

Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques

Volume 16, 1985

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt16bn01>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cette note

(1985). Book Notes / Références Bibliographiques. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 16, 361–363.

BOOK NOTES / RÉFÉRENCES BIBLIOGRAPHIQUES

David J. Mitchell, *WAC: Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 1983).

BRITISH COLUMBIA politics has been forged in the crucible of confrontation. A bill is passed. Union leaders rush to Victoria to register their protests. The act is denounced as an attempt "to destroy trade unionism," as a piece of "vicious class legislation." A workers' spokesperson notes that, "if it had been drafted by Peron in Argentina or Hitler's Labour Front, it couldn't be worse." 1983? Not quite. These were words and responses generated by W.A.C. Bennett's 1954 Labour Relations Act. David Mitchell shows how Bill Bennett's father used confrontation with labour and the promise of building prosperity in B.C. to polarize politics in the province to the benefit of his Social Credit Party. Some acts prove very difficult not to follow.

Della M.M. Stanley, *Louis Robichaud: A Decade of Power* (Halifax: Nimbus 1984).

HERE IS THE story of how a colourful and charismatic politician swept a backward province into the modern world of the 1960s, implementing massive social reform and battling the economic empire of K.C. Irving. One wonders about the social and economic context within which such an achievement unfolded. It is not in this book, which is most emphatically the view from Robichaud's own files. Universities get over 50 entries in the index; unions next to none. But there is — in skeletal form — material on legislation

affecting workers, including the 1968 Public Service Relations Act. This was the cornerstone of Robichaud's "modern approach to labour relations and to human rights." But modernity, as Marshall Berman has suggested in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*, is not the most enduring of realities. Robichaud is gone, the context that made him what he was has faded, and many of the "rights" of labour so central to the 1960s are in retreat.

Henry Abelove, et al., eds., *Visions of History* (New York: Pantheon 1983).

SINCE 1976 THE *Radical History Review* has conducted interviews with left historians whose work has grappled consistently with theory, political strategy, and the complexities of empirical research. These exchanges are now gathered together in one volume. Between two covers we find historians of labour (E.P. Thompson, Herbert Gutman, and David Montgomery), of women (Sheila Rowbotham, Linda Gordon, and Natalie Davis), of revolutions in the eighteenth (Staughton Lynd and C.L.R. James), nineteenth (E.J. Hobsbawm), and twentieth centuries (Moshe Lewin and John Womack), of blacks (Vincent Harding), and of imperialism (William Appleman Williams). The diversity and range of left writing on the past is all the more striking when one realizes that such easy compartmentalization of these historians masks their evident capacity to fracture simplistic boundaries and address large issues of social, economic, and political change. This is a book that should be read by all left historians. But, more impor-

tantly, it is a book that must be read by those who dismiss the left cavalierly without a sense of the debates, controversies, and common assumptions that radical historians are governed by.

Michel Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500-1980* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1983).

BEAUD'S *HISTORY* is, as the straightforward title implies, a bold and sweeping synthesis. It marches the reader through the age of mercantile conquest and into the revolutionary transformations of political and economic life associated with England, France, and America in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. From capitalism's industrial consolidation in the nineteenth century, the book moves into the era of imperialism and the crises of instability and world war in the twentieth century. Illustrating capitalism's dynamism and its essential dialectic — the simultaneous creativity and destruction at its core — this book is a useful, if at times frustrating, introduction to the large-scale international processes of change that determined the peculiar and parallel characteristics of various national working classes.

Christopher Hampton, ed., *A Radical Reader: The Struggle for Change in England, 1381-1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1984).

THIS EDITED collection presents key documents drawn from the English "radical tradition." Defined as the attempt to establish "that all men should be free, and of one condition," (Wat Tyler) that tradition has produced an amazing array of commentary. Hampton attempts to organize a sampling of this material by rooting it in a specific set of material contexts: the middle ages (1381-1453); the break-up of the feudal system (1453-1603); the rise of capitalism (1803-88); the expan-

sion of empire (1689-1788); the age of revolution and total war (1789-1848); and the triumph of capitalism (1848-1914).

Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson, and Michael Sonenscher, eds., *Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1983).

THIS SHORT COLLECTION of essays addresses the internal organization of production before the rise of the factory system. It builds upon, extends, and often challenges much of the literature that has danced around this subject: works of historians that bend in the direction of the determinism of labour discipline, of social historians who have stressed the complexities of lived experience, and of the advocates of what the editors refer to as the linear paradigm of protoindustrialization.

