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Bryan D. Palmer

Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982).

THIS BOOK IS THE PRODUCT of massive funding (it and its predecessor, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West*, acknowledge the support of five institutions of higher learning and four major grants/fellowships) as well as more than ten years of intensive research and collaboration. It would be surprising and shocking if historians and other social scientists could not find arguments, data, and perspectives in a volume of this nature that will enhance their understanding of the past as well as the present. Indeed, they will, for *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* contains a mass of information on class formation, property holding, crime, youth, family, and institutions of early capitalist hegemony, ranging from the school to the asylum. But in the end this pompously mistitled book is a con.

For years Michael Katz has been Canadian social history's Wizard of Oz. Behind his admittedly complex and sophisticated quantitative method, and guarded by a score of coders, technicians, programmers, key punchers, and loyal and enthusiastic students, Katz orchestrated a grand project of demographic reconstitution. His themes of structural inequality, mobility, class, and family dominated his first book and remain at the core of this second study. So awed were Canadian historians by the self-confident assertions of Katz & Company, so taken in by the promise of this exotic historical exercise, that the Emperor of Oz faced few critical assessments of his newly established regime. When he paraded before his subjects in 1975, with the publication of *The People of Hamilton*, Canadian historians were titillated by his display of intellectual nudity. Rather than raise questions about what all of this scholastic exhibitionism meant, they rushed to strip themselves of their critical faculties. The Wizard was nude, off with our clothes! Urban historians committed to the

necessity of studying the peculiarities of specific urban formations winked at Katz's inability to convey any sense of place in his Hamilton study; social historians long engaged in the study of conflict and dissidence skirted the problematic and puzzling passivity of Katz's reconstituted population; women's historians seemed content that the family was finally being considered and rarely questioned Katz's backing away from issues of domestic labour, patriarchy, or gender relations; even a Marxist labour historian, recognizing that *The People of Hamilton* (supposedly *about* class as well as family in a mid-nineteenth-century city) dodged many significant processes of working-class life, promised that the Emperor's next proclamation would attend to this original neglect. The land of Oz was becoming a nudist colony, the Canadian historical profession a sunbathers' retreat.

Now, seven years after that original study, the Emperor himself is telling us that he was, in fact, prancing about in a state of intellectual undress. The preface to *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* concedes that Katz's earlier work lacked a coherent social theory (not quite true since the Emperor occasionally sported the gaudy G-string of modernization theory, now thankfully tossed off) and foundered on the analysis of class. Moreover, the old mid-1970s land of Oz was not the unassailable fortress of "solid and enduring" data we were once assured it was; rather, old Oz was a fragile nation-state of "disparate observations" and "descriptive statistics." But fear not, the Wizard is unrepentant: multivariate techniques and theoretical discipline have re-established the land of Oz in all of its splendour. And in spite of the apparent co-authorship and collaboration that went into *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*, Oz remains an empire. As the preface to this study makes clear ("For over a decade I have worked . . . since that time I have carried this analysis forward . . . made it possible for me to write most of this book." [xi, xiii]), there is room in Oz for only one Wizard, however much he has changed.

Whereas *The People of Hamilton* rested on a *model* of a three-class society (entrepreneurs, artisans, and labourers) and a *paradigm* of two-stage development (from the commercial city to the industrial city), its successor argues the reverse: in the mid-nineteenth century society was composed of two classes (the business class and the working class) and developed over the course of the century in three stages: an ill-defined and nebulous mercantile-peasant social formation gave way to transitory years of commercial capitalism that culminated in industrial capitalism. Such monumental shifts in analytic perspective are never explained in *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*. On the contrary, Katz consistently avoids confronting the barrenness of his past interpretive framework. His newly found two-class society goes beyond what he apparently regards as the usual conception of artisans as "a transitional class," neglecting to remind his readers that he was one of the few advocates of such a view in past historical writing. (43) What is ignored as well is the bluntness of the resulting "model," in which roughly 35 per cent of the population might be shuffled into the column labelled "business class." Shifting away from his own earlier two-stage paradigm ("models" and "paradigms" are obviously Katz's language, not mine), Katz dismisses caustically such "mechanistic and vague" musings on the developing North American social formation to champion a three-stage paradigm that supposedly illuminates "the connection between social change and institutional creation." (364) Just how this connection is forged, however, is never actually spelled out. He cites Herbert Gutman as the culprit propagating the simplistic pre-industrial/industrial dichotomy, but fails to mention that he himself once wrote

