent publications (see especially 1944, 1944b, 1945 and 1947a), Innis expressed his notions about science and his own particular approach to the subjects he studied.

In 1934, Innis was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and served on a Royal Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia. In July of 1937, after seventeen years at the University of Toronto, he was appointed Chairman of the Department of Political Science, succeeding the retiring E.J. Urwick.<sup>8</sup> These appointments and honours provided recognition of Innis' increasingly widespread reputation as a scholar. They were followed in the forties by numerous honorary degrees and accolades extended primarily in recognition of his work in Canadian economic history. He chose the ceremonies at which various honorary degrees were conferred upon him to defend vigorously his views of the university tradition.

In 1944 Innis published three very important works all of which were written as addresses to academic audiences. In "A Plea for the University Tradition," Innis reaffirmed his belief in the value of an objective, dispassionate, "ivory tower"-based social science and lamented the mountain of restrictions placed on the scientist and scholar. In "Political Economy in the Modern State," Innis argued that "The social sciences reflect the demands of industrialism and capitalism . . ." rather than the search for truth, to the detriment of balanced development in Western civilization. In "On the Economic Significance of Culture," Innis reiterated his views on the social sciences. Creighton (1957:121) writes that at this stage in his career Innis ". . . was driven inevitably into a stupendous comparative investigation of the interrelations of



communications with politics, economics, and religion, throughout history and over the entire world. . .," adding somewhat melodramatically that by the end of the Second World War Innis ". . . had ceased spiritually to be a North American."

After 1945 there was a dramatic reduction in the number of reviews Innis published, in comparison to the preceding twenty years; those reviews he did write were increasingly concerned with newspapers, public opinion, and communications, although topics in Canadian history were not completely ignored. In 1946 he published what was to be the first of four collections of essays. Political Economy in the Modern State, in Innis' own words, ". . . has been designed to bring together widely scattered and relatively inaccessible articles published since 1933, for the convenient use of students, particularly the large number of students from the armed forces" (1946; vii). Included were articles on newspapers and public opinion, the university tradition, the social sciences, particularly economic history, and on governmental machinery.

His 1947 presidential address to the Royal Society of Canada, entitled "Minerva's Owl," was later published as the lead article in his second collection of essays, The Bias of Communication (1951).

In "Minerva's Owl" Innis seemingly abandoned Canada altogether for a journey that would take him back to the ancient Greek, Roman and Mesopotamian empires, building from there to modern times focussing not on constitutions, leaders and specific events, but on media of communication and the character of knowledge. "In each period," Innis wrote, "I have attempted to trace the implications of the media of communication for the character of knowledge and to suggest that a monopoly or oligopoly of

knowledge is built up to the point that equilibrium is disturbed" (1947a:3-4). Innis' telegraphic style in this essay and its sweeping generalizations took many of his colleagues aback. Creighton reported that:

The paper was much too long; and, as if its author were unhappily conscious of its prolixity, the whole, detailed, highly condensed argument was read in the most hurried and unemphatic fashion. Many in his audience were puzzled and bewildered; but despite these imperfections in its delivery and reception, "Minerva's Owl" was perhaps the most important general statement of the last phase of Innis' career (1957:127).

Innis' concern for the history of communications, scholarship and empire prompted him to search out other scholars who could relate to his studies. Thus, he developed an association with C.N. Cochrane, E.T. Owen and E.A. Havelock of the prestigious University of Toronto Classics Department. They assisted him with his investigations of Antiquity, but the questions he asked had arisen in his earlier work and its concern with the extent of political organization over time and space.

Empire and Communications (1950) continued the argument and analysis presented in "Minerva's Owl," expanding on the theme of communication and political organization. After completing these historical studies of communications, Innis was in a position to present his findings in a more general way. This was the thrust of The Bias of Communication-- a collection of articles which investigated the implications of the conclusions of Empire and Communication.

Another collection of essays appeared in 1952 entitled Changing Concepts of Time. In it Innis included five articles written after 1948 in which he further explored the strategic implications of his findings in The Bias of Communication but with special reference to the American

Empire. This is especially evident in the second essay, "The Military Implications of the American Constitution," in which he concluded that:

A written constitution with its divisive nature established by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, established under Washington and Adams, decentralized from Jefferson to Lincoln, first under the Republican party and later the Democratic party, so that at one time there has been a weakening of the power depending largely on the dominant medium of communication, stand in sharp contrast with the unwritten constitution of Great Britain and the undivided power of the Prime Minister responsible to Parliament (1952b:44).

In a sense, Innis had now come full circle. He had begun by engaging in studies in economic history specific to capitalism and the British Empire, had undertaken an expanded study of the political organization of empires which had come and gone over the span of millenia and now he came back to capitalism, the British Empire and the new American Empire.

This course of events coincides with Innis' remark that he had undertaken the studies of empires long past in order to ascertain whether or not there was a universal basis for the hypothesis he had generated earlier with regard to the relationship of the character of media of communication with political organization and authority. The history of Western civilization dating back thousands of years was, in a sense, Innis' laboratory. But aside from his interests in communication and his historical research Innis had other concerns during the post-war years.

Innis again served on a federal Royal Commission, this time one concerned with transportation. He travelled extensively, first to the Soviet Union in 1945--a trip that greatly impressed him--and then to Britain to deliver the Beit lectures at Oxford and for a round of conferences and personal touring. But his health was by this time failing him. His last lecture entitled "The Decline of Instruments"

Essential in Equilibrium," a presidential address to the American Economic Association, was left unfinished. He died on November 8th, 1952. His son, Donald, delivered the unfinished address in his place.

#### The Forgotten Scholar

"It is some time," wrote Neill in 1972 (p. 3), "since the name of Innis was the shibboleth of erudition in Canadian economics, and it may be that there is now sufficient historical distance to make possible an objective appraisal of his contribution." Indeed, in the twenty years since his death there had been very little critical appraisal of his work. John Porter, the noted Canadian author of The Vertical Mosaic (1965), wrote that, "His [Innis'] position as head of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, his own prodigious scholarship, and the numerous scholarly offices which he held made him, until he died in 1952, one of the most powerful figures in Canadian academic circles" (1965:503).

The recognition Innis achieved while still alive did little to sustain an interest in his work after his death. This tends to suggest that it was his powerful academic presence that impressed people, rather than the conclusions of his later works. His academic reputation, as much of his power, was largely built upon the foundation he had laid much earlier in his studies in Canadian economic history. Indeed, as Porter suggests above, Innis' scholarly offices provided him with the basis from which he could exercise substantial influence, but as Creighton remarked, Innis' work after 1940 was increasingly difficult to relate to for a large number of his former colleagues. As a result, interest in his work was effectively on the wane sometime before his death.<sup>9</sup> But other explanations

have also been advanced to account for the eclipse of interest in Innis' work.

Berger (1976:194) points to "The virtual destruction of the dominance of the political-economy tradition in the fifties. . ." as a major contributing factor. Neill (1972:125) suggests that:

His theoretical position, however, has either been misunderstood or ignored. To a great extent his work was the product of a period of adjustment in western civilization when fundamental questions were being asked and new analyses produced. In the consequent period of relative calm and prosperity that sort of thing in social science lost fashion to a more myopic view of greater pragmatic and less critical intent.

S.D. Clark, in turn, points to the rise of structural-functionalism especially in the United States, during the 1930s. This perspective became widespread in the 1950s and 1960s when Canadian universities began expanding rapidly and new universities were being built. Because of this growth, Canadian universities were virtually forced to recruit faculty from abroad and especially from the United States. The effect was that Canadian universities were inundated with foreign scholars with a non-historical theoretical perspective and no "feel" for Canada (Clark, 1976: 120-133). The negative ramifications of this trend on the kind of social science advocated by Innis were widespread and long-lasting. Yet a further reason for the decline of interest in Innis' work was the increasing trend towards specialization and quantification in the social sciences. Innis had recognized this development during the debates of the mid-thirties:

The end of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century were marked by the extension of industrialism dependent on minerals, new sources of power, physics and chemistry and mathematics. These have led to the decline in freedom of trade and the hardening of political entities in the intensity of nationalism. With these has come the end of political economy, the emergence of specialization in the social sciences, and its subordination to nationalism (1938d:5).

Thus, for Innis, the new industrialism with its scientific rationalizations and its increasingly pervasive and extensive division of labour created conditions in which countries took a defensive stance in regard to one another, a defensiveness which manifested itself as nationalism. As Innis pointed out (1946:xii and 129-30), social scientists were increasingly being called upon--and some went willingly--to support governments in the politically derived defensiveness of nationalism with its tariffs and other protective apparatus. Broadly-based inquiry such as political economy was discouraged and was replaced by a narrowly-based, nationally-framed inquiry responsive to political pressure in the form of governmental subsidies to universities and research. Yet, according to Innis, the social sciences had to be free to study what they will. This would mean that research of international--or non-national--character would often be required; moreover, he contended that phenomena such as the fur trade cannot be understood in purely national or regional terms. It was, therefore, somewhat ironic that the rediscovery of Innis by social scientists in the 1960s and 1970s was conducted in exactly the same narrow and specialized fashion that he had spent his career avoiding.

#### A Profile of Interpretations

Shortly after Innis' death in 1952 his close friends, colleagues and associates published several short biographical accounts of Innis' life and largely eulogistic commentaries in a wide variety of journals. They were more predisposed to suggest Innis' overwhelming importance to Canadian scholarship and social science by pointing to his voluminous scholarly production and his vociferous defense of the university tradition than they were to offer substantial criticism.

This trend continued for the following eighteen to twenty years. Articles and commentaries that appeared during this period consisted mainly of passing references to Innis' work in general survey articles and of isolated critiques of various particular aspects of his work. Commentaries on Innis' work in economics predominated with special attention paid to his so-called staples theory of economic growth. Recent attention to Innis is, by contrast to early commentaries, highly thematic and more critical than eulogistic. The themes being developed vary widely in response to the amazing range of Innis' work. But because Innis was primarily an analyst of economic institutions the conclusions he reached in this area have provided the greatest impetus for a reconsideration of his work. The other part of his thought that has received new attention is that dealing with the role of communications media and techniques in Western civilization. His studies of economic institutions have been of particular interest to a group of political economists, while his studies in communications have been the subject of substantial interest for the newly developing field of communications studies. Thus, the literature dealing with Innis' work began with general and largely biographical commentaries, waned during a period in which reference to Innis is rare, and finally entered a stage in the late 1960s when the conclusions of his studies are widely appealed to in support of various contemporary perspectives in the social sciences.

The greater part of the literature about Innis that appeared since 1952 will now be examined in order to (1) identify the major themes of different interpretations of Innis' work, and (2) to establish the principal areas of disagreement between different types of interpretations.

These major differences of interpretation will be addressed thematically, but chronological developments within themes will also be considered. The early commentaries on Innis were general rather than specific or thematic, but they often contained in embryonic form themes that were later elaborated upon;<sup>10</sup> in fact, most of the themes addressed in more recent times can be traced to earlier commentaries. Before systematically addressing the various themes it is appropriate at this point to identify, and then to comment upon, the more general published commentaries in regard to Innis' work.

Virtually all of the published remarks on Innis' work which appeared during his lifetime were in the form of reviews of his numerous books. Most reviews published prior to 1940 were complimentary.<sup>11</sup> The Fur Trade in Canada (1930) and The Cod Fisheries (1940), among his many publications, were especially well received. Negative criticisms of his overall contribution comprise mainly references to Innis' "cryptic" style and tendency to sweeping generalization rather than to more substantive and specific analytical and methodological issues. Innis' death triggered a more expansive reflection and commentary on his work than had been possible in book reviews.

Most of his obituaries, eulogies and general reviews of his work that appeared in the journals after his death were simply entitled "Harold Adams Innis: 1894-1952." These consisted mainly of straightforward biographical summaries which emphasized Innis' special personal characteristics.<sup>12</sup> However, Vincent Bladen, his successor as Chairman of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, and other close associates such as W.T. Easterbrook, A. Brady, J.B. Brebner, W.A. Mackintosh, and



Marshall McLuhan, also offered interpretations of the significance of different influences and events on Innis and considered the overall direction of his life and scholarship. In 1957, one of Innis' closest friends at the University of Toronto, the prominent Canadian historian Donald Creighton, published the first complete biography of Harold Innis entitled Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar. These early publications were followed several years later by several more of similar genre.