Historians of the working class will be especially interested in Michael Sonenscher's "Work and Wages in Paris in the Eighteenth Century," a stimulating attempt to connect the forms of reproductive life — housing, marriage, inheritance — to the wage relations from which they were inseparable.

Theodore Rothstein, *From Chartism to Labourism: Historical Sketches of the English Working Class Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1983).

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1929, *From Chartism to Labourism* is one of the earliest Marxist histories of the English trade union movement. Its author, Theodore Rothstein, had been a Russian exile under czarism, but returned to his homeland in 1920 to work with the newly-established Bolshevik state. An introduction to this reprint, written by John Saville, suggests the importance of Rothstein's project of comprehending reformism and links it to a wide range of recent writing on Chartism.

labour market segmentation, and the components of a post-1848 anti-radicalism.

Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Volume VII (London: Macmillan 1984).

THIS SEVENTH VOLUME in the Bellamy-Saville *Dictionary* is mainly concerned with personalities active in the British labour movement between 1926 and the 1960s. Events and institutions neglected in the historical literature — such as the League Against Imperialism 1927-1937 — receive lengthy (ten pages or so) entries to place specific individuals in context. Individual entries are substantial and contain thorough bibliographic references. Among the figures covered here are Max Beer, Charles Bradlaugh, and Theodore Rothstein.

Andy Phillips and Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.* (Chicago: News & Letters 1984).

MINERS' STRIKES HAVE a habit of restructuring class relations and perspectives. This pamphlet presents a view of the UMWA strike against automation in 1949-50 that stresses the spontaneity of the miners and then links it to the theoretical consolidation of "Marxist-humanism" in the anti-Leninism of the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a faction of the Socialist Workers Party led by C.L.R. James (Johnson) and Raya Dunayevskaya (Forest). Here is a historical document worth thinking through in the midst of the 1983-4 British miners' struggle.

William L. Rowe, ed., *Studies in Labour Theory and Practice* (Minneapolis: Marxist Educational Press 1982).

LIKE THE Phillips-Dunayevskaya pamphlet noted above, this volume attempts to link Marxist theory and the practice of

class struggle. Specific studies analyze media coverage of the 1977-8 American coal miners' strike, layoffs and anti-unionism in the Appalachian coal fields, and the role of agricultural research in serving specific class interests. The volume closes with an overly abstract debate on the issue of productive and unproductive labour.

Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed 1983).

THIS BOOK ATTEMPTS a complex argument. It explores the ways in which white labour and European socialist theory reproduced a racially-defined limitation structured by the contours of capital's gestation and the formation of the modern world bourgeoisie. The black radical tradition — rooted in slavery and revolt — challenged such a process and found its intellectual expression in the writings of Dubois, C.L.R. James, and Richard Wright. "Moulded by a long and brutal experience," concludes Robinson, "... the tradition will provide for no compromise between liberation and annihilation."

Philip S. Foner, ed., *First Facts of American Labor* (New York: Holmes & Meier 1984).

AN INVALUABLE reference work, this compilation should prove of particular use to lecturers, journalists, and editors. It lists a range of subjects alphabetically and presents brief accounts of the first known instance of the specific activity or development. If you want to know when the first labour petition was presented or when the first union women's auxiliary was founded pick up this book. Should you want some labour "firsts" to jazz up a lecture on the American presidency you will find thirteen entries here, including one that lets you know that the first trade

union president to become president of the United States was Ronald Reagan, formerly head of the Screen Actors' Guild. Only in America!

John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1984).

THIS BOOK is a revised edition of the important collection of essays that first appeared in 1975. Dated sections of the original have been dropped (most significantly two introduction chapters and two essays on the New Left), while new chapters have been added. Three new essays on socialism's relationships to race, ethnicity, and women link this reprint to major concerns of social historians. The original format of essays being followed by commentaries and rejoinders has been retained, making this a useful teaching tool, capable of introducing students to interpretive debates.

David M. Katzman and William M. Tuttle, Jr., eds., *Plain Folk: The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press 1983).

BETWEEN 1902-06 *A reform magazine* titled the *Independant* published a number of life histories of ordinary Americans. Katzman and Tuttle have assembled seventeen of these autobiographies concerned to preserve the actual voices of workers. Out of these atypical recollections, the editors argue, emerges a representative depiction of women's work, the immigrant character of the American working class, and the persistent place of race in the experience of labour in the United States.