that, "Hamilton in 1861 was more like Salem, Massachusetts, in 1800 than like the Hamilton it was to become in 1881 or 1891." (*People of Hamilton*, 47) This was a two-stage conception of capitalist development writ with an ahistorical vengeance. And as he now repudiates the ideal of domesticity as an explanation of women's place in early capitalism, calling for studies of the acquisitive individualism of the madam (101), he cites pages 56-57 of *The People of Hamilton* to remind us that he once wrote of the entrepreneurial talents of prostitution's labour aristocracy. What he neglects to mention is that on page 55 of that original book he was himself holding forth on the ways in which "the cult of true womanhood" that he now correctly dismisses as an idealized explanation of gender relations "kept women in their place." Emperors have no shame, let alone humility.

The Emperor has thus donned new dress, Oz is a different, if better, land, and the Wizard is still pontificating behind the mounds of his machine-readable data. But now Katz issues his directives from the high throne of quantification, not to historians, as he did in 1975, but to those on the left. They are addressed in terms of certainty that deserve an admittedly random reproduction: "It must be made plain to those who consider themselves politically on the left but who are skeptical about analytic [?] and quantitative approaches to the past that this is what the politics of historiography are all about (41-42).... Make no mistake ... the most remarkable aspect of the history of inequality has been the degree to which it has been accepted or acquiesced in not only by its beneficiaries but by its casualties as well (390).... [and, following somewhat startlingly on the heels of this piece of defeatist wisdom, the following corrective that Katz and his associates should themselves think through seriously] This patronizing attitude toward the intelligence of the decisions of working-class men and women is no more defensible when it comes from those on the left than it is when it comes from those on the right." (414) The Emperor has found Marxism.

His new wardrobe is drawn from the shops of Soho, where he has discovered Eric Olin Wright and other New Left theorists, from the boutiques of the Left Bank, where he has copped some Poulantzas and Carchedi, and out of the closets of Cambridge, from which he pulls a touch of Anthony Giddens. How does this enhance our understanding of the past? What kind of book is *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*?

On one level this second volume is an advance over Katz's earlier published work. All of his conceptual revision toward the two-class model, the three-stage paradigm, and a more explicitly political and material reading of the processes of subordination is in the right direction. And this is attributable to Katz's discovery of Marxism. He has been born again and the experience has pushed him in the right direction. But he is still located in Oz, where method rules and the awkward realities of human behaviour in the past are somehow suspect, to be studied only as footnotes to the essential *structures* of life that emerge from the manipulation of data. Katz's Marxism is of the sort, then, that confines itself to theoretical abstractions, on the one hand, while, on the other (and in the words of French Marxist, Pierre Vilar), limiting itself "to specialist areas, partial problems, and tentative technical innovations ... loyal in fact to the least creative kind of empiricism." There is an invaluable discussion of forms of property ownership (co-author Michael Doucet's realm of expertise), a tantalizing perspective on capitalism and the rise of various institutions (derived from Katz's published essay in the now-defunct *Marxist Perspectives*), and some new material on youth, fertility, and crime. But the meat of *The Social Organization of Early*

Industrial Capitalism remains social structure and the limited forms of mobility allowed the people of the past. Whole sections from *The People of Hamilton* are summarized here, and much of the data of the older study are simply slotted into the new framework. This general problem of repetition is compounded by specific instances and on more than one occasion the reader is fed information and quotes that she or he has eaten on an earlier page. (46 and 365; 43 and 365)