The first to appear was the monograph by Robin Neill, a Canadian graduate in economics from Duke University who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the character and thrust of Innis' whole contribution. His dissertation formed the basis for a monograph published in 1972, on the twentieth anniversary of Innis' death, entitled A new theory of value: the Canadian economics of H.A. Innis. It was followed in 1976 by a perceptive commentary on Innis published by Carl Berger, another prominent Canadian historian, as part of a book entitled The Writing of Canadian History. Two years later, in 1978, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Innis' death, Donald Creighton was again called upon to review Innis' contribution. His keynote address to the Innis Symposium, "Harold Adams Innis: Legacy, Context and Direction," at Simon Fraser University was simply entitled "Harold Adams Innis: An Appraisal." It was accompanied on the same occasion by an address entitled "The Contribution of H.A. Innis to Canadian Scholarship," delivered by S.D. Clark, one of Innis' students and probably the best known historical sociologist in Canada today, and a commentary by William Westfall of York University, entitled "The Ambivalent Verdict:

Harold Adams Innis and Canadian History." These are the most important of the general commentaries on Innis' work, although many other articles also make some reference to the broader thrust of Innis' work and to his significance for contemporary social science.<sup>13</sup>

Neill, Berger and Creighton generally agree that Innis had a single-minded dedication to scholarship, a strength of character, a need to be thorough and comprehensive in all that he did, a capacity for sustained intellectual effort and a sometimes overpowering career consciousness. He possessed a highly inductive mind and a critical spirit combined with an intractable intellectual integrity and honesty. They also contend that Innis was a strong liberal and nationalist, characteristics conditioned by his rigid Baptist "Grit" upbringing and his wartime experiences. They further conclude that his early work in Canadian economic history far outweighs in importance his later work in communications and that a clearly defined re-orientation occurred in his work in 1940 from studies of staples industries to their effects on the minds of men and political organization. The importance of Thorstein Veblen to Innis is generally acknowledged in passing as well as the influence of other scholars at McMaster University and the University of Chicago, where he studied.

The disagreements and contentious points in this body of literature arise mainly from the degree of emphasis to be accorded certain influences and events in Innis' life rather than from substantive issues. Clearly, there is a great deal of agreement in the literature in regard to the characteristics described above. The biography by Creighton encompasses most of the earlier commentaries on Innis and effectively serves as a written memorial to Innis (Creighton, 1957:ixi). The later works by

Neill (1972), Berger (1976), Clark (1978), Westfall (1978) and Creighton (1978) have the benefit of historical distance. They provide a more critical and analytical perspective than the earlier interpretations, yet they generally agree with the earlier interpretations that Innis was a nationalist, a liberal and a staples, then a communications, theorist.

Besides the predominantly biographical material, the interpretations of Innis' work fall into four basic categories: Canadian economic history, nationalism, social scientific theory and method and communication. Strictly speaking, nationalism as a theme can be incorporated in the category of Canadian economic history, but because of its central importance it deserves special attention. Commentaries surrounding Canadian economic history focus on either the conclusions of Innis' various studies or his methods of analysis. The same can be said about communications. Interpretations of his work in the area of social scientific theory and method tend to be critical and analytical in nature, dealing primarily with the manner in which Innis approached his research.

#### Commentaries

##### 1. Canadian Economic History

The central themes raised by interpretations of Innis' work in Canadian economic history are the staples/dependency theme and the theme of economic history as a mode of historical explanation. Throughout his career Innis was first and foremost an economic historian. This holds true whether he was investigating a staple commodity trade linking Europe to North America in recent times, or ancient Hellenistic and Mesopotamian empires. Most of the commentaries on his work, indeed, deal with topics relating to economic history. Moreover, a large number of commentators

go even further and suggest that Innis' work in "Canadian" economic history ranks as his most important. It is this aspect of his work that established his international reputation, that had provided the most sustained interest in his work throughout his career and that has since generated a substantial amount of controversy and discussion. Most early commentators on Innis would agree with W.A. Mackintosh (1953:185) that Innis' most fruitful work throughout his career was in Canadian economic history.

The first primarily critical articles on Innis' work in Canadian economic history were provided by Kenneth Buckley of Queen's University (1958) and by W.T. Easterbrook (1959). Both wrote critiques of the "staples approach" based on what they perceived to be the increasing complexity of the industrial system in Canada, something that could not be explained adequately, they maintained, by appealing to the staples producing sector of the Canadian economy. In contradistinction to both Buckley and Easterbrook, Mel Watkins, in a seminal article entitled "A Staple Theory of Economic Growth" (1963), attempted to systematize Innis' so-called staples approach as an explanation of Canadian resource-linked economic development. Watkins' article was followed by a series of analyses which explicitly accepted his assessment of Innis. They included, among others, Kari Levitt's Silent Surrender (1970), Gary Teeple's Capitalism and the National Question in Canada (1972), and Robert Laxer's [Canada] Ltd. (1973). Robin Neill (1972) addresses Innis' contribution to Canadian economic history and concludes that Innis was most concerned with uncovering a new theory of value in regard to economic activity, one based on

the creative potential of the human personality. Carl Berger (1976) focusses not only on Innis' conclusions of his studies in Canadian economic history emphasizing their comprehensive character, but also pays special attention to Innis' conception of his role as social scientist and economic historian. He maintains that Innis was primarily engaged in "a search for limits" in regard to the work of the social sciences.

Innis' work in Canadian economic history has had an especially pronounced effect upon a new generation of Canadian socialist and Marxist political economists. Canadian Dimension, a socialist monthly journal published in Winnipeg, printed several articles from 1972 to 1974 emphasizing what Mackintosh in 1953 identified as the political dimension of the production of export staples, namely, the relationship between metropolis and hinterland.<sup>14</sup> The dependent character of the Canadian economy and polity is explained by reference to metropolitan control over manufacture, secondary industry, administration, technological research and development, and the making of decisions.

In 1977, the Journal of Canadian Studies published a special issue dedicated to Innis, including articles specifically on the theme of Canadian economic history. Watkins contributed "The Staples Theory Revisited" in which he reiterates his 1963 argument while adding that ". . . the bias of the paper is toward the Marxist paradigm" (1977:83). He maintains that the scholars now working with the staples approach are predominantly Marxists. Neill (1977:73), criticizing Watkins and others such as Buckley (1958) and Easterbrook (1959) for pressing the staples ". . . thesis into service on every side of the debate over growth . . . ,"

holds that, unfortunately, Innis' thesis has become a set of theoretical models rather than an historical thesis. The Symposium held at Simon Fraser University in 1978 provided a context in which several scholars explored the theme of Innis and economic history. A particularly interesting aspect of the Symposium was the delivery of four papers concerned with the Canadian and American North and inspired, ostensibly, by Innis.<sup>15</sup> They were largely concerned with the dynamics and configurations of the development of the North by southern business and governmental interests.

Innis, the economic historian, is considered by some commentators to have been more inductively than deductively inclined. He is presumed to have allowed historical processes and events to lead him to explanation rather than imposing theoretical propositions on historical processes and events. Brebner (1953:18), supported by Neill (1972), rejects this notion, insisting that Innis worked both inductively and deductively. Part of his argument is based on the idea that Veblen provided Innis with a substantial theoretical and methodological base, and that in his studies in Canadian economic history Innis was guided by distinct theoretical notions about the character of civilization and the important factors which contribute to the growth and decay of institutions which, for him, were the ". . . chief interest of the social scientist" (Innis, 1935:283). Innis, it would seem, had a fairly well defined idea about what to look for in historical investigation and how to look for it. In this regard, Innis' views on nationalism and the use of the country or

nation as a unit of social scientific analysis are important clues as to how he approached the study of history.

## 2. Nationalism

The frequently-held view that Innis was a nationalist indicates that a fundamental misapprehension has occurred among numerous commentators on Innis in regard to his basic theory and method of historical investigation. Although Innis' published views on nationalism and on the use of the nation or country as a unit of analysis in the social sciences are overwhelmingly negative, several writers have considered him to be a strong nationalist and, for the most part, an analyst of Canadian national political and economic problems and issues. Two writers in particular have taken diametrically opposed views on this matter. In 1969, Daniel Drache published an article entitled "Harold Innis: A Canadian Nationalist," and in 1977 William Christian, of Mount Allison University, released a devastating critique of Drache and his perspective in "The Inquisition of Nationalism," an article that highlights Innis' often declared aversion to nationalism. As we shall see, Innis' views on the nation and nationalism are highly indicative of the way he defined science, and his practice thereof.

In broad terms, then, there is general agreement in the literature in regard to the notion that the staples/dependency theory or approach constitutes a major element of originality in Innis' work. There is, however, no agreement about how Innis approached the study of history, a difference of interpretation especially evident in regards to his alleged nationalism. This disagreement extends, moreover, not only to his work in Canadian economic history, but also to his communciations

studies undertaken after 1940.

### 3. Communications

The Innis Symposium mentioned above constituted an important event in the "official" recognition of the significance of Innis' studies in communications. The recognition was a long time coming despite the efforts of Marshall McLuhan and James Carey, a contemporary American communications theorist.<sup>16</sup> Creighton (1957), among others, confesses to being puzzled by Innis' adventures in communications studies; their significance in relationship to his work in Canadian economic history is unclear for a great many critics of Innis and his contribution.

The reviews of Innis' Empire and Communications (1950) were favourable except that V. Gordon Childe (1951), the eminent classical scholar from the University of London, recognized that Innis' inexperience with Antiquity and his reliance on secondary sources proved to be somewhat of a handicap. His subsequent The Bias of Communication (1951) was ambivalently reviewed. Karl Deutsch (1952) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Bernard Berelson (1952) of the Ford Foundation and John U. Nef (1952) of the University of Chicago were generally positive toward the tone and critical quality of the book while pointing out its "unfinished" character. On the other hand, E.R. Adair of McGill University was harshly critical of the book. He remarked sarcastically in conclusion to his review of the book that ". . . the reader is likely to close this book with the reflection that Mr. Innis' reputation will continue to rest on the sound and valuable contribution he has made to the history of Canada's economy and communications" (1952:394).



Shortly after Innis' death Easterbrook (1953:10) noted the crucial significance that communications had played in all of Innis' work, as did McLuhan in a well known article also published in 1953 entitled "The Later Innis." In 1960, Easterbrook again picked up this theme in "Problems in the Relationship of Communication and Economic History." James Carey in "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan," (1967) proposed that the main theme of Innis' communications studies was the relationship between media of communication and social organization, including the location of social authority and the mechanisms of its perpetuation. This argument was restated in 1977 in a somewhat modified form by William Christian, who emphasized the political dimension of the relationship between media of communication and social organization. However, it was not until the Innis Symposium at Simon Fraser University in 1978 that for the first time a group of students and scholars gathered to discuss the whole of Innis' contribution with special emphasis on his communications studies and their contemporary and future implications. There is no single theme running through all of the Symposium material, and many of the individual addresses on this occasion will be referred to in subsequent chapters, but it can be observed at this point that many of the presentations were concerned with the manner in which Innis approached the study of history and communications, and the connections between his early and later works. Indeed, although the positive importance of Innis' contribution to social science is seldom questioned, the nature of that contribution, both in its theory and methods, is subject to much debate. The manner in which Innis approached the study of history and communications, that is, his conception and practice of social science, has been

variously interpreted, and constitutes the last theme to be addressed in relationship to the literature on Innis.

#### 4. Social Sciences

Innis, especially after the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, often wrote about the social sciences and their relationship to capitalism and industrialism. He questioned the existing role of the social scientist and suggested what that role ought to be. Although a great deal of Innis' time was devoted to promoting the social sciences and suggesting alternatives to its subjugation to capitalism, this aspect of his work has received little attention of a specific nature since his death. An exception to this trend is evident in the work of Hugh G. Aitken, the noted Canadian economist. In an article written in 1977 entitled "Myth and Measurement: the Innis Tradition in Economic History," Aitken rejects the notion that Innis was a social scientist, noting his neglect for the construction of testable hypotheses. He labels Innis a "myth-maker" rather than a scientist, meaning that what Innis did had value, but only to the extent that it pointed to interesting areas for scientific investigation. Neill (1977), by contrast, points out that Innis was engaged in historical studies in which he attempted to construct historically rather than normatively based theses. This view had been suggested as early as 1953 by Marshall McLuhan.

As previously suggested, Innis' work in Canadian economic history has appealed particularly to a new generation of Canadian Marxist political economists. They contend that Innis was a strong nationalist, a materialist, a generalist rather than a specialist, and a scholar possessed of a basically historical perspective. Ian Parker, one of

this new generation of Marxist political economists, has suggested, in three noteworthy articles,<sup>17</sup> that combining Marx and Innis would provide the most powerful basis for any subsequent analyses of Canadian history. He suggests that their analytical methods have an inherent affinity.

A. John Watson and Leslie Pal, both contemporary commentators on Innis' work, address the issue of Innis' perspectives on social science, his conception of its nature and its potential.<sup>18</sup> Innis, they maintain, practised and promoted the "philosophical approach" as a counteracting force against the increasing specialization of the social sciences.

In summary, then, Innis' work has been the subject of a substantial amount of attention, especially immediately after his death and since the twentieth anniversary of his death in 1972. Much of the literature consists of biographical and eulogistic commentaries or of analyses of, and appeals to, particular themes in Innis' work. The dominant categories in which Innis' work has been assessed are those of Canadian economic history and communications.