Carol Smart, *The Ties That Bind: Law, Marriage, and the Reproduction of Patriarchal Relations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1984).

FOCUSING ON LAW, marriage, and divorce in the post-1950 world of the United Kingdom, this study argues that the law furthers the reproduction and legitimization of patriarchal authority. Central to the argument is the pivotal place of the family as the foundation of the economic dependency of women. As an advocate of the need for a feminist policy on the household, Smart advances the position that the privileged place of heterosexual marriage and the ideological character of family relations must be exposed. In contributing to that project she sees herself attacking the oppressive structures of the patriarchal family at the very moment that marriage's breakdown in divorce forces the issue of gender inequalities out of the private domain into the public arena.

Robert V. Daniels, ed., *A Documentary History of Communism*, Volume I: *Communism in Russia*, and Volume II: *Communism and the World* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England 1984).

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED in 1960, this collection of documents has been expanded to include material on the Soviet Union since Khrushchev. Included in Volume I are sections on Soviet dissidents, Soviet consumerism, and the Andropov succession. Volume II presents a range of new material on developments in China as well as a host of documents on détente, the New Left, Poland's Solidarity, and the renewal of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war.

Terrence Ball and James Farr, eds., *After Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1984).

TWELVE ESSAYS MARK the centenary of Marx's death. They are grouped in three sections: history and revolution; morals and politics; methodology and criticism. Of most interest to readers of this journal will be Jon Elster's "Historical Materialism and Economic Backwardness," Richard W. Miller's "Producing Change: Work, Technology, and Power in Marx's Theory of History," and John E. Roemer's "Exploitation, Class, and Property Relations." Overly abstract, none of these papers deals with the actualities of class struggle or class formation. As papers seeking to interpret the world and neglecting, for the most part, the process of changing it, they are indeed, after Marx.

Anthony Brewer, *A Guide to Marx's Capital* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1984).

BREWER HAS PRODUCED a succinct and understandable guide to *Capital*, a set of definitions and statements that take the reader through the major categories and confusions of Marx's major work. The text is introduced by a useful outline of Marx's own development and the influences upon him. It is organized clearly, the guide's own text following the chapters of *Capital*. A glossary of Marx's terms, with references to their use in *Capital*, concludes the text.

B.D.P.

Norman Levine, *Dialogue within the Dialectic* (London: Allen & Unwin 1984).

HERE IS YET another attempt to separate the essential Marx and the essential Engels, drawing their divergent thought out from different readings of Hegel. Levine seeks to rescue Marx's historical materialism from Engel's dialectical materialism, a task he tries to accomplish by returning to "the Hegelian notion of subjective activity, of conscious intervention into the material and social world, by disassociating materialism from philosophical realism." The resulting book, with its curious reading of Lenin and Mao, is enough to make those Marxists who have been attentive to the process of human agency while backing away from the analysis of economic structure, turn from their project in distrust. For what Marxist can accept statements like this: "There cannot be a Marxism which is not based on the antecedence of the social. . . . By destroying the domination of the objective, whether it be the objectivity of the spirit or the objectivity of matter, Marxism will again be re-united with the idea that the world is a resultant of human activity."

Read the

ALTERNATIVES

Canada's environmental
quarterly, publishing
since 1971



Perspectives on society,
technology and
environment.

Cheques or money orders for \$15.00
(\$20.00 institutions) for 4 issues payable
to:
ALTERNATIVES
c/o Faculty of Environmental Studies
ES1 - Rm 325
University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario
Canada N2L 3G1



ARE YOU FRUSTRATED BY THE DECENT PRESS?

WHY NOT SUBSCRIBE TO THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS INDEX?

The Alternative Press Index is the only complete index to periodicals that chronicle social change in the U.S. and around the world. Published quarterly, the API is a comprehensive guide to over 150 alternative and radical newspapers, magazines, and journals.

- Anarchism
- Alternative Energy
- Alternative Culture
- Black Movement
- Feminism
- Liberation Movements
- Labor Movement
- Prisoners Rights
- Radical Education
- Radical Health
- Radical Science
- Socialism

List of Alternative & Radical
Publications \$2.00

Per Volume: \$100 Libraries

\$25 Individuals, Mvt. groups

Alternative Press Center

PO Box 33109

Baltimore Maryland 21218

Libraries: Take a 50% discount on
back orders of 3 or more volumes.