The point, in the end, is that for all of the methodological refinements, for all of the theoretical rigour, and for all of the Marxist façade, this book is really little different than its predecessor. It is not about the social organization of early industrial capitalism, but about arbitrarily selected aspects of measurable experience. There remain whole realms of historical development central to the evolution of capitalist society and now addressed by a growing literature that Katz condescendingly ignores. The class struggle, the transformation of the labour process, the changing institutions and leadership of the workers' movement, and the process of political action are but four such areas that might be touched upon, but that are bypassed curtly in this study. Yet while Katz ignores these realms, he consistently assumes an analysis that presents them in a specific light.

Thus, his discussion of class formation is virtually immune to the countless strikes, lockouts, and battles that etched themselves into the very texture of the social relations of production, but that merit only a token glance from Katz. Class as the culmination of structured material relations and subsequent confrontations disappears, reduced to blunt formulations such as, "Class is not simply an empirical phenomenon. It expresses an analytical relationship." (61) And this analytic relationship proves a very one-sided affair. Katz, admitting that he has not explored aspects of workers' daily experience, is nevertheless confident in his assessment of the persistent and sustained passivity of the working class: "the largely willing acquiescence of most people in a system of inequality in which they are the losers." (3) Rootlessness and transiency facilitated "the accommodation of working people to the social relations of industrial capitalism." (129) The quantitative dimensions of mass transiency translate easily into an evaluation of lived experience: "Friendships were difficult to maintain; ties to individual places were tenuous; after a while people were reluctant to invest their emotions heavily in neighbors or places they would soon leave." (130) This flies so dramatically in the face of the working-class record that it seems futile to remind Katz of what he refuses to consider: of urban and labouring Orangemen whose "turf" was defended in ritualistic battle well into the 1880s; of small-town and neighbourhood-based funerals, associations, clubs, and lodges where class linkages may have persevered in the face of the structural collapse of community; of tramping artisans and wandering Knights of Labor, who took the institutions and instincts of mutuality and collectivism from place to place. These are the clothes that the Emperor will not wear, for they are indicative of resiliency rather than resignation in the face of structured inequality. No wonder that hegemony, which sophisticated Marxist writing now posits as a process of arm-twisting among classes, a reciprocal give-and-take that, in the short run, conditions stability, is reduced in this book to a straitjacket imprisoning labour in capital's consuming and continuous forms of subordination. There is no room in Oz for resistance, for an assessment of those ways in which workers in capitalist society reproduce conflict as well as accommodation.

Illustrative of this distorted reading of the late nineteenth-century experience is Katz's cursory and inadequate discussion of Hamilton's nine-hour movement of 1872. This was *the* essential moment of

class upheaval in pre-1880 Hamilton, and Katz himself claims (perhaps overstating the case) that it "demonstrated unambiguously that a collective sense of class had developed among the city's working men." (20) Yet how does Katz "handle" this historical process of arm-twisting in the class arena? Most of his discussion centres on the affinities of labour and capital in the realm of nineteenth-century political economy. When not waxing eloquent on this favoured theme of cultural and ideological accommodation (which jars somewhat with his previous assertions of an unambiguous "collective sense of class"), Katz returns briefly to two actual events, to the historical practice of class relations. The instances he selects out of literally hundreds that took place over the first six months of 1872 — including mass meetings, the setting up of Nine Hour Leagues and other centralized labour bodies, communications across the industrial heartland of the young Dominion, and the escalating pace of strike activity culminating in conspiracy trials in Toronto and a city-wide walkout in Hamilton on 15 May — are indicative of his one-sided appreciation of working-class struggle: 1) a strike apparently broken by an abundance of unskilled labour; and 2) a managerial "put-down" of labour that spells out for Katz "the sense of power" that was at the root of the business class's "firm and settled command" over the working class. But when we look to the dating of such events, to the context of such acts, we glimpse something of what Katz has done. For the first event took place early in February 1872, *before* the nine-hour movement had literally erupted across south-central Canada, while the latter "caricature of the class struggle" (34-5) unfolded months later, in June, after the defeat of the short-time pioneers. Between these two moments of defeat and humiliation lie substantial victories and a series of concessions wrung from the state and the employers, while later months would see the first stirrings of an admittedly compromised, but nevertheless significant, working-class participation in politics. Katz has thus deliberately selected moments within a larger moment of confrontation, and it is his selection, rather than the history itself, that results in a picture of total defeat and accommodation.