From the perspective of this thesis, which is primarily interested in understanding Innis' work in holistic terms as a contribution to social science, much of the existing literature is overly focussed on specific aspects of Innis' work, taken to have separate and distinctive meaning. The value of the existing body of literature surrounding Innis' work lies in its suggestive force and in its somewhat isolated yet potent insights. In it can be found a multitude of clues to enlighten the search for a more holistic understanding of Innis and his contribution. The subsequent chapters of this thesis are organized around the themes identified above.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. For a relatively detailed treatment of Innis' early life see Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar (1957) by Donald Creighton.
2. For an analysis of Veblen's impact on Innis, including a discussion of "method of approach," see Chapter Five of this thesis.
3. "The price system" is a common concept found in economic literature, especially in the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The price system is not essential to all economic situations but is particular to modern Western civilization. It describes a mode of distribution of goods and services which is based on private property, the use of money in distribution (exchange) and a market system. For a detailed discussion of Innis' use of the concept see Neill (1972:51).
4. In 1931 Innis wrote two articles in this regard: "The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Fishery in Newfoundland;" and "An Introduction to the Economic History of the Maritimes, including Newfoundland and New England." In 1935 he wrote "Cape Breton and the French Regime," and in 1937 he published "Basic Problems of Government in Newfoundland."
5. See the bibliography included at the end of this thesis for references to a complete list of Innis' published works.
6. This article was reproduced in substance (with a new introduction and conclusion) in Innis and Plumptre (1934:3-24). It was also later reprinted in Innis (1956:123-140) as "The Canadian Economy and the Depression."
7. Frank Knight and J.M. Clark were both on the faculty of the University of Chicago when Innis studied there from 1917-1920. Both, according to many commentators--prominent among them D. Creighton (1957)--had a great deal of influence on Innis. It was Clark who suggested the C.P.R. as a doctoral thesis topic to Innis.
8. Shortly after his ascension to the Chairmanship of his department he changed its name to the Department of Political Economy.
9. See Berger (1976:195) and Watkins (1963:141-43).
10. Examples include the themes of staple production, scholarship and nationalism.
11. Reviews of A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway by O.D. Skelton (1923), of The Fur Trade in Canada by W.A. Mackintosh (1931), and of Settlement and the Mining Frontier by C.R. Fay (1936) are but three examples.

12. See especially the eulogies and obituaries by Willits, Cole, Creighton, Faucher, Lower and Nef (1953).
13. See in particular Watson (1977), Christian (1977) and Marchak's critique of Clark, Westfall and Watkins within the context of the 1978 Innis conference at Simon Fraser University.
14. See in particular articles by A.K. Davis (1972), C. Gonick (1972), P. Usher (1972) and J. Warnock (1974).
15. See the articles by G. Valaskakis, Arlon Tussing, J. Steeves and P. Usher.
16. Carey wrote an article in 1967 entitled, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan."
17. See Parker (1977), (1977a) and (1978).
18. Watson and Pal both published articles in the Journal of Canadian Studies, November, 1977.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STAPLES APPROACH

During the past quarter-century a wide-ranging set of interpretations have been advanced regarding the early phase of Innis' work in economic history. Most of these interpretations have variously described Innis' method of analysis in his studies of the fur trade, cod fisheries, mining, timber and pulp and paper as the staples "approach,"<sup>1</sup> "theory," "thesis," "model," and "theme." The term "staples approach" has achieved the widest currency, but some commentators use the terms interchangeably.<sup>2</sup> However, the specialization of approach implied in such a perspective is fundamentally at odds with Innis' views on the nature of the social sciences and civilization. Moreover, when Innis' emphasis on commodity trade is viewed in relation to his overall theoretical and methodological framework, it becomes clear that his focus on staples commodity trade resulted from the application of a previously developed approach and did not constitute an approach in itself.

There is very little in the literature to indicate that commentators are prepared to accept the notion that Innis had developed a theory of historical change. Indeed, many of the writers who have commented on Innis' work are inclined to suggest that the staples approach constituted the pivotal element in the first phase of Innis' career, and that focussing on the staple commodity allowed him to correlate a wide range of historical events and processes.<sup>3</sup> As

Easterbrook expressed it, "From this standpoint, the staple, like the medium, may be viewed as a tool of analysis which enables study of total situations in terms of resources, technology and markets, and the institutions, economic, political and social, in which these are imbedded" (1960:563). Earlier, Easterbrook had suggested that "industrialism" was the focus of Innis' research in economic history (1953a: 291). Thus, for Easterbrook, Innis was engaged in studies in industrialism or industrial development with special attention being paid the staples producing sector because of its primary and critical importance in defining and determining the course of North American history. Support for this perspective can be found in an article by Hugh Aitken (1977:99) in which he suggests that the staples approach provided Innis with a way of "seeing the data" or as a "frame of reference." Kenneth Buckley observes that, "While Innis did not subscribe to a staple theory of economic growth, he did use the staple approach to correlate a wide range of political and social developments and explain the character of major institutions within Canada" (1958:442). Buckley, in the same article, contrasts what he considers Innis' staples approach derived from a concern for an international economy with Mackintosh's staples theory which he perceives as being more applicable to regional and national situations. In a variation on this theme, G.W. Bertram (1967), described by Drache (1978:28) as a "launderer" of the Innisian political economy tradition, proposes that the staple "model" was in reality a theory of regional growth within an international economy.

By contrast, Berger (1976) and Neill (1972) disagree with

Easterbrook's contention that Innis ". . . nowhere gives any indication of interest in constructing a system, or theory of historical change" (1953:9). They view Innis as having been engaged in a search for a more adequate theory of economic growth. Their arguments are based on statements by Innis to the effect that the economic theory of old countries is not suited to new countries and that an economic theory suited to new countries has to be forged in the furnace of economic history.<sup>4</sup> Neill (1977:73) explicitly rejects what he considers the transformation of Innis' historical thesis on the part of various writers into a set of what he calls "theoretical normative models." This does not imply, however, that Innis was uninterested in theory. Neill and Christian both argue that Innis was in search of a new theory of economic growth. Christian remarks, for example, that Innis ". . . drew his theory from the facts that he studied, but there was always an interpenetration of facts and theory, each refining and modifying the other" (1977:21). In their analyses, Neill and Christian are essentially reflecting views expressed by J.B. Brebner in 1963.<sup>5</sup>

Marshall McLuhan largely concurred with Brebner in this regard, but the manner in which he expressed his concurrence is unique. For McLuhan, Innis attempted to create a working model of the fur trade and other staple-centered industries from the inside, with special reference to the people most involved in it, ". . . and who were most harassed by its exigencies" (1953:385). In 1953, commenting on Innis' method, McLuhan wrote that:

For the Innis approach, no preconceptions are necessary. In fact, total reconstruction of an industry makes preconceptions useless. And 'explanation' takes the form simply of presentation of a dramatic model (1953:386).



Thus, McLuhan noted that although one element such as the staple commodity may be centrally important in Innis' historical reconstruction on a certain historical setting and instance, it does not automatically command singular theoretical significance at all times and in all places.

A major difficulty with the above perspectives is that they define Innis either in regionally or structurally limited terms, or as an inductively inclined scholar. This latter variation depicts Innis as having discovered, through the influence of Marian Newbigin and W.A. Mackintosh, that the staple commodity provided the key to the opening of the North American continent to European economic interests. These interpretations generally fail to acknowledge the predominant influence on Innis of Thorstein Veblen's historical and institutional approach.

Before undertaking his analysis of the expansion of the institutions of European civilization into North America, Innis had already come to the conclusion--thanks in large part to Veblen--that the study of economic institutions would provide the most efficacious course to a more profound understanding of European civilization as a whole historical process.

In the specific case of The Fur Trade in Canada, this meant tracing the European origins of the trade in furs in North America, an activity Innis considered fundamental to the spread of settlement inland. The fur trade, Innis contended, had arisen in the relationship, at first haphazard and accidental and then organized, of Europeans engaged in fishing for cod on the eastern seaboard and the Grand Banks with autochthonous groups living on shore, or not far inland. He

concluded that after a time the fur trade grew independent of the fishery and moved toward the interior of the continent. He outlined the patterns of political organization necessary for the profitable prosecution of the trade at different times, and their replacement by more effective organizational techniques, especially when depleting stocks of beaver and other fur-bearing animals necessitated a push toward the west. Finally, Innis described the decline of the trade in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in face of settlement, forestry, mining and fur farming. In all of this Innis attempted to present a life-history of the growth of European civilization, focussing on the fur trade as a uniquely important factor. Innis argued that European civilization expanded into North America because of the superiority of its technology and because of the search for profit. The development of the fur trade was a result of the latter, one of the most powerful institutions of European civilization.

The explanatory power of Innis' method of historical reconstruction provides the foundation upon which he built his academic career and reputation. But even though the value of his contribution has been widely recognized, its precise character and thrust have not always been clearly identified.

To characterize Innis' method as a "staples approach," as many commentators on his work do, or to view the staples in his work as a convenient focal point, is to misunderstand Innis' conception of social science and civilization, and to miss the importance of Veblen's work for Innis. In essence, Innis appropriated--or at least was highly impressed by and agreed with--Veblen's particular theoretical and methodological

assumptions about science and civilization.

Veblen considered that science was an institution which had evolved from earlier forms of thought and action, and which was itself evolving through the development of new theories and methods particularly suited to industrialism and capitalism.<sup>6</sup> He divided science into two basic categories, pre-Darwinian and post-Darwinian, partly on the basis of methodology, but more clearly on the basis of their metaphysical assumptions. The objective of pre-Darwinian scientific inquiry, for Veblen, was taxonomy and definition. Scientists of this bent search for final causation and natural laws governing all phenomena. Moreover, they emphasize the immutable relations that govern phenomena before the intervention of causation. Post-Darwinian science, by contrast, places its explanatory emphasis on the process of causation itself, whereby ". . . the interval of instability and transition between initial cause and definitive effect, has come to take the first place in the inquiry; instead of that consummation in which causal effect was once presumed to come to rest" (Veblen, 1906:37). In post-Darwinian science there is no longer any preoccupation with natural laws or final causation. Thus, post-Darwinian or modern science, as Veblen often characterized it, is exclusively concerned with the relationship between what has taken place and what is taking place.

Both phases of scientific inquiry, according to Veblen, are concerned with the collection of facts and logical proof based on empirical observation, experimentation, interpretation and verification. The difference between the two is primarily one of metaphysical emphasis. Pre-Darwinian science focusses on phenomena in a state of rest, so to

speak, while post-Darwinian science focusses on change, or more precisely on consecutive and cumulative change.

Moreover, Veblen related the development of science to other phases of human development. He wrote: "This question of a scientific point of view, of a particular attitude and animus in matters of knowledge, is a question of the formulation of habits of thought; and habits of thought are an outcome of habits of life" (Veblen, 1906:38). The habits of modern life, Veblen held, were predominantly influenced by machine production and business practices in the pursuit of profit. Post-Darwinian science, thus, has taken on the colour and animus of the technology of machine production, and largely serves the needs of industry and business. All habits of thought and life in modern European civilization come under the influence of these dual forces of industry and business.

It is this Veblenian conception of post-Darwinian science and economics that Innis referred to in the Preface of A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway when he described his own perspective as "scientific and evolutionary" (1923). Not only did Innis completely reject neo-classical economics, as Neill suggests, but, more importantly, he was most impressed by Veblen's conception of science. Innis' use of the term "science" must not be construed to imply a hypothetically-based exercise in deduction where syllogisms, models and normative evaluations about; it refers essentially to a life-historical method. Where that science is a social science, the object of life-historical inquiry must be civilization defined as a schema of institutions.

It becomes understandable, then, why Innis, as J.B. Brebner so

aptly expressed it: "Again and again . . . pleaded with his peers to cut along the grain of human experience not across it" (1953a:16). By urging this method of analyzing the human experience Innis was registering his opposition to an ahistorical functional approach to the study of social phenomena.

Taking the predominant influence of Veblen's views on science and civilization into account, Innis' studies of the fur trade and other staples trade must be viewed as first and foremost studies in the expansion of the institutions of Western (European) civilization into North America of typically European ways of approaching nature, technology and social relations. Innis chose, in Veblen's words, to enquire into the life-history of material civilization on a restricted plan (Veblen, 1909:627).

In view of the above, and if a label must be attached to Innis' method, the term staples approach seems inadequate. Innis' approach can be more adequately described as the institutional life-historical approach. Innis discovered the importance of the trade in staples commodities for the expansion of Western civilization into North America as a result of the application of a method of analysis derived from Thorstein Veblen, which he described as evolutionary and scientific. To characterize Innis' work as a theory of regional growth or as a staples approach ignores his conception of European institutions as being habits of thought and life, largely intangible, constantly growing and decaying, unconfined to geographical regions or political units and having, in a sense, a life of their own.

In conclusion, Innis did not consider that geographically or

politically defined units were necessarily suitable units of social scientific analysis. Countries and nations are institutions of Western civilization and must be considered important in any analysis of expanding European civilization. However, there is no reason to limit our studies to the use of regional or national frameworks. Political institutions such as countries must be analyzed in conjunction with a whole constellation of other institutions. Innis maintained that there was no reason for the social scientist to allow the politician to define his analytical framework for him. Innis, from this perspective, was not an analyst of "Canadian" economic history, but of European civilization in an area of the world defined in political terms as Canada. The difference may seem subtle and somewhat insignificant, but within it lies the key to understanding Innis' unorthodox conception of the role of the social scientist and of the nature of civilization. Further, it serves to unravel the mystery of whether or not Innis was a nationalist, which theme we now turn to.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Although Drache (1976:7) contends that Innis himself provided the term "staples approach" to define his method, I find no such reference in his published work.
2. Good examples of this can be found in the work of Watkins (1963) and Drache (1976).
3. See especially Easterbrook (1953, 1959 and 1960), Brebner (1953 and 1953a), Neill (1972, 1977 and 1978) and Berger (1976).
4. See, for example, Innis (1929:3 and 1929a:26).
5. Brebner wrote: "Innis' thematic achievement was grand and unprecedented . . . . His formal documentation could only be described as whimsical and his scholarly apparatus as casual, but every page of his text conducted the reader deep into the problems and opportunities of the men in the field, Indian and European, or of their managers nearer the economic capitals, or of the politicians whose services they tried to evoke. In effect, he wove geography, economic history, changing technology, political adaptation, and far more theory than is evident, into a tough fabric of explanatory exposition that its rough spots and irregularities could be ignored . . . . He was always both the inductive and the deductive thinker" (1953a:18).
6. For a detailed, carefully constructed delineation of Veblen's views on this matter see his The Place of Science in Modern Civilization (1906), and "The Limitations of Marginal Utility" (1909).

