

## Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques

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## BOOK NOTES / RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

**Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)

GREEN PROVIDES a well contextualized and nuanced history of the Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968, best known because of the assassination of Martin Luther King during one of his visits to the city in support of the workers. Indeed most of this book is not about the strike as such but the longer-term organized efforts of the city's African Americans to win social justice and to challenge social stereotypes.

**Sheila Blackburn, *A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work?: Sweated Labour and the Origins of Minimum Wage Legislation in Britain*** (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate 2007)

THIS BOOK TRACES the campaigns against sweatshops in Britain from the 19th century to the present, with an emphasis on the earlier period of extensive home-working for which there was little or no state regulation and a general inability of trade unions to organize some of the most exploited workers in the country. The threat of losing their jobs to homeworkers made it difficult for factory workers in several sectors to prevent employers from imposing piecework and other exploitative practices even when unions were present. Reformers within and without the trade union movement pushed for trades boards that would set minimum wages within particular

industrial sectors. Blackburn notes the debate within industries, such as the chain manufacturers, about trades boards, with some arguing in favour of minimum wages as a way of stabilizing their industry while others opposed government intervention.

**Jenny Anderson, *Between Growth and Security: Swedish Social Democracy from a Strong Society to a Third Way*** (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2006)

ANDERSON DESCRIBES the growth of neo-liberalism within the Swedish Social Democratic Party. That party was at one time the poster boy for compromise between capitalism and socialism: a governing party that accepted private ownership of the means of production, but provided workers with wall-to-wall social protections, arguing that the latter benefited economic development. As capitalist crises began to seem endemic in the 1970s, the party's left-wing proposed a quick transition to socialism by handing over control of workers' pension investments, and with them, most of Swedish industry, to trade unions. That effort fizzled and the party began to drift to the view that social investments were a drag on economic growth. Anderson traces changes in party discourse on social policy, though she does not provide a class analysis of why those endorsing a shift to the right gradually gained ground.

**Stephen Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *Development, Democracy, and Welfare States: Latin America, East Asia, and Eastern Europe*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2008)

THESE AUTHORS PROVIDE a wealth of information about the social programs that workers enjoy or fail to enjoy in a variety of countries. Their framework is one in which the level of development of parliamentary institutions is treated as the major factor in determining the degree to which social provisions are provided. But the authors only deal with social class in passing, assuming without evidence that more formally democratic regimes provide more input from working-class people. This seems particularly suspicious when one is discussing Eastern Europe where the Communist regimes, while totalitarian, provided, for the most part, far better social guarantees than their capitalist successors have so far proven willing to provide. The authors speak of "reform" of the socialist social programs as if the stripping down of social guarantees that the transition to capitalism has produced is an undisputable good. Overall, while the book has important data on social programs in many countries, it pays little attention to the extent to which such programs redistribute income in particular countries.

**Diane Kirkby, *Voices from the Ships: Australia's Seafarers and their Union*** (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press 2008)

THIS IS AN OFFICIAL history of the Seamen's Union of Australia for the period from 1972 to 1993. It is based on both archival materials and on interviews that the author conducted with officials and activists in the union.

Throughout this period, the SUA had a mainly Communist and militant leadership who fought to keep shipping jobs in the country and to improve wages and working conditions in a period of rising neo-liberalism. The union was involved in a variety of anti-imperialist campaigns and stood out as Australia's leading working-class opponent of Australian intervention on the American side in Vietnam and against apartheid.

**Jeremy Seekings and Nicolì Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*** (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press 2005)

SEEKINGS AND NATTRASS map both the apartheid and post-apartheid policies that have created a huge gap in incomes and in social wages that whites and Africans have been able to access. Under apartheid, the African majority were denied a share in the country's economic growth. However, over time, in the context of growing African unrest, the state made some concessions to the majority. The African National Congress, while it was a liberation movement fighting for majority rule and an end to oppressive policies of segregation, advocated a radical redistribution of wealth within a mixed-economy framework in which the state would play the largest role in economic planning. But once it came to power, the ANC accepted the norms of global capitalism and contented itself with changing the social rules so that a minority of Africans could be counted among the country's rich and its middle class. But, for the majority of the population, the distribution of wealth has become even less egalitarian than under apartheid. Though the authors' analysis would lead a reader to expect support for a return to the earlier socialist goals

of the ANC, they surprisingly advocate far more conservative changes, perhaps reflecting a degree of despair that the new elites of South Africa would agree to anything more radical and an apparent rejection of the possibility of a bottom-up revolt.

**Giovanni Federico, *Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture, 1800–2000*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005)

FEDERICO PROVIDES an ambitious history of modern agriculture that combines technical, economic history with analysis of the impact of government interventions of various kinds and, to a degree, the demands of farmers upon governments. Overall, it is a conservative tome that finds nothing at all redeeming in either Soviet or Chinese efforts at collective agriculture, and expresses scepticism about current discourses aimed at sustainable agriculture, which the author sees as most likely to recreate traditional agriculture with its lives of poverty for peasants.

**Bernhard Ebbinghaus, *Reforming Early Retirement in Europe, Japan and the USA*** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

THE RIGHT TO RETIRE at some point before you croak with income provided by the state or employer or some combination of both was one of the victories that workers in most advanced capitalist countries had achieved before the era of neo-liberalism. But the extent of such victories varied a great deal with European workers winning the biggest gains in terms of state guarantees, while Japanese workers counted mainly on life-time employment with a particular

employer, and American workers hoped to eke out a decent retirement from modest social security payments and private pension plans, the latter covering at best a third of the work force. In recent years, in all countries, there has been an effort to reduce workers' pension benefits and to make workers work for more years before they retire. But again the results have varied from country to country. Ebbinghaus provides useful information but his bias against state guarantees to workers shows throughout the book.

A.E.

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