Katz, who castigates historians for succumbing to a reactionary anti-quantitative backlash that threatens "a return to descriptive and narrative history" (41) therefore misses the point. A part of history, especially the history of class struggle in its episodic guise, must pay attention to the development of events if analysis is to mean anything. Structurally situating events is vitally important, but it can not be done by abstracting structure; rather, a nuanced appreciation of the changing contexts of events, of the movement of history, must be placed alongside of structural analysis. Katz misses those changing contexts and that movement on every page of this book. In situating his version of the events of 1872 between two poles of defeat, Katz bypasses other poles of accomplishment and achievement. Historians who hang their history on such pegs, be they defined by census data or events chosen arbitrarily can never come close to capturing the flow of history across and around the many pegs of the past. Oz, it turns out, is a land of leapfrog, where feet seldom land on the real, if ambiguous, terrain of historical process.

This is not surprising. For all of the Emperor's earnest injunctions about just what a Marxist history premised upon theoretical rigour and a "structural view of social experience" (41) entails, there is no developed appreciation, for instance, of economic change and productive life. This book supposedly rests on its analysis of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century social formation, studied concretely in terms of two industrial cities, Hamilton and Buffalo, as well as the latter's rural hinterland, Erie County, New York.

Laden with assertions and assumptions about capitalism and economic transformation (many of them appropriate), *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* provides only seven pages on the economic contexts of these particular places, pages of generalized and mundane observation that could easily have been written after a glance at any economic history of North America. Buffalo's economy — and this forms a part of what is new in this study — merits two unremarkable pages of scrutiny. And since the statistical material for Buffalo, Erie County, and Hamilton are not always comparable (the New York data used are samples, the Hamilton data encompass the entire population, and occupational classifications throughout the book vary among three types of schematic ranking) a precise understanding of the differences and similarities of such settings is always problematic.

This failure to probe specific contexts leads Katz into some rather cavalier assessments of human experience, and some curious choices about how evidence is used. He takes images of the origins of crime cast in the 1830s and tests them against the reality of criminal charges in Hamilton between 1850-80, understating the vast social changes of half a century. Introducing his discussion of mass transiency is the life of Dr. Amariah Brigham, a professional whose movements into and out of many cities took him to neither Hamilton nor Buffalo. At another point Katz explores the preference women workers expressed for factory labour over domestic service. In spite of the existence of numerous letters on this subject in Hamilton's *Palladium of Labor*, Katz reaches instead for the Wisconsin Bureau of Labor statistics. And in the end he concludes, surprisingly, that, "By and large industrial capitalism did not require the labor of women and children, and the division of responsibilities between the sexes and between home and work served its interests well." (395)

Perhaps this may have been the case in Hamilton, where metal-producing shops dominated the industrial landscape, or in Buffalo, where milling, brewing, and wood-working were so important. But even this was not as clear-cut as Katz implies for in low-wage sectors like shoemaking, sewing-machine production, or tobacco (all of which were significant in one city or the other) women and children were essential to productive life by the 1870s. Moreover, the history of industrial capitalism cannot be inferred from the peculiar and specific character of social relations prevailing in two cities. Were we to look to Toronto in 1871, we would find that 74.6 per cent of all employees in the clothing sector were women and children and one-third of the workers in shoe production female or under the age of sixteen. In printing, tobacco, and furniture production, the percentages ranged from a low of 11.3 to a high of over 50. Across the industrial spectrum more than one in five Toronto workers was a woman, more than one in ten a child. In Montreal, as the work of Bettina Bradbury on the 1870s and Terry Copp on the early twentieth century suggests, a similar picture might be drawn. Two of the public outcries emerging out of the testimonies before the late 1880s Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital concerned social perceptions of women and child workers: the so-called immoralities of factory settings that "contaminated" female purity with the rough language and ways of male labourers, and the "discovery" of the brutal exploitation of the young in the *unregulated settings of patriarchal* capitalism. To argue as Katz does that industrial capitalism did not "require" this labour of women and children is to forget the Lowell mill girls, the rise of the New England textile towns, and the agonies of waged work in Canadian cotton communities like Cornwall, where three factories in 1881 employed 133 men, 227 women, 186 boys, and 190 girls, a