## CHAPTER THREE

### INNIS AND NATIONALISM

There are two diametrically opposed views on Innis and nationalism. Those who consider Innis to be a Canadian nationalist buttress their arguments with biographical references to such factors as Innis' refusal to accept prestigious academic posts abroad (especially at the University of Chicago); his defense of Canadian scholarship, the "Canadian" focus of most of his work and research, and his attacks on American imperialism.<sup>1</sup> Those who reject the notion that Innis was a nationalist defend their position with textual references, such as Innis' acidic comment about the "Warm, fetid smell of nationalism, the breeding ground of the pestilence of the west, the worship of which kills its millions where the worship of the church in the inquisition killed its thousands."<sup>2</sup>

The latter interpretation is the more plausible one from the perspective of this thesis, the former one being essentially incomplete; the issue of whether or not Innis was a nationalist must be viewed in conjunction with his views on science, civilization, culture, monopoly and marginality. Placing Innis' views on nationalism and on the use of the nation as unit of social and scientific analysis in the broad context of his whole scholarly output, it will be argued in this chapter that Innis was not a nationalist, and that he did not consider the nation, country or region to necessarily be proper frameworks in which to conduct social



scientific inquiry.

The evidence from his post-1940 work suggests that, by this time, Innis considered Western civilization to have collapsed. He urged, particularly in his convocation speeches, that Western civilization should return to a state of balanced development between force and intellect. Part of his solution to the problem of the collapse of Western civilization--which was caused by extremism and fanaticism, including nationalism--was to promote criticism, culture, and opposition to all monopolies whether political, economic or scientific. He maintained that change in the form of pressure towards balance would not come from the power-holding monopolies themselves, nor from extremists and fanatics. Instead, the pressure for change would come from marginal areas and from marginal people.

Furthermore, Innis, especially prior to 1940, refused to allow that the nation or country should provide the structural framework for scientific analysis. He maintained that social scientists must decide, for reasons dictated by the logic of scientific inquiry alone, what to study, how, and within what framework. When scientists, for the sake of convenience, undertake to accept the nation as their underlying analytical framework, they are allowing politicians and other powerful interest groups to define their research for them. Innis' approach to the nation was, as was his treatment of all other institutions of Western civilization, an attempt to uncover its relative significance, within the context of a constellation of institutions, for the development of civilization as a historical process.

The opening line of argument that Innis was an unqualified

lifelong nationalist came from scholars such as J.B. Brebner and Donald Creighton, men who dealt with Innis both on a personal and a professional basis. For example, Brebner wrote in a review of Changing Concepts of Time that ". . . in spite of some anti-nationalistic comments, Innis here exposed a nationalism that had hitherto for the most part been masked in irony and wit" (1953:171). Drache, in agreement with Brebner and summarizing the majority opinion, argues that Innis was a nationalist because of his liberalism, and that "What he achieved, and what his followers failed to grasp, is that he laid the foundation for a new liberal tradition with its own language and concepts which was neither American nor British but Canadian" (1969:7). Moreover, Drache proposes that it was Innis' anti-Americanism that provided the basis for his nationalism (1969:10). The notion that Innis was opposed to American imperialism, defined as the spread of powerful American-based institutions beyond American political boundaries, provides the basic argument for many writers' suggestion that Innis was a nationalist. Their view of Canadian nationalism, which seems to be a defensive one, is that it is a doctrine opposed to foreign encroachments in the political and economic decision-making of Canada. However, subscribing this essentially antagonistic stance to international relations to Innis fails to observe the fact that Innis worked very closely with many American organizations. For example, he served as president of the American Economic History Association and the prestigious American Economic Association, and he advised the Rockefeller Foundation on the allocation of its research grants.

Only Brebner and Berger acknowledge that Innis made overtly and

explicitly anti-nationalistic statements in his published works, but this acknowledgement had little effect on their conclusions. Following Brebner, Berger comments that "His [Innis'] was a passionate nationalism that had for long been masked in irony and wit, humour and cynical comments on the clichés of his day" (1976:111). Cooper is so convinced of Innis' nationalism that he is moved to write: "The case for Innis' Canadianism is so obvious that it could only be belaboured during a period of national narcissism within a country whose identity is typified by its quest for one" (1977:133). For Cooper, as well as for Drache (1969) and Berger (1976), Innis' individualism and his independent spirit go hand in hand with his nationalism.

In contrast, Christian, while recognizing the strong surface case for Innis as a nationalist, argues that Innis' overwhelmingly negative comments concerning nationalism in his published works, as well as in his unpublished papers, clearly point in the opposite direction. Textual comments centered on six basic themes form the core of Christian's argument. According to Christian, Innis opposed nationalism because:

- (1) it encouraged war and territorial disputes;
- (2) it exaggerated the importance of national boundaries in the collection of statistics;
- (3) it fostered totalitarianism via control over public opinion and replaced rationalism with basically irrational appeals to the population;
- (4) it placed enormous restrictions on the social scientist because of the breakdown of international communications between scientists and the frequent harnessing of the findings of social science for militaristic purposes;
- (5) it hampered the development of "culture";
- (6) and, finally, it created economic hardship for the common man via the introduction of

tariffs, trade barriers and governmental intervention (Christian, 1977: 65-70). Christian's argument is highly persuasive, particularly because he draws upon a multitude of examples from Innis' writings in support of his conclusions.<sup>3</sup> The following comment by Innis in reference to the appointment of university presidents, while not one that Christian draws upon, is representative of the type of statement that he uses in buttressing his argument:

. . . they should be appointed from those concerned with the protection of scholars against colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, ecclesiasticism, academic nepotism, political affiliations and the demands of special groups and classes, and with encouragement of scholars concerned with the search for truth (1944a:69).

Two highly respected and prominent writers agree with Christian's view that Innis was not a nationalist and that he opposed nationalism as a programme and ideology. Carey (1967:14) writes that "Innis viewed the rampaging nationalism of the twentieth century with anger and anguish, attitudes not untypical of contemporary intellectuals." Easterbrook, writing in 1953 and in contradiction to both Brebner and Creighton, contends that Innis viewed modern nationalism as a dangerous ". . . by-product of the new industrialization of communications . . .," because it accentuated differences of outlook via the press and radio (1953a:302). Easterbrook concludes that Innis was increasingly mindful of the effects of nationalism on economics and scholarship in general.

As noted earlier, the key to understanding Innis' stance on nationalism is to consider it in conjunction with his views on science, civilization, culture, monopoly and marginality. None of the writers previously referred to, except Christian, does this in a complete and systematic manner.<sup>4</sup> In the previous chapter it was argued that Innis,

like Veblen, considered science to be a life-historical method. Beyond this, there is another aspect of Innis' approach to science which is crucially important for an understanding of his views on nationalism, i.e. its fundamentally critical nature. "Science," Veblen noted, "creates nothing but theories" (1906:19). That is, the findings of science are subject to continuous revision and rejection; there is no absolute truth in science. Innis construed this to mean that science is by definition a "search for truth," with emphasis being placed on search rather than on truth. He wrote that "With the independent search for truth, science was separated from myth" (Innis, 1950:63). However, the independent search for truth described an essentially ideal situation for science. The effects of nationalism have been especially devastating for the social sciences. "Scientific interest has been distorted to fit the mold of nationalism," Innis remarked, "and national boundaries have become cultural facts with the permanence of the features of geological phenomena" (1945:302). Nations elicit the support of social scientists and, as Innis noted caustically, "On all sides the social scientist can be seen carrying fuel to Ottawa to make the flames of nationalism burn more brightly" (1946:xii). Increasing collection of national statistics and unquestioned use of them in the social sciences indicate that social scientists are ready and willing to serve the interests of the nation in promoting itself (Innis, 1949a:104). "Social scientists of reputable standing are known as nationalists or imperialists or protectionists, or free traders" (Innis, 1935:281). Thus, on the grounds that social scientists must be free to search for the truth wherever that search might lead them, and on the grounds outlined in the previous chapter that

civilization is the fundamental analytical unit and focus of the social sciences, Innis rejected the notion that the region or the nation should be considered appropriate units of analysis in the social sciences.

Buckley, recognizing Innis' repudiation of the region as a proper unit of analysis in the social sciences, points to his consistently negative criticism of F.J. Turner's frontier thesis as elaborated in Turner's The Frontier in American History (1921). Buckley also points to Innis' ". . . criticism of Silberling's nationalistic bias in otherwise eulogistic comments on Silberling's Dynamics of Business" (1958:44). Easterbrook (1953a:295) had earlier recognized Innis' opposition to the subjugation of the social sciences by nationalism. Nationalism, Innis maintained, prevented the free inquiry of science, the independent pursuit of truth. He wrote that "The social sciences reflect the demands of industrialism and capitalism" (1944b:135). Combined with his views expressed ten years earlier that "The trend of industrialism has strengthened the trend of nationalism . . .," (1934b:17) this statement leads to the conclusion that Innis had little confidence in the social sciences because of their general forfeiture of the search for truth and their acceptance of the "truth" of nationalism. Innis remarked that, "We must beware of those who have found the truth" (1946:vii). He was concerned that social scientists had become impotent in the face of the mounting pressures on them from industrialism and capitalism to contribute to the rehabilitation of Western civilization which, as he concluded, had collapsed in the twentieth century:

The importance of vested interests and of rigidities in thought in the social sciences [such as nationalism] weakens the position of the social scientist in relation to impacts of cultural importance (1946:vii).

Innis considered the collapse of civilization to be of primary cultural importance.

Innis began as early as 1936 to disparage the social sciences because of their subordination to nationalism, industrialism and capitalism, the very forces which had in his estimation contributed so much to the problems of the collapse of Western civilization. At the same time, he advocated their ideal nature which he considered fundamental, i.e., their critical character. The critical spirit of the social sciences Innis now promoted as the essential nature of "culture."

According to Innis, culture

. . . is designed to train the individual to decide how much information he needs and how little he needs; to give him a sense of balance and proportion, and to protect him from the fanatic who tells him that Canada will be lost to the Russians unless he knows more geography or more history or more economics or more science. Culture is concerned with the capacity of the individual to appraise problems in terms of space and time and with enabling him to take the proper steps at the right time (1950c:85).

Cultural life is not particular to a nation or country, nor can it be founded on nationalism. "Culture survives ideologies and political institutions," remarked Innis, "or rather, it subordinates them to the influence of constant criticism" (1951a:190). Thus, culture is a distinctively critical element in human life which allows for the appraisal of problems in terms of time and space, and is charged with crucial strategic importance.

Culture, with its spirit of constant criticism of monopolies and "truth," provides the individual with a balanced perspective and is thereby in a position to oppose nationalism and other monopolies of thought. "It would be instructive for the social scientist," Innis wrote, "to attempt a study of his place in the cultural growth" (1946:xvi). But,

according to Innis, the problem of the social scientist is also the problem of the university (1935c:287). As the principal habitat of the social scientist, and as an institution of cultural importance, the university must also be concerned with the search for truth and the survival of Western civilization.

The university must play a major role in the rehabilitation of Western civilization (Innis, 1952:73). The following quotation encapsulates Innis' assessment of the role of the university and its possibilities:

The university has played its greatest role in serving as a stabilizing factor. However inadequately it has played this role in various periods in the history of civilization, it has served as a repository of the reasoning of the ablest minds attracted to it. It has preferred reason to emotion, Voltaire to Rousseau, persuasion to power, ballots to bullets. Rashdall has described the influence of the University of Paris, in checking in France the dangerous tendencies of the church shown in the Inquisition of Spain. It must continue its vital function in checking the dangerous extremes to which all institutions with power are subject. The extreme tendencies of modern civilization shown in the rise of the modern state and in the tyranny of opinion compel universities to resist them. The trend of the social sciences in response to the demands of the new bureaucracy has been toward increasing specialization. And in this it has threatened the influence of universities. The university must deny the finality of any of the conclusions of the social sciences. It must steadfastly resist the tendency to acclaim any single solution to the world's problems at the risk of failing to play its role as a balancing factor in the growth of civilization. The Marxist solution, the Keynesian solution, or any solution, cannot be accepted as final if the universities are to continue and civilization is to survive. It is the task of the social sciences in the universities to indicate their limitations in their cultural setting. Their contributions to the universities and to Western civilization will depend on their success in that task. If they fail they will add to the confusion. It is possible that an application of demand-and-supply curves may assist in determining their limitations, but the character of civilization suggests that the problem is philosophical and perhaps beyond their power to solve (1944b:141-2).

The universities, whose existence ". . . depended on the search for truth and not on truth . . . ." should be aware of their precarious position



(1944a:65). In this regard Innis wrote that,

The universities are in danger of becoming a branch of the military arm. Universities in the British Commonwealth must appreciate the implications of mechanized knowledge and attack in a determined fashion the problems created by a neglect of the position of culture in Western civilization (1951a:195).

In the Canadian case, the university, with an interest in the search for truth, balance and perspective, must support the position of culture and oppose the threat posed by American propagandists-cum-advertisers. "In our time," Innis wrote,

it must resist the tendency to bureaucracy and dictatorship of the modern state, the intensification of nationalism, the fanaticism of religion, the evils of monopoly in commerce and industry (1944a:65).

For Innis, the solution to the problem of balance in Western civilization is the infusion of culture as a countervailing force opposed to all monopolies. The crisis of Western civilization is a crisis of culture. The university must, according to Innis, play a role in eliminating the crisis by promoting culture. Culture diffuses extremism and fanaticism, it encourages mutual criticism and respect between nations. Quoting Sir Douglas Copland, Innis commented that:

It is the cultural approach of one nation to another, which in the long run is the best guarantee for real understanding and friendship and for good commercial and political relations. In the past, it has been, on the whole, sadly neglected, and especially between western Europe and China. (Roxby) It has been scarcely less neglected as between Canada and the United States (1952a:3).

Thus, Innis suggested that relations between the people of the United States and Canada would be improved not by a defensive nationalistic posture associated with protective tariffs, trade barriers, national aggrandizement and mutual belittlement, but instead by the cultural approach emphasizing positive criticism and cooperation.

Innis' consistently negative remarks on nationalism compels acceptance in principle of the view that Innis was not a nationalist. However, there is danger in categorizing him too rigidly. According to Neill, Innis increasingly saw Canada being a marginal area to successive French, British and American empires, as ". . . One of the last strongholds of Western civilization" (1972:17). The reason for this, according to Neill, is that Innis considered that cultural and technical innovations ". . . generally take place in the fringe areas of monopolized systems" (1972:101). Innis was convinced that the closer one moved towards the centre of power, either geographically or institutionally, the more remote was the possibility of the creation of competing institutions or power. Innis wrote that: Power is poison (Innis, 1946:vii): When power is concentrated and monopolized, change must be sought in the fringe or marginal areas. There is scattered evidence throughout Innis' work that indicates his belief in the beneficial effects that accrue simply from the fact of marginality, either in terms of time or space, especially in opposing monopolies of all sorts. Although Innis was not prepared to propose Canadian nationalism as a mechanism of defense in the face of American imperialism, he was convinced that Canadians living on the margins of the American empire could, if persistent action were taken, present an effective force against the American monopoly of knowledge that had developed through industrialization of the press and radio. Even with the close proximity of Canada to the United States, Innis felt that Canadians could nevertheless better appraise American strengths and weaknesses than could Americans themselves. He wrote:

The difficulties involved in any country's understanding itself, particularly a country with a complex unstable history, are overwhelming and the most penetrating studies of the United States have been made by de Toqueville, a Frenchman, and by Lord Bryce, an Englishman (1952:21).

Canadians, according to Innis, must follow in the illustrious footsteps of de Toqueville and Bryce:

We can point to the dangers of exploitation through nationalism, our own and that of others. To be destructive under these circumstances is to be constructive. Not to be British or American but Canadian is not necessarily to be parochial. We must rely on our own efforts and we must remember that cultural strength comes from Europe (1952a:2).

For Innis, then, Canadian cultural strength could provide a mechanism to counterbalance the omnipresent danger of American commercial monopoly and imperialism. The difficulties in opposing such a powerful force were staggering, however, and Innis wrote that:

We are indeed fighting for our lives. The pernicious influence of American advertising reflected especially in the periodical press and the powerful persistent impact of commercialism have been evident in all the ramifications of Canadian life. The jackals of communication systems are constantly on the alert to destroy every vestige of sentiment toward Great Britain holding it to no advantage if it threatens the omnipotence of American commercialism. This is to strike at the heart of cultural life in Canada (1952:19-20).

For Innis, the aggressive nature of the monopoly of knowledge of American communications media necessitated a critical stance on the part of Canadians. This could be provided only by culture. Nationalism, Innis maintained, could not effectively counter the force of American commercialism so forcefully transmitted by the communications media. The only way that Canadians could survive the onslaught was by maintaining cultural ties with Europe as a counterbalancing force, and by opposing all monopolies. Innis wrote:

States are destroyed by ignorance of the most important things in human life, by a profound lack of culture--which, following Plato, is the inability to secure a proper agreement between desire and intellect. The state of the arts in Canada is threatened by a

fanatical interest in nationalism reflecting our inability to grapple with the problems of Western Civilization. The drain of nationalism on our energies all but exhausts efforts to appreciate our position in the West (1946:x).

Innis perceived the very survival of the Canadian state as under threat, but saw nationalism clearly as being part of the problem and not part of the solution.

In conclusion, the major thrust of Innis' opposition to nationalism resided in his concern for the survival of science and Western civilization. When he is considered by his interpreters as having been a staples theorist in the first part of his career and a communications theorist in the second part, emphasis is necessarily placed on the conclusions of his studies rather than on the fact that throughout his career Innis consistently opposed concentrations of power in science, politics and economics. In regards to science, this meant in part the avoidance of over-emphasizing conclusions which tend to take on an air of finality, but it also meant opposing nationalism because of its tendency to attempt to delineate the frameworks of research. The analyses of staples trades and of communications in Innis' work must, therefore, be interpreted as being phases or aspects of his overriding concern for civilization rather than as attempts to create independent and final systems of explanation which would discourage further investigation in these fields or compel acceptance of his conclusions. Focus on his methods of analysis and his related concern for civilization avoids the difficulty of over-emphasizing his conclusions and provides a basis upon which his work can be viewed in a unified and coherent manner. In the next chapter, we shall consider the unity between Innis' earlier staples and later communications work.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. See, for example, D. Creighton (1957:113-114).
2. The reference that Christian gives for this quotation is Innis' Idea File, page 213. See his note 4 (1977:71). He could have provided other equally caustic comments such as: "Nationalism is still the last refuge of scoundrels" (Innis, 1941:307).
3. See, for example, Innis, 1938c: 261, 262, 268, 269, 271 and 272; 1947a:29; 1952c:396; and those in this chapter.
4. Even Christian, who provides a reasonably thorough analysis of Innis and nationalism, neglects to expand on the relationship of marginality to Canadian culture and national existence.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FROM STAPLES TO COMMUNICATIONS

It is generally agreed that in 1940 Innis abandoned his previous preoccupation with Canadian economic history and embarked upon studies in the field of communications. Although these fields of study are commonly regarded as being largely unrelated, most commentators allow that the studies in communications resulted from the earlier studies. For example, Easterbrook contends that Innis changed his research focus in 1940 because he came to the realization that communication had been the unifying theme in his work throughout his career and that ". . . to continue in this direction he had no recourse but to turn to the study of history of media of communications, their timing and impact" (1953:10). From another perspective, Berger maintains that Innis was prompted to embark upon his communications studies because of the conclusions that he had reached in his studies of pulp and paper:

There was an inner logic in the development of Innis' thought from the economics of staples trades to his communications studies . . . To complete his survey of the staples trades, Innis turned to an examination of the modern pulp-and-paper industry. This investigation led immediately to his consideration of the market for newsprint, the history of the press, and the influence of printing on public opinion and communications monopolies (1976:188).

Yet another perspective suggests that the 1940 disjuncture is comprehensible only if Innis' newly developed association with the Classics Department of the University of Toronto is adequately taken into account.<sup>1</sup>

All of these perspectives are problematic, inasmuch as they (1) over-emphasize the importance of selected elements in Innis' career, and (2) focus on the conclusions of his particular studies rather than on his methods of analysis. The first two perspectives encompass a viewpoint that Innis was almost compelled to embark upon his history of communications and his studies of empire because of the conclusions of his earlier studies. In short, the conclusions of the history of the C.P.R. and the early staples studies led him logically into investigations into the production and transportation of more contemporary commodities such as pulp and paper, studies which in turn drove him almost inexorably to investigate the influence of printing on public opinion and communications monopolies. This interpretation contends that it was the conclusions of each of his successive staples studies that either pressed him into extending his analysis backward or forward in time in order to establish a complete picture of European influences on the development of North America, particularly the northern portion. One of the major consequences of Innis' studies of newspapers and public opinion in the early 1940s was that he dropped his previous emphasis on the productive aspects of economic activity (supply) and concentrated on consumption of raw materials in the form of pulp and paper (demand). His later studies of ancient empires were not studies of production or consumption, in isolation, but rather of both processes viewed from the unifying perspective of communications. As Creighton remarked, ". . . he was driven inevitably into a stupendous comparative investigation of the interrelations of communications with politics, economics, and religion, throughout history and over the entire world" (1957:121).

The third perspective offers a viewpoint at odds with the first two perspectives. This viewpoint is a relatively recent one and is contained in Pal (1977), Watson (1977) and Christian (1977). They do not disagree that there was a relatively serious disjuncture in Innis' career around 1940. Their departure from the first point of view rests with the source of Innis' reorientation. Along with studies of the fur trade, the cod fisheries, timber, wheat, mining and pulp and paper, Innis' published works include articles on the state of the social sciences and the university and to what Innis considered important in scholarship. Pal, Watson and Christian turn to these writings in their explanation of the disjuncture in Innis' career.

Watson (1977:46) is prepared to accept the notion that the Second World War, personal factors and the studies of pulp and paper played a role in Innis' decision to change the direction and range, in time and space, of his research. However, recognizing the theme of "objectivity" and "bias" in Innis' early work, and his research methods based on a "painstaking cataloguing of details," Watson does not view the communications studies as a radical departure from earlier work. Christian reinforces Watson's view although he suggests that

Innis' studies of the fur trade and the cod fisheries were manifestations of Innis' attempt to transcend the intellectual biases of training and membership in distinct professional groups . . . . Innis treated Canada not as a unique phenomenon, but as a particular one. In the particularity of Canada Innis could see manifestations of universal, or at least general principles; and it was to these latter that his mind was increasingly drawn throughout his life (1977:21).

Christian is arguing that Innis embarked upon his early studies not primarily in order to shed light on the economic history of Canada-- although that was indeed partly the result--but to test new tools of



social scientific analysis and to avoid specialization and its inherent biases. Pal (1977:33) draws attention to specific connections between the early and late work. For example, he points to Innis' definition of the subject matter of the social sciences as being institutions,<sup>2</sup> and its similarity to the concept of monopoly found in his communications studies.

That is, for Pal, Innis' earlier notion of entrenched habits as institutions becomes transmuted into monopoly in Innis' later work.

Watson, Pal and Christian all maintain that it is misleading to view Innis as either a "staples" theorist or as a "communications" theorist. They hold that such an interpretation is overly concerned with the results of Innis' inquiries rather than with his method, which remained relatively intact throughout his career. They also emphasize the strategic transitional influence of C.N. Cochrane. Cochrane apparently instilled in Innis a preference for the philosophical approach, and he provided him with a sense of the importance of the survival of Western civilization and the role of the social scientist in the furtherance of that goal (Watson, 1977:49).

To resolve the problems raised by the above perspectives is to provide a more complete and comprehensive interpretation of the course of Innis' career. Instead of viewing Innis' work as being separated into two distinct and only marginally related phases, as the first point of view does, it is more appropriate to view his career as a continuous activity of transmutation of ideas, concepts and values in response to contemporary events, conditions and circumstances which sometimes touched him personally or were the result of his research, or which involved major phenomena such as the Second World War. The influence of

C.N. Cochrane, important as it was for Innis, was primarily related to the experience of Antiquity that Innis lacked.

Innis followed Veblen very closely in his definition of economics as the study of the institutions of civilization primarily concerned with the material survival of men. If, in the early part of his career, Innis studied the institutions of Western civilization as they expanded into North America, in the latter part of his career he extended his attention to the whole course of the development of Western civilization in the hope of uncovering a solution to the problems of monopoly and extremism evident in the twentieth century. He extended his analysis not out of some idle antiquarian interest, but to test the tools of economic history, i.e., to determine if economic history could explain the present crisis of modern civilization. Shortly before his death he remarked that, "The economic historian must test the tools of economic analysis by applying them to the broad canvas and by suggesting their possibilities and limitations when applied to other language and cultural groups" (Innis, 1953:17-18). He also judged that: "Perhaps the most significant development in the social sciences in the past quarter century has been the interest in the study of civilization following Spengler, Toynbee, Kroeber and others . . ." (1946:xv-xvi).