woman/child to man ratio of about 4.6:1. However important and correct Katz's comments on family life may be, however appropriate his remarks on the ways in which capitalism has structured women into non-waged labour reproducing the social order, it is nevertheless apparent, painfully so, that early industrial capitalism was also rapacious and flexible enough to utilize women and the young in waged work. Indeed, it required such poorly paid labour to sustain specific levels of appropriation. But in the land of Oz such processes are often invisible: contexts not studied, and people not easily classifiable in terms of the census, serve to obscure much of a part of the social organization of early industrial capitalism. The Emperor has no clothes; perhaps as a consequence he strips women and children of the past of some of their historical covering, shunting them into the inert and undistinguishable mass of a passive population.

The tragedy of the Katz project is that it was never able to become anything more than an entrepreneurial exercise. So much promise and potential was squandered on the pursuit of the mundane, and justifying, rationalizing, and legitimizing that pursuit became, in the end, what was obviously most important to the Emperor. In what remains one of the most insightful products of this sustained project, Katz speculates on the place of institutions in the capitalist perpetuation of inequality. It is ironic that this fascinating digression proceeds outside of reference to the data that have for so long structured Katz along certain paths. It is even more ironic, perhaps pathetic, that Katz cannot see that he has himself reproduced, in his years of study, the very process he outlines in the concluding sentence of his chapter, "Early Industrial Capitalism: The Institutional Legacy":

> As the marketplace has become less effective, as the allocation of rewards no longer appears to follow simply from effort and virtue, as the possibility of a rise from rags to riches or from dependence to independence cannot be sustained even on the level of myth, it has fallen to bureaucracy to administer the illusion of opportunity in which industrial capitalist societies vest their claim to moral worth. (391)

To substitute a few words in this sentence is to comment, not on capitalism, but on historiography and the Emperor's place in it:

> As historical writing became less effective, as the past no longer seemed to be capable of being understood in terms of large events and "great" personalities, as history seemed to collapse on the inadequate foundation of narrative and description, it has fallen to quantitative methodology to administer the illusion of "the facts" in which the historical profession vests its claim to scientific worth.

How troubling that after shedding the archaic clothing of an inadequate historiographical practice, Katz would find only enough clothes to cover himself in this kind of modest finding and admission:

> It has taken a corps of research assistants, the most modern electronic data-processing equipment, and powerful statistical techniques to make a case for what most late nineteenth-century social commentators would have accepted without argument. They knew that a great change in social organization had taken place and that two great classes, Capital and Labor, were increasingly dominating social, economic, and political life. (62)

If there is a lesson to be learned here, it is that once one is an Emperor wearing no clothes is easy indeed. For the Canadian historical profession wears few itself. A history that deals with the making of the working class only on the level of structured social relations of inequality and of the popular acquiescence and passivity accompanying this will find a welcome audience. A Marxism that structures the people of the past into the process of accommodation, all the while skirting the issues of context, struggle, and resistance, as Katz's does, will find few critics in historical circles. For all of its superficial shifts, Oz remains a land of safe social history, a programme (SSH) for success

some enterprising technician might like to code and key-punch for the edification of future aspiring professionals who, if they cannot climb to the status of Emperor, may become minor wizards in their own small backyards.