Innis' own studies had been studies of the growth and decay of civilization. A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway, The Fur Trade in Canada and The Cod Fisheries have been mistakenly perceived, by virtually all of the commentators on Innis' work, as primarily studies in Canadian economic history or as staples studies. In fact, they are studies in the spread of the institutions (habits of thought and life) of Western

civilization into North America. The conclusions of his A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway included the comment that, "The history of the spread of Western civilization over the northern half of the North American continent" (1923:287). The conclusions of The Fur Trade contained similar references, as did his other subsequent works. This meant, in general, that the institutions of Western civilization--such as commodity production, wage-labour, machine-industry and commerce--were replacing the institutions previously dominant on the continent--such as production primarily for use and not for trade, hunting and gathering as economic institutions of the first order, and tribal organization associated with the indigenous groups found in North America before the presence of Europeans. Following Veblen, empires (French, British, Portuguese and Spanish), nations, industry, commerce and all other institutions present in the conquest of North America are viewed by Innis as being habits of life and thought which, because of their superior force, come to dominate and suppress other weaker institutions. Innis' later studies were no less concerned with Western civilization, although they were focussed largely on earlier empires such as those of ancient Egypt, Babylonia, Sumeria, Greece and Rome. His interest in the study of empires long past grew, as previously noted, out of a need to apply the life-historical method to discrete institutions in time and space, in an attempt to uncover a pattern in the rise and fall of empires and of Western civilization. Innis considered empires to be especially significant institutions of Western civilization. He wrote:

Civilizations can survive only through a concern with their limitations and in turn through a concern with the limitations of their institutions, including empires (1950:4).

Once Innis had satisfied himself that

. . . the subject of communications offers possibilities in that it occupies a crucial position in the organization and administration of government and in turn of empires and Western civilization . . .  
(1950:5)

he could more confidently conclude that the barbarism displayed in the twentieth century in the form of two major wars--the resort to bullets rather than ballots--was a sign of the collapse of Western civilization, of the defeat of intelligence by force, and of the tyranny of public opinion fanned by the newspaper industry with its interest in exploiting human curiosity, sensationalism and nationalism over freedom of thought. Innis was fearful that mechanization in communications had

. . . emphasized complexity and confusion; it has been responsible for monopolies in the field of knowledge; and it becomes extremely important to any civilization, if it is not to succumb to the influence of this monopoly of knowledge, to make some critical survey and report (1951a:140).

Although Innis' lifelong interest was in the study of civilization as a complex of institutions, his attitude towards civilization and its study was significantly altered by the war of 1939.<sup>3</sup> Before the war Innis was not explicitly concerned with the downfall of civilization, but with its scientific analysis. After the war, Innis not only questioned the usefulness of the particular notion of social science he had previously held, but he concerned himself more and more with the downfall of civilization, which for him, meant the elimination of those conditions conducive to freedom of thought. Those conditions, Innis explained in "Minerva's Owl" (1947a), were few and far between in the history of Western civilization.

Thus, Innis shifted from an essentially descriptive consideration of the complexities of institutional interaction in an expanding Western civilization into North America, in which few references were made to the

relative merits or value of a particular course of events or circumstances, to considerations where the survival of civilization assumed a fundamental importance. It was this shift that prompted him to explore the role of wartime public opinion and its relationship to newspapers, and which moved him to seek out C.N. Cochrane who held similar views in regard to the value of Western civilization (Christian, 1977:23).

Newspapers, Innis judged, had played a substantial role in promoting war in the past through control over public opinion.<sup>4</sup> According to Innis, newspaper media emphasis on the sensationalism of battle during World War Two was designed to sell copy, to increase circulation and profits. War provides a constant and reliable source of sensational news suited to headlines.

The power over public opinion held by newspapers compelled Innis to reconsider his assumption of the primacy of economic institutions in the study of civilization (following Veblen). His early studies of European institutions in North America had provided him with evidence that the life-historical method had profound explanatory power although he now realized the limitations inherent in focussing on economic considerations:

Obsession with economic considerations illustrates the danger of monopolies of knowledge and suggests the necessity of appraising its limitations. Civilizations can only survive through a concern with their limitations . . . (Innis, 1950:4).

Obsession with economic considerations was a particular weakness of the British empire, Innis observed, and his excursions into ancient empires were designed to test and confirm his suspicions about the power of control over communication media and techniques

. . . in determining 'things to which we attend,' and suggest also that changes in communication will follow changes in 'the things to which we attend' (1951:xvii).

He concluded that empires and civilizations survive only through a balance between material forces of production and consumption and reason or intellect. His disenchantment with economics, and his search for what he called a more "philosophical approach," resulted from the recognition that economics was itself a form of specialization, and contributed to his searching out and exploiting the substantial resources of the University of Toronto Classics Department. John U. Nef, first president of the Economic History Association, had in 1941 urged the use of a more philosophical approach in the social sciences, which he considered not incompatible with science. The "philosophical approach," as distinct from the "specialized approach" in the social sciences, focusses on the "whole of life" rather than on a part of it (1941:5).

In conclusion, the argument expressed here, based on careful consideration of the whole of Innis' work both in its methodology and conclusions, is that Innis did experience a profound change in the late 1930s and early 1940s, a change in which civilization took on new meaning. After 1940, it was no longer sufficient for Innis to simply study the course of Western civilization scientifically; he felt that it was necessary to promote its survival. In order to clearly assess the potential for the rehabilitation of Western civilization, Innis was compelled to undertake a study of its whole course of development with a view to identifying those periods and circumstances in which the survival and good health of civilization were most profoundly experienced. His conclusion was that Western civilization was at its healthiest when a balance existed between modes of communication or when criticism of authority was permitted and encouraged. In this, Innis considered that

the university must play a special role in promoting the conditions suitable for freedom of thought.

Innis presumably considered that, following what he believed to be further evidence of the collapse of Western civilization in the twentieth century as witnessed by the Second World War, it seemed incongruous to promote the scientific study of civilization when that civilization had ceased to exist. Innis' so-called communications studies, although concerned with techniques and media of communication, were largely inspired by his conclusion that Western civilization had collapsed. Focussing on the details and conclusions of Innis' communications studies serves to obscure his overall intention of assessing the potential for the rehabilitation of Western civilization, just as focussing on his so-called staples studies obscures his institutionalist methods of analysis.

Having now considered several interpretations of Innis which focus on specific aspects of his work and which, for that reason, are misleading, we shall, in the next chapter, develop an overall re-interpretation of Innis emphasizing his method of analysis and his perspective on the nature of civilization, both of which impart to his whole contribution an essential coherence and continuity.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. See, for example, Pal (1977) and Watson (1977).
2. Innis defined the subject matter of the social sciences as institutions in (1929a) and (1935).
3. See, for example, Brady (1953:93) and Brebner (1953:21).
4. See, for example, Innis (1949a:96) and (1942a)



## CHAPTER FIVE

### INNIS: A RE-INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of Innis as an "intellectual schizophrenic" can be avoided by applying a life-historical approach to the analysis of his work, emphasizing those aspects that provide it with a sense of coherence and continuity. Innis' contribution was dominated throughout by an emphasis on the methods of institutional analysis and the related view of civilization as being a complex of institutions. For Innis, focussing on the methods of the social sciences rather than on their conclusions can contribute to avoiding rigidities and monopolies of knowledge which tend to dominate the social sciences, thereby denying them their essential critical character.

In challenging a great deal of established wisdom about Innis, the thrust of the preceding chapters has been to critique the perceptions of him as a staples theorist, a nationalist, or a communications theorist. The task now is to interweave the arguments of the previous chapters and, building upon them, to provide a substantial re-interpretation of the nature and significance of Innis' work with major emphasis being accorded his conception of the proper practice and role of science, and the nature of civilization. In this re-interpretation the work of Thorstein Veblen, largely ignored by the majority of interpreters of Innis, will figure prominently.

As noted above, Innis was suspicious of too great a passion for the conclusions or results of scientific investigation, a tendency which he

considered to create rigidities or monopolies of knowledge in the social sciences. Innis wrote that, "With imperfect competition between concepts the university is essentially an ivory tower in which courage must be mustered to attack any concept which threatens to become a monopoly" (1946:xvii). The social sciences were particularly affected. He wrote that "Unfortunately the social sciences have created an impression of scientific finality and the use of the word science suggests the power of the fallacy" (1944a:124). The fundamental problem, according to Innis, was the deterioration of standards in the social sciences. Innis maintained that a large number of social scientists had abandoned the pursuit of knowledge and the search for truth, replacing them either with a strong attachment to the conclusions of their research or with dogmatic defense of particular political platforms. But,

The university must deny the finality of any of the conclusions of the social sciences. It must steadfastly resist the tendency to acclaim any single solution to the world's problems at the risk of failing to play its role as a balancing factor in the growth of civilization. The Marxist solution, the Keynesian solution, or any solution cannot be accepted as final if the universities are to continue and civilization is to survive. It is the task of the social sciences in the universities to indicate their limitation in their cultural setting (1944b:141).

Obviously, if Innis considered that the solutions proposed by others were to be denied finality, like the conclusions of the social sciences in general, so must his own. It was for this reason that he emphasised "method of approach" rather than conclusions. "Method of approach" is a term which was widely used in the first half of this century in the social sciences. It refers primarily to a scholar's complex of methodological and theoretical biases that he brings to bear in the investigation of social phenomena. For Veblen and Innis, for example,

method of approach applies to their evolutionary and historical points of view combined with their emphasis on the study of institutions.

Like Veblen, Innis' career is characterized by a constant reference to, and critique of, the social sciences. He was not content simply to undertake research studies from his own perspective, but often criticized other approaches. In this he emulated Veblen, of whom he wrote:

Like the positivists he was willing to test the theory of evolution and to attempt to work out scientific laws for economics, always remaining critical, however, and prepared to check the validity of any line of approach (1929a:19).

For various reasons, some of them personal and inaccessible, he was attracted to the unorthodox and insightful contribution of Thorstein Veblen. However, he was not uncritical of the latter. The Second World War and the need Innis felt for a broad "philosophical approach" to ascertain the potential for survival of Western civilization resulted in the abandonment of Veblen's emphasis on economic factors. Certain other aspects of Veblen's work, however, Innis retained throughout his career: the emphasis on the study of civilization and the institutions thereof, the life-historical approach and his critical, skeptical spirit.

Several writers have acknowledged Innis' dependence on the Veblenian legacy.<sup>1</sup> Few, however, have systematically addressed that dependence. Neill alone pays substantial attention to Innis' relationship with Veblen's work in his book, A new theory of value: the Canadian economics of H.A. Innis (1972). He concludes that, for Innis, the most important aspect of the Veblenian legacy was the theory of cyclonics which proposed to explain the development of new countries such as Canada and the United States by reference to the application of technology developed

in old countries (England, France and Germany) to virgin resources and to civilization characterized by a simple, non-mechanical technology (that of the North American Indians). Neill allows that Innis followed Veblen very closely in regards to analytical methods and theoretical assumptions. In fact, he remarked that: "Innis accepted Veblen's critique of neo-classical economics, so much so that his work presupposes Veblen's and cannot be understood outside of that context" (1972:109). He concedes, however, that Veblen's influence on Innis waned as the years passed, and as Innis moved into his analyses of communications after 1940.

Veblen's influence on Innis was profound, but as Easterbrook remarked, so was the impact of Adam Smith.<sup>2</sup> Innis was attracted to Adam Smith's "philosophical approach" and considered Veblen's work to be a continuation of Smith's work (1929a:25). He found in Veblen an articulate synthesis of methodological and theoretical concerns characteristic of the intellectual tradition begun by Adam Smith and heavily influenced by Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Veblen's work is the culmination of the evolutionary, materialist and institutionalist tradition in the generation which also witnessed the work of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and a host of other central figures in social scientific thought.

Innis wrote "The Work of Thorstein Veblen" in 1929--the only article of its kind devoted to the work of a single man ever written by Innis--perhaps as a tribute to the enormous intellectual debt he felt he owed this uncharacteristic scholar.<sup>3</sup> This article, although initially published as "A Bibliography of Thorstein Veblen" in The Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly, is much more than a simple

bibliography. It consists of a highly condensed and succinct distillation of the important aspects of Veblen's thought.

Regarding Veblen's critique of the social sciences, Innis considered his devastating attack on marginal utility economic theory to be the most significant contribution. Veblen's attack was levelled at the personalistic, static, a-historical and rationalistic assumptions about human nature in marginal utility theory, and their consequences for economics as a whole.<sup>4</sup> As an alternative, Veblen proposed a radically different conception of man based on modern psychology and anthropology. According to this conception man is considered to be a "coherent structure of propensities and habits" and not simply a "bundle of desires." Man's economic activity is carried out within the framework of a specific technology (mechanical residue) which is constantly developing, and which he himself acts upon creatively. Moreover: "What is true of the individual in this respect is true of the group in which he lives" (Veblen, 1898:74-5). This new conception of man had important ramifications for economics which

. . . must be a theory of a process of cultural growth as determined by the economic interest, a theory of a cumulative sequence of economic institutions stated in terms of the process itself (Veblen, 1898:77).

Innis commented in regard to Veblen that:

Like Professor MacIver and Professor Unwin, he insisted upon the existence of laws of growth and decay of institutions and associations. His life work has been primarily the study of processes of growth and decay (1929a:24).

But before addressing the more constructive aspects of Veblen's contribution, there is another aspect of Veblen's critique of neoclassical theory in particular, and of economics in general, that must be considered.

Innis remarked that Veblen had inquired into the effects of the industrial revolution on economic theory. As Veblen explained,

The changes in the cultural situation which seem to have had the most serious consequences for the methods and animus of scientific inquiry are those changes that took place in the field of industry (1906:13).

He added that:

Hence men have learned to think in the terms in which the technological processes act. This is particularly true of those men who by virtue of a peculiarly strong susceptibility in this direction become addicted to the habit of matter-of-fact inquiry that constitutes scientific research<sup>5</sup> (1906:17).

In other words, social scientists are as much, if not more, affected by the impersonal workings of the industrial machine process than are other members of the community. This is brought about by a long process of habituation. The economist, Veblen wrote,

. . . is a creature of habits and propensities given through the antecedents, hereditary and cultural, of which he is an outcome; and the habits of thought formed in any one line of experience affect his thinking in any other (1918:79).

In other words, economists--as do all social scientists--acquire the general cultural traits and habits of their particular cultural setting. Thus, Veblen considered the nature of social science and of the social scientist to have been outcomes of the industrial revolution.

Innis pointed to Veblen's concern with the forces of industrialism. "The constructive part of Veblen's work," wrote Innis, "was essentially the elaboration of an extended argument showing the effects of machine industry and the industrial revolution" (1929a:23). According to Innis, Veblen simply carried on, in a sense, the work of Adam Smith at a later stage of the industrial revolution. "As with Adam Smith," Innis remarked, "nothing is more conspicuous in Veblen's work than his attention to current events and his interest in dynamics" (1929a:25).

Thus, the Veblenian legacy had an intense and lasting effect on Innis primarily with respect to Veblen's constructive work in the analysis of industrialism, in his critique of classical and neoclassical economic theory and in his conception of the evolutionary character of economics. Innis intended to build upon all three aspects of Veblen's work within the context of his own time and space.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the direct methodological and theoretical influences that Veblen had on Innis there were other more general aspects of Veblen's life and work which profoundly impressed him. For example, Innis remarked:

Like Adam Smith, he is an individualist, and like most individualists in continental countries, in which the industrial revolution made such rapid strides, he is in revolt against mass education and standardization. Veblen had continued with Unwin, MacIver, Fay, and Tawney the work begun by Adam Smith on behalf of the individual and the common man (1929a:25).

Innis located Veblen within a tradition in social science which works on behalf of the common man. He reiterated his affinity for this tradition fifteen years later when he stated that ". . . economic history . . . is not concerned with the belief in the common man but with the common man himself" (1944:97). This insistence that economic history is concerned with the common man is consistent with the emphasis on the study of institutions which is not focussed on personality but on habits of life and thought which are shared by the vast majority of people in any given group (Veblen, 1909:629). In addition, work on behalf of the common man implies work against vested interests, monopolies of thought and all extremist views and practices and for individual freedom, something Innis was later to dwell upon to a considerable extent. Innis considered Veblen's work to be a monument to the "unbiased approach" in economics

and to the struggle against standardization, mechanization and final economic theory, or theory which offers final solutions to the world's problems. One of the most important aspects of Veblen's work, for Innis, is Veblen's "constructive warfare of emancipation against the tendency toward standardized static economics" (1929:26).

When Innis undertook to write his doctoral dissertation sometime in 1919 he was also in the process of becoming familiar with Veblen's work through his contacts with other graduate students at the University of Chicago (Neill, 1972:35). A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway reflects his concern for the tradition in economic thought embodied in the work of Thorstein Veblen. This is evident in the Preface to his thesis, published as A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1923) which he declared had been undertaken from a scientific and evolutionary point of view. "Like Veblen," Easterbrook (1953a:293) wrote, "Innis lived through the economic strains of a new country and sought to work out their more important characteristics through studies of the impact of industrialism on a continental background." "As he put it in conversation," Easterbrook (1953:10) commented of Innis,

he set out to adapt the work of J.M. Clark and Thorstein Veblen to his own field of historical investigation--technology and the price system--unused capacity as a factor in economic history--and developed in the process tools which he put to highly profitable use.

Veblen's early studies of wheat prices and production ". . . were ~~ls~~ for the work of later economists in analysing the relationship of complex factors" (Innis, 1929a:19). Innis fully intended to continue the work of Veblen in the same way that Veblen continued the work of Adam Smith, not in the sense of copying Veblen, but of following a tradition characterized by a critical and life-historical method and an emphasis on the effects of industrialization of Western civilization.



In his studies, Innis, following Veblen, was not so much interested in individuals as in the way habits had become institutionalized. The study of institutions did away with the need to study individuals because individuals were in a real sense "agents" of institutional imperatives.<sup>7</sup> European institutions, when exposed to the cultural and environmental exigencies of North America, were required to adapt or perish, much like the individuals involved. Habits of life and thought developed in Europe were often modified to suit these exigencies, but so were those characteristics of the Indians of North America modified in the face of an increasing European presence and a growing dependence on European manufactured goods. Nowhere is this perspective revealed more clearly than in The Fur Trade in Canada, a book in which Innis applied Veblen's life-historical method with exceptional creativity.

The influence of Veblen on Innis' approach and method of analysis is also clearly revealed in the latter's position during the debates over the scientific character of the social sciences which became public in Canada with the establishment of the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science (CJEPS) in 1935.<sup>8</sup> Innis' participation in this controversy is contained largely in three articles (cf. 1935, 1935a and 1935c). They contain in embryonic form many of the major concerns Innis subsequently elaborated upon and in some cases modified.<sup>9</sup>

The arguments contained in these articles were intended as counter-thrusts in an ongoing debate between two factions: Frank Knight, E.J. Urwick and Frank Underhill, on the one hand; and Innis himself on the other. Knight, Urwick and Underhill had little else in common except their contention that the social sciences were not, in fact, sciences at

all, and their underlying assumption that social scientists thus had no option but to declare their allegiance to this or that social movement.<sup>10</sup> Innis' response to this position constituted an attempt to counteract what he viewed as dangerous trends in the social sciences: specialization, present-mindedness, emphasis on final solutions, support of vested interests and a general crisis surrounding standards of practice and conduct. In opposition to these deleterious trends in the social sciences, Innis outlined his own conception of the course social science must take if it was to flourish. He emphasized the critical role of the social sciences and their scientific character.

For Innis, and Veblen before him, social science must be chiefly interested in the study of institutions, their growth and decay. The substantial difficulties associated with the study of something of which the observer is also the observed, i.e., of human conduct, are lessened by the fact that institutions are collective forms of habituation, the investigation of which can enlighten the observer as to the source of his own biases. Observation of the behaviour of others is less complicated than the observation and analysis of one's own behaviour. "The habits or biases of individuals which permit prediction," wrote Innis (1935:283), "are reinforced in the cumulative bias of institutions and constitute the chief interest of the social scientist." As Veblen constantly repeated, human beings are creatures and creators of habit in their lives and thoughts.<sup>11</sup> The study of habit, how it becomes institutionalized, then modified and rejected in man's infinitely variable circumstances of life provides the basis upon which a scientific study of society can be built. It was precisely Innis' conception of science itself that proved to be the source of much misunderstanding. One of Urwick's

arguments in his article entitled "The Role of Intelligence in the Social Process," centered on his contention that science could not deal with life--could not comprehend it, nor study it in any form--because intellect or science was limited to the study of things in stasis, of lifeless, dead things. He argued (1935:67):

I have already implied that intellect cannot deal with life. And that, of course, is strictly true. It never does deal with any living being as such, nor any whole vital situation. They are too lively for it. It must first devitalize them, dessicate and sterilize them, abstract them from the life--kill them in fact--and then, and then only, deal with them as bits of a soluable problem.

Biology, although by definition the "study of life," does not escape Urwick's characterization. It also, he argued, studied dead things, "museum specimens." He concluded (1935:67) that:

. . .when the biologist does try to deal with life as a living and moving whole, he loses his science and takes to guessing. That is the explanation of all evolution theories.

Innis' definition of science differs from Urwick's in two important ways.

First, for Innis (and Veblen) modern science is the study of life.

Second, what Urwick considered the object of "guessing" Veblen termed

"metaphysical preconception," the unobservable "nexus of the sequence,"

but the necessary link between cause and effect, and the focus of the

modern scientist's attention.<sup>12</sup> Urwick's science can be described as

taxonomic and pre-Darwinian from the Veblenian perspective.<sup>13</sup> It is

this divergence of opinion in regard to the nature of science that can

explain Innis' apparently contradictory statement:

Since the social scientist cannot be "scientific" or "objective" because of the contradiction in terms, he can learn of his numerous limitations. The "sediment of experience" provides the basis for scientific investigation. The never-ending shell of life suggested in the persistent character of bias provides possibilities of intensive study of the limitations of life and its probable direction (1935:283).

The study of institutions, the receptacles of bias, using the evolutionary method was social science according to Innis. He recognized the existence of a "taxonomic" social science, i.e. one which attempted to categorize human phenomena as the goal of explanation but restricted its usefulness to its position as an introduction to social science (Innis, 1935:284). The "sediment of experience" referred to above defines the whole complex of human institutions to the present. That explains why Innis (1935: 283) defined the word "introspection" as a field of investigation ". . . in a range extending back to geological time." For an individual to "introspect" means to review the entire past process of human institutional growth and decay of which he is an agent; he has no "personal" basis for introspection.<sup>14</sup>

In conjunction with Innis' definition of science as an evolutionary study of institutions is his concern that in order to study institutions a scientist must be free to search for trends wherever that might lead him. Allegiance to vested interests or particular institutions precludes that possibility and necessity. It is the task of social science to search for truth (Innis, 1935c:286). Social scientists who settle on any particular "truths" are no longer engaged in the search, and social scientists who actively promote particular truths or who make "statements of certainty" raise the question of standards in the social sciences (Innis, 1935c:286). Veblen (1906) had suggested that scientific investigation is the result of "idle curiosity" and is devoid of pragmatic and utilitarian content to the same extent as the speculations of the Pueblo myth-maker.<sup>15</sup> "Science creates nothing but theories . . . ," Veblen wrote (1906:19), to which he added: "It knows nothing of policy

or utility, better or worse." Questions of expediency or pragmatism have an inhibiting and misdirecting influence on scientific investigation by distorting or directing idle curiosity which is then no longer "idle". Science ". . . has no ulterior motive beyond the idle craving for a systematic correlation of data . . ." (Veblen, 1906:25)--a position which presages Innis' warning that:

Intelligence in the social sciences tends to be absorbed in the abstruse and abstract tasks of adjustment and to be lost in specialization, with the result that it is unable to participate in the endless and complex and possibly fruitless search for trends (Innis, 1935:285).

Thus, Innis considered that social science, by its very definition, could not ally itself with any particular institution or vested interest, nor could it "steer" the course of inquiry by having some preconceived notion as to expediency or pragmatic relevance, nor could it, without denying itself, become specialized to the point of placing boundaries and parameters around specific research areas to the exclusion of all others. The search for trends must be free to go wherever idle curiosity leads.

However, because Innis held that social science had no utilitarian nor pragmatic content in regard to policy or expedient conduct, it does not automatically follow that he denied social science a higher transcendent value. "The importance of vested interests and of rigidities in thought in the social sciences," wrote Innis (1935:282) "weakens the position of the social scientist in relation to impacts of cultural importance." Without defining "impacts of cultural importance" Innis (1935:280) nevertheless suggested that the social scientist in the university is more likely to be in a position to contribute to "impacts

of cultural importance" due to his relative freedom from "major sources of bias" associated with particular vested interests and rigidities in thought. The universities, according to Innis, are places where contributions to "impacts of cultural importance" can be made although ". . . the dangers are numerous and subtle" (1935:280). The opening sentence of "A Note on Universities and the Social Sciences" advises that; "The University may be regarded as at least an active centre in strengthening the position of the natural and social sciences, but limitations to its possible assistance are numerous" (1935c:286). Moreover, Innis noted that: "The cultural background of the University is of fundamental importance" (1935c:287); and ". . . the problem of the social scientist is the problem of the University" (1935c:287). The "problem" referred to was the increasing pressure on behalf of vested interests which threatened the very existence of the University, that centre in which the search for truth can be carried out and from where the limitations of civilization can be indicated. The notion of "culture" is not defined until much later in Innis' work,<sup>16</sup> but it can be pointed out that it serves him as a device by which the limitations of "power" and "force" can be revealed in the development of western civilization which, for Innis, is the highest value. The transcendent value of social science and the university lies in supporting "culture" in counterbalancing power, force and extremes of all kinds, thereby enhancing the survival potential of western civilization.

Although Innis never speculated as to the particular course that civilization should take in the future he was nevertheless concerned with the survival of Western civilization and therefore with the future. But

his interest in the future was non-specific. He presented no panacea, nor did he prescribe a specific remedy for the world's ills. He pointed to times in the history of Western civilization when balance and perspective had been achieved and suggested that we might take a lesson from history and attempt to recreate in some form the conditions in which civilization could develop in a healthy, balanced way.

Innis believed that civilization had collapsed. However, he perceived of no particular cure for this condition ". . . except appeals to reason" (Innis, 1943c:5). Western civilization had indulged in extremes and excesses which had manifested themselves as monopolies of knowledge, nationalism, concentrations of power in industry and commerce and the fanaticism of religion. Innis considered that the role of the social scientist was to point out the dangers of resort to extremes. Intelligence, based on the search for truth, demanded constant criticism, concern for limitations and culture. He wrote:

The search for truth assumes a constant avoidance of extremes and extravagance. Virtue is the middle way. There are no cures. Always we are compelled to be skeptical of the proposal to cure the world's ills.

Thus, the balanced growth of civilization required, according to Innis, a need to constantly assess and evaluate, that is to criticize, the course of institutional development, including empires. A search for truth, rather than truth itself in the form of monopoly, rigidity, concentrations of power and force and an emphasis on final scientific theory, provided the necessary foundation. The independent and individual search for truth is the essence of culture, intelligence and rationality. It constitutes a major device in counterbalancing power and force.

In conclusion, a great deal of continuity and coherence can be detected in Innis' lifetime contribution to the social sciences and to learning. However, instead of appealing to the conclusions of his various studies to explain this continuity and coherence, this chapter has sought to account for this characteristic of his work by reference to two very important aspects of the Veblenian legacy that he chose to adopt, i.e., his methods of research and analysis and his concern for civilization. Innis' critical institutionalism and his concern for the study and survival of civilization form the twin pillars of his work throughout his career.

The task remaining for this thesis is to provide a synopsis of the arguments contained in the above chapters and to extend the implications of these arguments for contemporary social science. It is to this task that we now turn.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. See especially Easterbrook (1953a:293), Neill (1972:109) and Berger (1976:88).
2. Easterbrook (1953a:291) contends that Adam Smith made more of an impression on Innis than Veblen did.
3. In a very perceptive passage, Neill (1972:110) concludes that Innis wrote the article, in part at least, as a tool in his ongoing polemic with E.J. Urwick over the nature of social science.
4. Veblen (1898:73) wrote a brilliant characterization of the assumptions about human nature inherent in marginal utility theory (which he sometimes called the Austrian School): "The hedonistic conception of man is that of a lightning calculator of pleasures and pains, who oscillates like a homogeneous globule of desire of happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area, but leave him intact. He has neither antecedent nor consequent. He is an isolated, definitive human datum, in stable equilibrium except for the buffets of the impinging forces that displace him in one direction or another. Self-imposed in elemental space, he spins symmetrically about his own spiritual axis until the parallelogram of forces bears down upon him, whereupon he follows the line of the resultant. When the force of the impact is spent, he comes to rest, a self-contained globule of desire as before. Spiritually, the hedonistic man is not a prime mover."
5. This point is most forcefully made in the last chapter of Veblen's The Theory of The Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions (1899). In it he writes that ". . . modern science may be said to be a by-product of the industrial process" (1899:387).
6. See especially Innis (1929a:26).
7. See Veblen (1909:629) for an analysis of the role of the individual as agent of the institutional complex which makes up civilization.
8. The exceptions to this rule are Pal, Watson and Christian, although even they fail to trace the genesis of Innis' arguments in the debates to Veblen's work.
9. This is the view expressed by Leslie Pal (1977), William Christian (1977), and especially A. John Watson (1977) who focusses specifically on the element of "objectivity" and "bias" discussed in these articles.
10. See Chapter One, pp. 11-12 for a short outline of the various positions and arguments in the debate.

11. See, for example, Veblen (1908:39).
12. Veblen wrote (1908:32): "The sciences which are in any peculiar sense modern take as an (avowed) postulate the fact of consecutive change. Their inquiry always centres upon some manner of process. This notion of process about which the researchers of modern science cluster, is a notion of a sequence, or complex, of consecutive change in which the nexus of the sequence, that by virtue of which the change inquired into is consecutive, is the relation of cause and effect." This is a description of genetic science. Change itself cannot be observed but the sequence of causation in which cause leads to effect requires it. For example, Darwin did not observe the changes that occurred in the beaks of finches on the various islands of the Galapagos in response to environmental exigencies, he imputed it based on the evidence accumulated.
13. See Veblen (1908:36-37) for a description of pre-Darwinian and post-Darwinian science.
14. Veblen (1908:39) explained the relationship of individuals to the complex of institutions: "The scheme of life, within which lies the scheme of knowledge, is a consensus of habits in the individuals which make up the community. The individual subjected to habituation is each a single individual agent, and whatever affects him in any one line of activity, therefore, necessarily affects him in some degree in all his various activities."
15. See Veblen's (1906:6-7) definition of "idle curiosity" which he considered to be a tangential result of the workings of intelligence as "inhibitive selection."
16. See Innis (1950c:85 and 1951a:195).

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS

The main argument developed in this thesis suggests that Innis' conception of civilization as a complex of growing and decaying institutions produced or determined the kinds of research topics he undertook to study, and the manner in which he studied them. His primary interest was not to shed light on Canadian economic history--although that was the result of much of his work--but to trace the developmental course of Western civilization, first in its industrial stage after the fifteenth century, and then in the whole course of its development from the Egypt of the Pharaohs to modern Europe and America. His primary objective was to uncover laws or patterns in the rise and fall of civilization and its institutions which could be used to shed light on the future course of Western civilization.

Although Innis is widely regarded as having been a staples theorist in the first part of his career, his interest in staples trades was a result of a method of analysis borrowed from Veblen and which can be described as the institutional life-historical approach. Most commentators on Innis' early studies of the fur trade, the cod fisheries and other staples trades regard him as being engaged in either regionally defined or structurally bound analyses of discrete phenomena.<sup>1</sup> They fail to appreciate Veblen's influence on Innis in the latter's description of civilization as being a complex of habits of thought and of life (institutions). Moreover, they fail to understand Innis' conception of

science as an activity designed to uncover the laws of the growth and decay of institutions and of civilization.

Although Innis is considered by the vast majority of his commentators to have been a nationalist, they do so only by ignoring an overwhelming number of anti-nationalistic comments and statements in his published work, and again, by failing to understand his conception of science and of civilization. Innis maintained that science is ideally the independent and consistent pursuit of truth regarding the unfolding reality of Western civilization. Nationalism, as an ideology which has infected a large number of social scientists, has prevented the independent pursuit of truth and has subordinated that search to the needs of the nation or country. Moreover, nationalism as a political platform encourages international disputes and misunderstandings, leads to war and stifles the growth of freedom of thought.

Innis is presumed to have abandoned his studies in Canadian economic history after 1940 in order to take up studies of communications technology and media because of the conclusions of his studies of pulp and paper. However, a more realistic interpretation of Innis' changing research interests after 1940 is that he was determined to understand the conditions by which Western civilization could best survive trials like the Second World War, and to avoid them in the future. It was for this reason that he turned to studies of ancient empires and patterns of political organization and authority.

Robin Neill contends that Innis attempted to create during his career a new theory of value in economics, one in which individual human creativity replaced Veblen's theory of instincts as a basic factor in the

explanation of economic change (Neill, 1972:113). The fact is that Innis began his career convinced of the value of individual creativity, choice and criticism. Furthermore, he was convinced of the value of institutions which served to inspire, enhance or protect the creativity of the individual. Combined, they could provide effective forces to counter-balance concentrations of power in collective social organization. Innis once remarked that: "It is the search for truth, not 'truth,' that makes men free" (1945:305). Innis equated "truth" with monopoly, rigidity, fanaticism and extremism. The search for truth, on the other hand, he equated with freedom, criticism, culture, skepticism and flexibility. Innis opposed anything that threatened the search for truth, an activity which he was personally and professionally involved with as a scholar. In science and scholarship, that meant opposing: (1) an emphasis on the conclusions and results of social scientific investigation rather than on the methods of analysis and skepticism; (2) dominance of non-scientific factors, such as nationalism, in the determination and delineation of scientific research; (3) specialization, a fact which prevented the broader "philosophical" approach of political economy; (4) and mechanization, which threatened to impose quantification and mathematics upon the social sciences. In short, Innis opposed in science and scholarship all of those ideas, theories and notions which tended to monopolize thought and discourage the independent and dispassionate search for truth.

Innis opposed all forms of control in society on individual freedom of thought. He considered that American commercial interests, with their allies in the communications media, threatened to impose upon

people a way of doing things and of seeing the world which would discourage criticism and dissent. Again, he opposed nationalism because it placed the interests of the nation before those of peace and the balanced development of civilization.

Innis believed that all living organisms, including individual human beings, institutions and civilizations, must strive for balanced growth. In the case of civilization, this meant avoiding extremes like the Second World War, the fanaticism of religion and the deleterious effects of monopoly for business, industry and science.

Having been at the centre of scholarly power in Canada, Innis can hardly be considered a marginal scholar. Yet, his method of approach and his conception of the nature of the social sciences set him apart from most of his colleagues who, while they could relate to specific studies like Innis' The Fur Trade in Canada, could not appreciate the broader significance of such works. Current wisdom about Innis suffers from the same difficulties. There is little attention paid to the broad methodological and theoretical framework which led Innis to undertake studies such as The Fur Trade in Canada and The Cod Fisheries.

The implications of the re-interpretation of Innis contained herein are far-reaching for contemporary social science, and particularly for political economy. From the perspective of this thesis, the works of political economists such as Melville Watkins, Daniel Drache, Robert Laxer, Gary Teeple and Cy Gonick must be reassessed and reviewed without the legitimizing force that Innis' work provided for them. It seems likely that Innis, were he alive today, would criticize some of the above theorists in the same manner that he criticized Frank Underhill; i.e. to the extent that they display nationalistic sympathies and subordinate

scientific values to political values, he might consider them to be the heirs of the League for Social Reconstruction. However, in all fairness, it is not it is not difficult to see why some social scientists might turn to Innis in support of their own conclusions. Most of Innis' early monographs and articles can easily be perceived of as being nationally framed. They seem to be about Canada.

Upon closer examination, however, this often unquestioned conclusion about Innis' work becomes less obvious. Whether he was successful or not in accomplishing his stated objectives, his intentions in both A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway and The Fur Trade in Canada, as he expressed them, were to ". . . explain the effects of a vast new land area on European civilization" (Innis, 1930:386). Within Innis' framework of analysis, "Canada" as a political creation of European civilization is only one institution among many others. Innis' concern, following Veblen, was with what the latter termed "material civilization." For this reason, he focussed on the institutions of commodity production, technology, trade, transportation and public policy, and tended to explain changes in other institutions with reference to those institutions most closely associated with material survival, of both institutions and individuals. Innis, therefore, explained the rise of Canada with reference to European institutions developed during the fur trade particularly within the framework of the Northwest Company. These institutions are called European rather than Canadian because they were created within the institutional complex referred to as European, but not necessarily confined to the European continent. Besides, there is no "Canadian" civilization; no complex of institutions particular to the political entity which occupies the northern part of the North

American continent. Innis defined European civilization as his unit of analysis. However, tracing the life-history of a whole complex of institutions is more easily pursued than accomplished and social scientists are limited by time and research grants in the scope of their studies. Innis himself was often compelled to drop his research in order to serve on a Royal Commission, or to advise on the allocation of grants, or to attend to various administrative details.

In recent years, governments have sought to provide assistance to special scientists in their work by providing them with employment or information in the form of census data and statistics of various kinds. Unfortunately, for the social scientist, this new-found source of wealth and information has its drawbacks. Statistics are generally collected on a national, provincial or municipal basis and are designed for easy comparison. Governments have de facto used the nation as their framework for data collection. This is understandable when one considers that the nation is the basic foundation of their political power. According to Innis, however, national statistics contain inherent structuralist and a-historical biases. By their very existence, these statistics favour nationally framed research. Besides, governments provide direct incentives to study issues and problems of national or provincial significance by the judicious allocation of research monies. Even many of those social scientists and political economists who criticize the government tend to frame their critiques in national terms. They implicitly accept the designation of Canada as a frame of reference. Furthermore, they tend to find support for their work in Innis' various studies in economic history. However, focussing on Innis' method of approach rather than on the conclusions



of his work, and on his conception of civilization rather than on his presumed national analytical framework, yields a substantially different program of research than that which currently occupies many political economists.

For Innis, political economy is characterized by the "philosophical" approach in contradistinction to the "specialized" approach in the social sciences. It is also characterized by a study of the growth and decay of institutions defined as habits of thought and life, and of western civilization defined as a complex of institutions. This perspective precludes research which is nationally framed. It demands a historical--what Innis calls a "genetic"--approach which treats structure as basically non-existent. Further, it demands a consistently and stubbornly critical approach. Perhaps an example of a proposed hypothetical research project might help not only to illustrate how Innis' approach might be applied, but also how it differs from current nationally framed studies.

Instead of, for example, undertaking a study of the Canadian west coast salmon fishery, a project which could rely heavily on national statistics and on the analysis of national public policy, the Innisian approach would require a study of the whole west coast fishery from its beginnings in pre-contact Indian civilization to its present international highly capitalized extent. It is significant in this regard that Innis subtitled The Cod Fisheries: The History of an International Economy. The public policies of the United States and Canada would be considered as only one institutionalized aspect of the fishery, albeit an increasingly important aspect. For Innis, there

would be no scientific reason for limiting analysis to the Canadian fishery. It is "salmon fishing" as an institution of Western Civilization which is of interest. The present tendency in "Canadian" social science would be to limit study to the salmon fishery of the coast of British Columbia. According to Innis, this would place artificial restraints on the work of the social scientist, restraints of a political, and not of a scientific, nature.

Innis' institutionalism prevented him from considering Canada to be a singular and a priori, given unit of scientific analysis. For Innis, "Canadian" social science or "Canadian" political economy or a study of the "Canadian" salmon fishing industry are equally unacceptable. Social scientists must not define themselves in terms of their citizenship, but in terms of their critical approach and their search for truth.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. The reference here is specifically to Watkins (1963 and 1973), Bertram (1967), Aitken (1977), Buckley (1958) and Rotstein (1977). Although these few names do not constitute an exhaustive list they are nevertheless representative of more recent critiques of Innis in this regard.

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